

The Art and Archaeology
of the **AEGEAN**
BRONZE AGE
A History



Jean-Claude Poursat and **Carl Knappett**

THE ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE



The Art and Archaeology of the Aegean Bronze Age offers a comprehensive chronological and geographical overview of one of the most important civilisations in human history. Jean-Claude Poursat's volume provides a clear path through the rich and varied art and archaeology of Aegean prehistory, from the Neolithic period down to the end of the Bronze Age. Charting the regional differences within the Aegean world, his study covers the full range of material evidence, including architecture, pottery, frescoes, metalwork, stone, and ivory, all lucidly arranged by chapter. With nearly 300 illustrations, this volume is one of the most lavishly illustrated treatments of the subject yet published. Suggestions for further reading provide an up-to-date entry point to the full richness of the subject.

Originally published in French, and translated by the author's collaborator, Carl Knappett, this edition makes Poursat's deep knowledge of the Aegean Bronze Age available to an English-language audience for the first time.

Jean-Claude Poursat is Professor Emeritus at the University of Clermont Auvergne in Clermont-Ferrand, France. He is the renowned excavator of 'Quartier Mu' at Malia, one of the most extensive town complexes of Middle Bronze Age Crete, and the author of many publications on various aspects of the Aegean Bronze Age.

Carl Knappett holds the Walter Graham/Homer Thompson Chair in Aegean Prehistory at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Thinking through Material Culture*, *An Archaeology of Interaction*, and, most recently, *Aegean Bronze Age Art: Meaning in the Making*. He currently directs a fieldwork project at the Minoan town of Palaikastro.



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A History

JEAN-CLAUDE POURSAT

University of Clermont Auvergne

CARL KNAPPETT

University of Toronto



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INTRODUCTION

THIS TEXTBOOK PROVIDES A HISTORY of the artistic output accompanying the development of Aegean civilisations, beginning with the Neolithic (c.7000 BC) and running to the end of the Bronze Age (c.1050/1000 BC). The art objects that are produced vary considerably by both period and region (mainland Greece, the northeast Aegean islands, Cyclades and Dodecanese, Crete); here, for the sake of convenience, they are placed under the general heading ‘Aegean art’.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

The geographical setting is the Aegean basin and its surrounding regions. This is a well-defined area that includes elements both varied and complementary – from sea to plains and mountains (L. Faugères, in [Treuil 2008](#), 1). Forming a key part are the islands, the vestiges of mountain chains that ran from Greece to Anatolia. They are very close to each other and so form natural ‘stepping-stones’ allowing for the ready movement of people, objects, and technologies, even from the earliest periods, and from Anatolia to the Balkans and as far as the Adriatic. In the basin’s centre we find the Cyclades, encircling the island of Delos; along the Anatolian coast, the islands of the northeast Aegean and the Dodecanese; close to the Peloponnese, the islands of Lefkada, Kythera, and Aegina; and in the northern Aegean, the Sporades. In the eastern part of mainland Greece, from Thessaly to Euboea, and from Attica to the Argolid, the coastal landscape, with its bays and promontories, is not very

different from the islands, although valleys and inland plains break through to the mountains. In the north, Macedonia and Thrace are more like the Balkans. To the east, Anatolia belongs to another continent: only the coastal fringe becomes part of the Aegean civilisations. Crete, which forms the southern boundary of the Aegean Sea, is of course an island; but its dimensions and varied landscape make it a region very similar to the Peloponnese, Attica, and central Greece. At the same time, its position between mainland Greece and both Egypt and the coastal Levant gives it a central role.

Mainland Greece is actually inhabited from the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods; traces of occupation are few, but are attested especially in the Peloponnese and northern Greece, as well as on Crete ([Galanidou and Perlès 2003](#); [Ammerman and Davis 2014](#)). Neolithic sites are known in Greece from the beginning of the seventh millennium BC, mainly in Thessaly, but also in central Greece and the Peloponnese, as well as Crete. Gradually Neolithic groups establish themselves on the coastal plains of northern Greece, Macedonia, and Thrace, on the islands along the edge of the eastern Aegean, and in the Cyclades. From the Early Bronze Age (EBA), which begins c.3200 BC, the Aegean world is already quite populated, becoming more and more densely inhabited during the Late Bronze Age (LBA).

What can we know of the broad sweep of Aegean history during these six millennia? Directly, very little. We have to wait until the second millennium BC until Mesopotamian texts report Cretan voyages to the Syrian coast, and Egyptian texts mention the inhabitants of Crete and the Aegean islands. In the fifteenth century BC in Egypt, tomb paintings at the eighteenth-dynasty pharaonic capital of Thebes show people designated as inhabitants of the land of the Keftiu, and of the islands from the middle of the sea, which we can identify with the Aegeans, Minoans, and Mycenaeans (Wachsmann 1987).

An inscription – the list of Kom el-Hetan – provides a list of Cretan and Peloponnesian towns, among which are Knossos and Mycenae (E. Cline, S. Stannish, *JAES* 3, 2011, 6–16). In the Near East, references in Hittite texts to a kingdom of Ahhiyawa certainly concern the Achaeans, another name for the Greeks in the Homeric texts. But the exact location of this region (whether the area of Miletus, Boeotia, the Argolid, or Greece in general) is still subject to debate (M. Wiener, in [Daniilidou 2009](#), 701–15, with references). These are very limited sources. The Mycenaeans are totally absent from the Egyptian diplomatic correspondence of the Amarna period in the fourteenth century BC.

Before 1400 BC in Crete we only have undeciphered texts (clay tablets inscribed in Cretan Hieroglyphic, and Linear A), without king lists as in Egypt; the name of Minos, the king of Crete, remains a mythical name. From around 1400 BC, tablets written in Linear B, a script that is a form of ancient Greek, show that Greeks are present in mainland Greece (notably at Mycenae, Thebes, and Pylos), as well as on Crete (at Knossos). When did they arrive? This is still a source of debate and, rather than see any arrival as a singular event (‘the coming of the Greeks’), we can imagine that Greek-speaking groups arrived in the Aegean basin at different times, perhaps since the beginning of the EBA. The Linear B tablets are a key resource, since they provide us with the names of specific towns (Ko-no-so: Knossos; Ku-do-ni-ja: Kydonia, Chania) and inform us about palatial administration, the extent of their territories, and social/religious administration, but they tell us nothing about historical or diplomatic events. Later, in the first millennium BC, the Homeric texts – particularly in the *Iliad*’s Catalogue of Ships – provide a list, probably anachronistic and unreliable, of the Mycenaean towns supposed to have sent ships for the mythical expedition against Troy (O. Dickinson, in [Betancourt 1999](#), 207–10).

The major events of Aegean pre- and proto-history are in large part caused by natural phenomena. The volcanic eruption of Santorini (Thera), which annihilated the ancient town of Akrotiri around 1560 BC, constitutes one of the crucial landmarks of Bronze Age archaeology. During these periods frequent earthquakes struck certain regions of Greece, as has been the case throughout recent history; we can see the effects on buildings such as the Cretan palaces, built around 2000 BC. Their destruction, around 1700 BC, is a key date in the Bronze Age – it determines the period of the so-called First Palaces, from 2000 to 1700 BC. In the Argolid, Mycenae and Tiryns alike are damaged from 1250 BC by earthquakes; the reconstructed settlements are then destroyed around 1200–1190 BC, at a period when in the east Mediterranean turmoil and destruction also affect towns like Ugarit. The causes of the palatial system's decline in the Aegean are still unclear: a combination of natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, drought, and epidemics) and the inability of an overly bureaucratic system to overcome a major catastrophe. After 1200 BC, new social and political conditions lead to a period dubbed the 'Dark Ages' and entail profound changes in artistic production, of which some elements will nonetheless be transmitted through to the Archaic period.

In all periods, the contacts between the Aegean and the neighbouring regions of the Mediterranean, where highly evolved civilisations already existed, are especially important. The Aegean maritime world is in constant contact with Anatolia, the Near East, and Egypt. In this work we will only be able to evoke some of what Anatolian or Cypriot art is, as also with the art of Mesopotamia, Syro-Palestine, and Egypt; but we should remember that the Neolithic of Greece begins just when the Ubaid culture in Mesopotamia is emerging, and that the beginnings of the Aegean Bronze Age in the late fourth and early third millennia BC correspond with the birth of the Egyptian Old Kingdom,

the First Dynasty of Ur, and the moment when the first ramparts of Troy are raised. During the LBA in particular, eastern objects imported to Greece, like the Minoan and Mycenaean exports to the east, supply some of the key synchronisms for the chronology and history of civilisations. Cyprus becomes from the fourteenth century a crucial stopover in the Aegean influence on the Levant. To the West, contacts are well attested with the Italic world; maritime routes link the Aegean to southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia, and follow the Adriatic coast as far as northern Italy.

THE DISCOVERY OF AEGEAN CIVILISATIONS

The discovery of these civilisations is still quite recent. The nineteenth-century history of their discovery has been told many times. Before the excavations of Heinrich Schliemann at Troy and then Mycenae, and of Arthur Evans at Knossos, at a time when the main point of reference was the Classical Greek art of the time of the Parthenon, with the so-called primitive arts barely appreciated, there was little discernible interest in the few pieces that had been found up to that point. However, from the beginning of the nineteenth century a few objects that had not yet been categorised as 'Mycenaean', in particular sealstones, had been acquired in Greece and brought to European museums and collections (B. Feuer, *AJA* 115, 2011, 507–36; O. Krzyszkowska, *CMS Beiheft* 6, 2000, 149–63). Travellers like William Gell, Thomas Hope, and Sebastiano Ittar (architect of Lord Elgin) visited Mycenae and published drawings of the Lion Gate and the Treasury of Atreus (Lavery and French 2003, 1–5; Moore 2014).

Two steps mark the real discovery of these civilisations. The first is the beginning of Schliemann's explorations at Mycenae in 1874 that uncovered a 'Mycenaean' civilisation which was still of

uncertain date. Mycenae's grand tombs yielded their objects; a first historical synthesis is published in 1893 by the Greek archaeologist Tsountas, who took up the excavations at Mycenae in 1899 (English translation: [Tsountas and Manatt 1897](#)).

The second step was the excavation of the Cretan palaces from 1900, at Knossos by Evans and at Phaistos (and Haghia Triada) by Halbherr. A civilisation earlier than the Mycenaean was thus discovered, with its own scripts and distinct artworks. The soundings carried out by Evans and his assistant Mackenzie in 1904 revealed a succession of stratified layers that represented all the periods in the evolution of an art now called Minoan, and allowed for absolute dates to be proposed thanks to Egyptian synchronisms. This is what also allowed the Mycenaean civilisation to be situated in time: it was later than the so-called Minoan culture. It was then also possible to include within a single concept of a civilisation and an art then dubbed 'Prehellenic' other finds from the end of the nineteenth century on both Crete and in the Cyclades (marble figurines; remains of the town of Phylakopi on Melos), the origin and chronology of which had until then been unclear.

Beside these two civilisations, Minoan and Mycenaean, research in northern Greece and the Cyclades has completed the picture of the Aegean civilisations. In central Greece, the digs at Orchomenos and Eutresis led to the discovery of the so-called Minyan culture, named after King Minyas of Orchomenos. In Thessaly and Macedonia, as in the Peloponnese, Neolithic and EBA sites studied in the first quarter of the twentieth century provided the stratigraphic sequences needed for the establishment of a relative chronology for mainland Greece. Scientific dating methods, notably C14, then enabled the construction of an absolute chronology, somewhat approximate to begin with, for the Early, Middle, and Late Bronze Age, each in

turn divided by phase into I, II, and III. The Cyclades had already been the source of artworks making their way to the grand museums from the 1850s; now their extensive cemeteries were explored. In the northeast Aegean, digs at sites like Poliochni on Lemnos and Thermi on Lesbos meant that the Aegean cultures could be linked to those of Anatolia, the wealth of which the Troy excavations had already demonstrated.

Subsequently, all through the twentieth century, excavations, surveys, and publications have added to our knowledge, albeit with quite uneven regional and temporal coverage. In mainland Greece some other major sites have been explored: the excavation from 1939 of the palace of Pylos (the 'Palace of Nestor') by Carl Blegen, with its thousands of tablets inscribed in Linear B, was a landmark event. The discovery of both tombs and settlements has continued uninterrupted up to the present. At Mycenae, Grave Circle B was revealed in 1951 by J. Papadimitriou, and new quarters of the citadel and town have been uncovered. In the last third of the twentieth century, new digs were initiated in the Argolid and the Corinthia, at Asine, Midea, Nemea, and Tiryns; in Messenia, at Nichoria; in Boeotia, at Thebes; in Euboea, at Perati and Lefkandi; and on Rhodes and Crete. Several large Mycenaean tombs have been found intact: at Volos in 2004, Pylos in 2015, and near Orchomenos in 2017. In Messenia, a new palatial complex at the site of Iklaina near Pylos has been under exploration since 2006, as has a port on the Saronic Gulf, at Kalamianos, since 2007.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the excavations on Crete of the palace at Zakros, the harbour site of Kommos, and the town of Chania, among others, have supplemented our knowledge considerably, as have Haghia Irini on Keos and Akrotiri on Thera for the Cyclades. Underwater finds near the Lycian coast – the shipwrecks of Ulu Burun and Cape Gelidonya – have confirmed the commercial ties between the Aegean, Cyprus, and the Levantine towns.

THE HISTORY OF AEGEAN ART

Above all, it is archaeological finds that tell us the history of a vast and complex Aegean world; and, in the absence of textual information, it is the works of art that best allow us to assess its diversity.

The first work explicitly devoted to Mycenaean art was volume VI of the monumental *Histoire de l'art dans l'Antiquité* by G. Perrot and C. Chipiez. It was published in Paris in 1894, after work had started at Mycenae, but before the excavations on Crete. Entitled *La Grèce primitive: l'art mycénien*, it gathered together the findings of the first travellers and the initial results from Schliemann's work, presented a number of documents (for example, a plan of the Vaphio tholos and a reconstruction of the façade of the Tiryns palace), and proposed historical interpretations largely abandoned today, like the idea of the influence of Mycenaean architecture on the Doric order (B. Burns, in [Morris and Laffineur 2007](#), 141–9). At this time Mycenaean vases were first catalogued ([Furtwängler and Loeschke 1879, 1886](#)). Aegean art in general became quite quickly known thanks to publications that brought together images, from the *Antiquités Crétoises* of [G. Maraghiannis \(1907–12\)](#) to the works of Bossert, Zervos, Marinatos and Hirmer, and Buchholz and Karageorghis ([Bossert 1937](#); [Zervos 1956, 1957, 1962–3](#); [Marinatos and Hirmer 1973](#); [Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973](#)) and, more recently, thanks to numerous museum catalogues and richly illustrated exhibitions (e.g. [Demakopoulou 1988](#); [Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2008](#); [Steinmann 2018](#)).

Aside from scholarly works and innumerable studies devoted to particular objects or categories of object, organised by style or period, there have been few general overviews. In *L'art égéen*, the title of a short 1929 book by J. Charbonneaux, the subject was the corpus of Minoan and Mycenaean art, which at that point was still

quite new. The 1964 volume by Demargne, *Naissance de l'art grec* (translated into English as *Aegean Art*), also incorporated the early part of the Archaic period, and was the first attempt at a true art history of the Aegean ([Demargne 1964, 2](#)), in tying together the Aegean Bronze Age with its Neolithic precursors, linking it to neighbouring civilisations, and studying the artworks in their historical context. In a different format, treating the various arts (except for architecture) in separate chapters, S. Hood's 1978 textbook on the arts of prehistoric Greece presented a remarkably precise and full overview, including discoveries such as those from Akrotiri on Thera and Zakros on Crete; shorter, and lacking the critical framework of Hood's textbook, [Higgins's 1967](#) study limited itself to Minoan and Mycenaean art. The short textbook by [Preziosi and Hitchcock \(1999\)](#), which also includes architecture, offers a general overview which has the merit of insisting upon placing artworks in their context. Some important recent works, less art historical in outlook, have reviewed how archaeology, together with the decipherment of Linear B by Ventris and Chadwick in 1953, has contributed to our knowledge of the history of ancient Aegean societies; general information can be found in recent handbooks ([Shelmerdine 2008](#); [Cline 2010](#); [Lemos and Kotsonas 2020](#)).

Can we speak of Aegean art as its own phenomenon, like Mesopotamian art, or Egyptian art? On the one hand, this broad term incorporates some quite disparate outputs and short-lived styles, and encompasses regions which, at least until the beginning of the Mycenaean period, maintain their own distinct identities. On the other hand, even using the term 'art' for prehistoric or protohistoric periods has been cast into doubt. 'Art' cannot have the same meaning as in later periods, from Classical Greece until today: art for art's sake never existed in these periods and the conditions of production for luxury or

prestige objects, even by specialist artisans, were very different. All the objects produced in the Neolithic and Bronze Age had a function, whether everyday or symbolic, a vase or a figurine. If the term ‘art’ is hardly doubted when used for the frescoes or jewellery of the palatial civilisations of Crete and Mycenae in the second millennium BC, the question has nonetheless recently arisen if there really was such a thing as Aegean prehistoric art (O. Polychronopoulou, in [Darcque 2006](#), 345–55). The argument tends to veer between two extremes. If we assign to this term a basic meaning from the Greek ‘*techne*’, or from the Latin ‘*ars*’, of anything made by man that involves particular techniques and rules, then anything from chipped obsidian tools to the most everyday vase can count as art. All material culture can be included. Alternatively, we might reserve ‘art’ for those objects whose aesthetic and technical qualities make us think today of true works of art, admired in museums and collections; it then becomes a matter of making subjective choices and isolating in an arbitrary way, according to contemporary judgement, too few of antiquity’s artefacts.

Where should we draw the line between a mundane tool and a work of art? We might argue that, in civilisations in which every product in some way or other serves a particular goal, art appears as soon as the artisan makes a choice among several possible forms ([M. Wiencke, in Cadogan 1986](#), 69–92). This is still a very broad definition: if Cycladic figurines differ from Neolithic or Minoan figurines and are themselves divisible into multiple types, it is more a result of adherence to cultural traditions, which have their own origins and meanings we must try to identify, and less a matter of choice on the part of the artisan. Here we will consider as an artwork any object for which the artisan has introduced elements that surpass the primary functional needs of the object: the decoration of a Neolithic drinking vessel probably

speaks to a group’s social need for identity or communication, and the choice of motifs surely does not rest only upon the imagination of its creator. But here we are probably already in the domain of artistic production. A human or animal figurine could be a simple instrument, used in a ritual or in all manner of social ceremonies; but certain particular details of the eyes, the pose, or hairstyle could also reveal workshop traditions, or the influence of other civilisations, thereby providing an historical context. A sealstone may remain a tool, engraved with the simplest design that could allow for the identification of an impression; but when it receives the form of a person or animal, when its faces are truly decorated, it then becomes a work of art that expresses the social conditions in which it was made and used.

We can legitimately recognise aesthetic qualities in these artworks: this is what led to the popularity of Minoan frescoes at the beginning of the twentieth century, compared to Art Nouveau; or that of the Cycladic figures, then admired by sculptors like Giacometti, and which continue today to attract interest. We might even think, despite some opinions to the contrary, that these aesthetic qualities – in weapons, jewellery, and frescoes – were not unknown to either artisan or patron, who could appreciate the technique, the colours, or the sumptuous renderings of nature. But this is not the aim of a history of Aegean art, no more than it is to seek to identify the ‘genius’ artists – of which there were surely some – the ‘masters’ who created the most beautiful pieces – at least those known to us today. In a corpus that only represents a very small percentage of what was originally produced, and with few certain dates or provenances, this would be to risk painting a rather distorted picture. We must first classify artworks by category – there are rarely utterly unique works in Aegean art – and then date them, narrow down their place of production, and try to situate them in

their broader context of manufacture and use, among other categories of object.

As we will see throughout this volume, the study of Aegean art comes up against two main difficulties.

The first concerns the artworks' chronological placement: the uncertainties and discrepancies are infinitely more numerous and problematic than in the world of Classical art. The reasons are many and obvious. It is clear that we cannot retrace the evolution of Aegean art in the same way as is possible for Greek sculpture, architecture, or ceramics; and the ever-present tendency to interpret both the styles and the civilisations of Aegean prehistory according to a tripartite rhythm of birth, apogee, and decline has significantly constrained their interpretation. Find contexts are often dated imprecisely, ancient works may have been held as heirlooms and placed in burials long after their date of production, and it is not always clear what we should make of stylistic differences. The proliferation of research and the further study of stratigraphy and style have alleviated these problems, to some degree. The study of Aegean art has further benefited from the application of scientific methods. The analysis of ceramic fabrics has enabled the differentiation of Marine Style vases of Minoan vs. Helladic origin (P. Mountjoy, *M. Ponting*, *BSA* 95, 2000, 141–84); and many Pictorial Style vases, such as the large craters decorated with chariots, still thought thirty years ago to be made in Cyprus, have been recognised as coming from workshops in the Argolid and destined largely for export to the Levant (Åkerström 1987).

The second difficulty, as we have already mentioned, is tied to the absence of historical documents for these periods. Other than through the analysis of the works themselves, it is very difficult to identify the individuals, or even the identities, behind the production or use of Aegean artworks.

These difficulties largely account for the way in which the history of Aegean art has been approached since the end of the nineteenth century. In the absence of a rigorous chronology and historical data, observations have often been purely aesthetic in nature. Thus, scholars have emphasised how some aspects of Minoan art relate to Art Nouveau, or Chinese or Japanese art, or even recently the style of Jackson Pollock (P. Warren, in Evely 1996, 46–50). Cycladic art became fashionable through the interventions of early twentieth-century sculptors such as Brancusi. These comparisons may make Aegean art topical, but its supposed universality is misleading. The first frescoes were widely reproduced, such as the Haghia Triada fresco of a cat stalking a bird, or the blue bird or *la Parisienne* from Knossos; when isolated from their original context, these frescoes provided an image of an enchanted and enchanting world, both familiar and enigmatic, shimmering and vital. This naive vision of a lost paradise has been predominant in a number of accounts since the beginning of the twentieth century and has only faded gradually insofar as critical study of these works has allowed for their proper contextualisation. Occasionally efforts have been made to apply methods that have proven worthwhile in the domain of Archaic or Classical Greek art (study of artists' hands) to Cycladic, Minoan, and Mycenaean art. Some have looked for – and continue to look for – the legends of Classical Greece in Aegean art (Morris and Laffineur 2007). And there have been important studies that have striven to analyse and describe the formal decorative principles employed by Aegean artists (Matz 1928; Furumark 1941; Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951), in a way that is much more convincing than those that have attempted to reconstruct its fundamental creative impulses (Snijder 1936).

ORGANISATION OF THE VOLUME

This textbook combines in a single volume the eight parts originally published in two separate monographs. The [first part](#) presents Neolithic art from different Aegean regions, from Thessaly to the Peloponnese, Crete, and other islands. The [second](#) is devoted to the Early Bronze Age, which sees the growth of the southern Aegean regions and the appearance of Cycladic art. The [third part](#) covers the period of the First Palaces on Crete, at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age; this is when Crete becomes the preeminent power in the Aegean. The [fourth](#) traces the history of the arts on Crete during the peak of the so-called Neopalatial period (1700–1450 BC), and their influence on Cycladic art, as shown especially by the excavations at Akrotiri, Thera. The four following parts are devoted to Mycenaean art, from its emergence around 1600 BC in mainland Greece – at Mycenae in particular, with the fine luxury objects found in the Shaft Graves – to its last survivals at the end of the second millennium BC, around 1050–1000 BC. [Part V](#) describes the first development of Mycenaean art between 1600 and 1450 BC, illustrated notably by the objects from the Mycenae Shaft Graves and the first magnificent tholoi of

Messenia and the Argolid. [Part VI](#) then examines the crucial period during which, after 1450 BC, the Mycenaeans took control of Knossos and set up a palace there, which then suffers a major destruction c.1370 BC; this is when, to a large degree, the forms and the repertoire of Mycenaean art take shape. A little after, citadels and palaces appear in mainland Greece: [Part VII](#) tackles this peak period during which the Aegean world becomes a Mycenaean world, the expansion of which reaches the eastern borders of the Mediterranean; palatial art thus evolves on an expanded frame. The [final part](#) follows the transformations in Mycenaean art after the fall of the palaces, around 1200 BC, until the end of the Bronze Age.

Illustrations are not exhaustive; you will find here the main artworks that have long been known, have received frequent commentary, and continue to be relevant to the history of Aegean art, as well as more recent discoveries, which not only show the vitality of scholarship in the domain of Aegean protohistory, but also serve to refine and sometimes revise our vision of Minoan and Mycenaean art. The bibliography for this long period is especially plentiful: in some cases only the most recent studies are cited, and these in turn lead to references to earlier works.

Part I

AEGEAN NEOLITHIC ART

Chapter 1

ARTEFACTS AND CONTEXTS

1.1 A NEW CULTURE

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEDENTARY WAY OF life in permanent villages; the beginnings of agriculture (cultivation of cereals and pulses) and animal domestication, which together replace hunting and gathering; and, not long after, the use of pottery: these are the profound changes that mark the shift from the hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic to Neolithic culture. The Neolithic developed gradually from c.10,000 BC, initially in the 'Fertile Crescent' from Mesopotamia to northern Syria, then across the entire Near East. In Europe it established itself first in the Balkans, along the Danube, before reaching the Aegean world around 7000 BC.

The conditions under which this process of 'Neolithisation' occurred are still hotly debated. The Neolithic was in all likelihood introduced into Greece by an influx of farmers from the Levant and Anatolia – small groups ended up mixing with local populations, bringing their animals, cereals, and new practices. Thus, a significant component of Near Eastern Neolithic culture entered the Aegean. While in the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic the Aegean world seems to have been poorly represented in the earliest artistic expressions of central Europe, Neolithic art multiplies, with stone, bone, and shell ornaments, human and animal figurines, and miniature objects modelled in clay. Geometric decorative motifs, either painted or incised, adorn pottery, figurines, and seals. These works find parallels or precursors

from Anatolia to the Balkans, with figurines and seals from Çatalhöyük, and ceramic styles from Bulgaria and Romania. The Neolithic is also a period during which exchange connections between coastal zones and the islands increase: obsidian from the Cycladic island of Melos is used for making tools across a large part of the Aegean world.

Nonetheless, the Aegean Neolithic has its own history. The new culture diffuses quite unevenly into different regions: it first appears in the fertile plains of Thessaly and the Peloponnese, and then spreads to central Greece before making it to the north and the plains of Macedonia and Thrace. Paradoxically, the Aegean islands, although right next to Anatolia in some cases, are only occupied during or at the end of the Neolithic, with the notable exception of Crete, inhabited from the beginning of the period. Population density varies considerably by region, and settlements are also diverse, though often close to the sea, water, and forests. There are simple caves like those of Theopetra in Thessaly, and Franchthi and Alepotrypa in the Peloponnese; sprawling sites on flat plains like Makrygialos in Macedonia or Nea Makri in Attica; acropolises in the Peloponnese, and often tell sites too, artificial mounds gradually built up through the accumulated remains of buildings that succeeded each other in the same spot for generations. The last of these are found mostly in northern Greece, where they are best preserved, such as in Thessaly (where they are called 'magoula'), Macedonia ('tumba'), and Thrace, though they also occur in central Greece.

It is extremely difficult to paint a picture of the organisation of agricultural communities in Aegean societies at this time, even though recent work has managed to shed some new light. Far from being a static society made up of isolated villages, the Neolithic Aegean appears increasingly to be a culture open to all kinds of exchange which served to connect distant parts of the Mediterranean. At both the local and regional levels, it seems clear that

no community was self-sufficient: essential social bonds knit families, villages, and regions closely together. In the absence of documentation other than material culture, the history of the Neolithic is above all about these relations, which spread or change over the course of numerous phases and which we surmise on the basis of changes in settlement patterns and the circulation of artefacts.

It is in this context that we must locate the artworks of this period. Stone or pottery vessels, figurines and other representations, and seals are the means by which human groups mark their identity, express their perspective on society and the world, and communicate with other groups. In contrast to later periods, most objects come from settlements: only a handful of burials are known and on the whole their finds are limited to a few vases or adornments. As for sanctuaries, sometimes supposed to exist, they are not clearly attested in the archaeological record, even if it is evident that ritual and belief played an important role in society. As is the case with their use, the conditions under which artworks were produced are unclear. To what degree could there have been specialised artisans in this period? Vases or figurines were most typically made locally, perhaps by families; but from the very beginning the production of highly standardised ceramics implies an increasing level of specialisation, within a socio-economic system that now appears to modern scholarship as quite complex.

During this period – which lasted longer than the whole of the Bronze Age – it is difficult to identify from limited discoveries coming from a few sites any kind of overall stylistic evolution. But local variations do allow us to appreciate the rich creativity of Neolithic communities.

1.2 CHRONOLOGY AND REGIONAL TRAITS

Regional traditions can be quite varied, even if art across the Aegean is generally more

uniform than it is in later periods. Though geographic regions may be well defined, cultural boundaries defining stylistic similarities are fluid and shift over time.

The absolute chronology of the Neolithic, which is based on C14 or thermoluminescence (TL) dates, is not altogether precise, but the degree of uncertainty is quite limited given the period's length, close to four millennia. The period begins in the Aegean around 7000 BC and gives way to the Bronze Age towards the end of the fourth millennium BC. It is the relative chronology – that is, the differentiation of successive phases established through various site stratigraphies – that presents the greatest difficulties, in contrast to the periods that follow (Aram-Stern 1996, 83–98). The basic tripartite division into Early, Middle, and Late Neolithic, inspired by the system used for Minoan Crete (S. Weinberg, *AJA* 51, 1947, 165–82), has been supplemented with subdivisions (e.g. Late Neolithic (LN) I, LN II) and transitional phases. These are often quite complicated, and the terminology of the Balkan Neolithic, which includes Macedonia, diverges from that of Thessaly and the rest of Greece; it is the latter's chronological and stylistic divisions that we will use in this chapter (Z. Tsirtsoni, in Darcque 2006, 231–44). The very beginning of the Neolithic, which is characterised by the almost complete absence of pottery, has been labelled 'Initial Neolithic' (c.7000–6500 BC) (Aram-Stern 1996, 192–3; Perlès 2001, 64–97). A fourth period, named the Chalcolithic in the north of Greece (as in the Near East) but the Final Neolithic (FN) in the southern Aegean and the islands, has been added to the basic scheme. Lasting more than a millennium (from c.4500/4300 to 3300/3100 BC), it remains poorly defined in some areas, like Macedonia, and could partially overlap with the LN.

Early Neolithic (EN) proper (from 6500 to 6000/5800 BC) has been the subject of specialised

studies that show the unique features of the beginnings of the Greek Neolithic: a very uneven occupation by region (Thessaly, Peloponnese, Crete), an immediate mastery of new techniques, and the establishment of exchange networks across the entire Aegean basin (E. Aram-Stern, in Lichter 2005, 183–94). The distinction between the EN and Middle Neolithic (MN) comes down almost exclusively to differences in ceramic styles, although these styles can vary from one site to another; it is not always easy to establish chronological correspondences. The clearest division occurs between the MN and LN (around 5500/5300 BC). This is when new regions are populated, such as Greek Macedonia and Thrace, and most of the Aegean islands. One can observe the introduction of a new type of black polished pottery with carinated shapes (of Anatolian influence), a relative decrease in decorated pottery, and various attempts at technological innovation. We also see the first appearance of copper metallurgy and goldworking. This is really a new cultural tradition, accompanied by stylistic changes and linked to environmental and socio-economic transformations.

In northern Greece it is Thessaly, investigated since the early twentieth century (Tsountas 1908; Wace and Thompson 1912), at the very same time that the Minoan palaces were being discovered, that is still the best-studied region, with a very large number of sites that stretch from the coastal zones of the gulf of Volos (Dimini, Sesklo) to the inland plains. Occupied from the very beginning of the Neolithic, it has considerable influence on neighbouring areas. Macedonia (Heurtley 1939) was occupied later and has close ties with the Balkans, which we now understand much better thanks to the excavation and publication of sites like Dikili Tash (Treuil 2019) and Sitagroi (Elster and Renfrew 2003) in east Macedonia, Olynthos in central Macedonia, and Nea Nikomedia, Servia, and Makrygialos in west

Macedonia. In the second half of the LN, some of the features of these sites are very close to those of Thessaly; thus the area of northern Greece, up to Thrace, comes to form a cultural unit.

In central Greece, as is the case in later periods, it is the provinces closest to the Aegean basin which are best known: Boeotia, with the sites of Orchomenos and Eutresis; Attica, with the coastal sites of Nea Makri and Kitsos cave; and the island of Euboea (Manika). These areas are indirectly influenced by Thessaly and the Balkans. In the FN, they are included in a vast cultural grouping (called the Aegina-Attica-Kephala group), which stretches from the Adriatic to coastal Anatolia, and from Euboea to the southern Peloponnese.

In the Peloponnese there are important coastal cave sites. One of these is Franchthi, in the Argolid, excavated from 1967 to 1979, and providing a continuous occupation sequence from the Palaeolithic to the end of the Neolithic. The site has produced pottery, figurines, and jewellery, especially for the EN and MN periods. In the southern Peloponnese, in Laconia, the Alepotrypa cave sees use principally during FN (Papathanasiou 2018). Other major sites are located close to the coast (Corinth, Lerna) or in valleys inland. In the western Peloponnese, it is only at the end of the period that the number of sites increases considerably.

Among the islands, it is Crete that was first occupied, even before those of the northeast Aegean or Cyclades, even though the latter were closer to the Neolithic heartlands. This particular colonisation could only have happened through the arrival of immigrants from Anatolia, bringing with them cereals and domesticated animals by boat (C. Broodbank, T. Strasser, *Antiquity* 65, 1991, 233–45). Excavations at Knossos have demonstrated the site's continuous significance since the very

beginning of the Neolithic. On a plateau close to the sea, the accumulated remains of occupation formed a tell on which the Bronze Age palace was later established (Efstratiou 2013). The islands of the northeast Aegean and of the Dodecanese are only populated towards the beginning of the LN. The main sites are those of Emporio and Haghia Gala on Chios, Tigani on Samos, Poliochni on Lemnos, Thermi on Lesbos, and Kephala on Keos. In the Cyclades, also inhabited only towards the end of the period, the first known sites are those of Saliagos, an islet between Paros and Antiparos, and Grotta on Naxos.

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Chapter 2

ARCHITECTURAL BEGINNINGS

2.1 TECHNIQUES AND PLANS

THE FIRST STRUCTURES OF THE AEGEAN world follow techniques known over a huge geographical area; the simplest houses are oblong huts or four-sided houses with floors of beaten earth (Treuil 1983). Reconstructions of houses of this type have been proposed on the basis of remains found at Achilleion in Thessaly, Nea Nikomedeia in Macedonia, and Nea Makri in Attica (AEI, fig. 1). They are made of posts connected by a horizontal wattle of branches covered in daub, and with a clay plaster which could take a coloured wash; they sometimes have one or two rows of posts at the interior (Perlès 2001, 173–99). The wattle and daub technique is almost exclusively found in the north (Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly) and slowly fades away through the course of the Neolithic. As for the southern Aegean, here it is construction with sun-dried bricks, in various formats, that predominates, the same technique as used in the Near East and Anatolia. It gradually spreads to the north, and completely replaces wattle and daub during the Late Neolithic (LN) period. The walls are without foundations, and typically sit on a rubble foundation and are reinforced by wooden supports; these too are usually covered in a clay plaster, then with a lime plaster and a coloured wash.

It is Neolithic houses that constitute the first adoption of rectangular plans in Europe. In the Early Neolithic (EN) period, single-room houses are common in

northern Greece, although more complex house plans, with two or three rooms, appear in Macedonia and Thrace, and then in Thessaly in the Middle Neolithic (MN) period. Sometimes houses with an axial entrance are found, with a porch, a main room, and a secondary annex. It is these buildings with a porch that have often anachronistically and improperly been called ‘megaron’, a term borrowed from the Homeric texts. This type of house-plan is a general form that occurs widely from Palestine to Europe, and it emerges in the LN (Sesklo, Dimini) before continuing in the Early Bronze Age in the northeast Aegean, particularly at Troy. A special type of house with interior pillars (*AEI*, fig. 2), seemingly designed to support a smaller upper storey, is known particularly from two MN sites in Thessaly, Tsangli, and Otzaki ([Treuil 1983](#), 288–93; [Aram-Stern 1996](#), 353, fig. 29). A building of exceptional size is the ‘sanctuary’ at Nea Nikomedeia in Macedonia, a tripartite structure of more than 150 square metres ([Perlès 2001](#), 271–2). Roofs are generally pitched for the simple houses of northern and central Greece, and probably terraced for the composite houses of central Greece. On Crete, four-sided brick houses with terraced roofs appear at Knossos from the EN period; more complex houses, composed of two adjacent rooms with one accessed from the other via an offset opening in the central partition (the so-called but and ben type: D. Mackenzie, *BSA* 14, 1907–8, 368), and to which a series of smaller rooms could be added, are known there from the MN (L. Vagnetti, P. Belli, *SMEA* 19, 1978, 125–63, pl. III). Besides the four-sided plan, houses with apsidal plans emerge in Greece towards the end of the LN: houses with a semi-circular wall at one end are well attested in the Final Neolithic (FN), notably in Macedonia, as well as on the island of Andros at Strophilas.

Neolithic villages are made up of independent houses, but few sites have been sufficiently

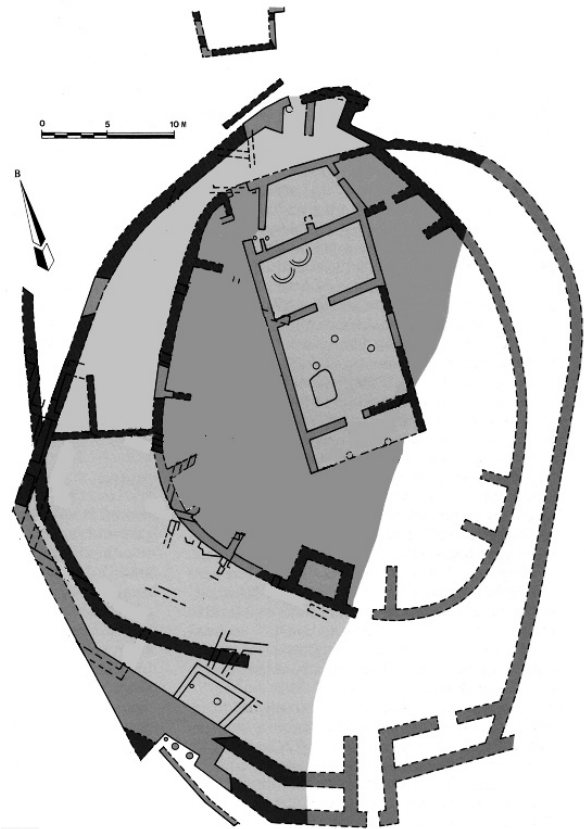


Figure 2.1 Sesklo, site plan. LN I (5500–5000 BC). After [Papathanassopoulos 1996](#), 53, fig. 10.

preserved or investigated for us to know their organisation with any kind of precision. Current knowledge suggests that it is the Thessalian sites close to the gulf of Volos, Sesklo and Dimini especially, that have the most complete plans. At Sesklo, on the part of the site known as the ‘acropolis’, occupying a flat spur, a ‘megaroid’ building and elongated form composed of a porch in front of two axially arranged rooms has been found; the walls that encircle the tell are supporting terrace walls rather than fortifications ([Figure 2.1](#)). On the lower part of the site, where wide ditches kept spaces separate, rectangular houses of a single room (c.10–50 m²) were built in wattle and daub, with a pitched roof with a wooden frame covered in clay. The neighbouring site of Dimini, established in the LN period, has a central space containing a small

porched building surrounded by an enclosure which delimited domestic and craft activity areas (Papathanassopoulos 1996, figs. 11, 56); some scholars have seen in this the signs of a social organisation that is already hierarchical. At the end of the FN period, true ramparts appear in the Cyclades: on Andros (Strophilas), a double-faced rampart, nearly 2 m wide, blocked off the promontory, and several round towers protected the wall and entranceway (Aram-Stern 1996, 112; BCH 127, 2003, 1032).

2.2 HOUSE MODELS

Ceramic house models are known from the MN period in Thessaly, whence most examples come, and in central Greece. They are very small and represent single-room, four-sided structures of one or two storeys. Although rudimentary, they allow us nonetheless to restore the general appearance of buildings of this period. Some of them provide invaluable information on structural properties: frames, roof projections above the walls, and roof beam-ends.

Their pitched roofs often have a circular hole at the centre; on the sides, in the walls, openings suggest a door or windows. One example from Krannon in Thessaly reproduces a square house with an opening on each side; at the roof angles, there are outgrowths that imitate overhanging roof rafters (Papathanassopoulos 1996, figs. 14, 61). A house model from Chaironea in Boeotia (AE1, fig. 4), with slanting walls, has a single rectangular window in the middle of one side (K. Grundmann, *AM* 6, 1953, 7–14). Most of these models have painted decoration in red on a white slip that is similar to that found on vases, and perhaps inspired by the coloured plasters which may have covered house walls. Some have a roof decorated with a checkerboard motif (AE1, fig. 5); red lines and bands outline the frames of windows and building angles. One

model in particular seems to show a two-storeyed house, as could have been those with interior buttresses of the Tsangli type, and is decorated with meanders (AE1, fig. 6).

Some rare LN house models, from the tombs of Zarkos and Sitagroi, depict building interiors, so we can see their arrangement; they belong to a type known in southeast Europe (Bulgaria, Ukraine). The Zarkos model (AE1, fig. 7), the most complete, shows the base of a house with rounded corners and a door, with the occupants represented by eight fixed figurines of varying size, adults and children, perhaps a single family; opposite the entrance to the room, situated on the long side, an oven is located close to a corner platform. Found under the floor of a house, this model is probably a ‘foundation deposit’, a ritual offering intended to ensure a long-lasting house (K. Gallis, *Antiquity* 59, 1985, 20–4; Aram-Stern 1996, 526, 541–2, figs. 5–7).

Evidently, these ‘models’ are not true architectural models: they only represent houses in an abstract or symbolic way and their precise function remains uncertain. They are relatively late occurrences, in the MN in northern Greece, and on Crete in the second half of the LN. Their existence has been connected with the growth of a culture in which the social and economic role of the household appears to take on increasing importance (P. Tomkins, in Barrett and Halstead 2004, 51–2).

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Chapter 3

POTTERY

3.1 SHAPES, TECHNIQUES, AND FUNCTIONS

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NEOLITHIC, pottery was much less common than in later periods, and some scholars maintain that it could have been reserved for ceremonial or ritual use; in any case, pottery seems to have rarely been used for cooking, even if it could have served for storage or movement of foodstuffs. In the Middle Neolithic (MN) period new shapes, techniques, and decorative motifs appear, but it is only from Late Neolithic (LN) that pottery, including everyday wares, truly takes off, with various kinds of bowl (globular, convex), with rounded or sometimes flat bottoms, and often a ring base. Shapes and manufacturing techniques are the same across Greece. Generally made using the coil technique (coils of clay superimposed), pottery vessels are of excellent quality, considering the period, and all manufacturing techniques are skilfully employed, with the exception of the potter's wheel (Vitelli 1993, 60; A. Kalogirou, in Laffineur and Betancourt 1997, 11–17).

As for decoration, Aegean pottery oscillates between two trends, which alternate or co-exist according to period and region: monochrome pottery and painted pottery. Most Neolithic pottery is monochrome with burnished shiny surfaces; sometimes irregular iridescent mottling from firing produces a decorative effect. Decorated monochrome vases are uncommon, though they can come in a range of techniques: incised lines in the wet clay; marks impressed with awls, nails, combs, or the edges of denticulated shells (*cardium*); or relief decoration consisting of applied clay bands. Sometimes incised motifs are infilled with red or white clay, which can appear like painted decoration against the dark background. Moreover,

the tools used for burnishing can leave striations of contrasting hue on the vase surface, called pattern-burnished decoration.

As throughout the Bronze Age, mineral pigments are used for paints, allowing for red, white, or black decoration in either matt or lustrous finishes. Other techniques, like the use of red or white clay slips applied post-firing (so-called crusted decoration), come to replace proper painting towards the end of the Neolithic. In the LN another technique using graphite becomes popular, especially in eastern Macedonia (at Sitagroi and Dikili Tash); this mineral form of carbon produces a shiny silvery hue (P. Yiouni, *BSA* 96, 2001, 17–20; S. Martino, *NEA* 80, 2017, 3–13). Graphite-painted pottery often bears several treatments at once: polishing, banded linear incisions, and coloured clay infilling post-firing.

3.2 MOTIFS AND STYLES: EVOLUTION AND LOCAL VARIANTS

The use of very varied and complex geometric motifs in pottery decoration is found in many forms from Anatolia to the Balkans. The basic features are always the same: chevrons and meanders, and more rarely spirals and curvilinear motifs. Variation lies in the manner of execution, the colour combinations, and the decorative syntax. All the techniques we will encounter later in the Aegean Bronze Age – decoration in light-on-dark or dark-on-light, painting in white or polychrome, a combination of incised and painted decoration, and scraped or crusted decoration – see experimentation throughout the Neolithic.

Within any given phase some general similarities can be found – though more often than not there is quite a lot of variability from site to site and region to region in what colour combinations, decorative techniques, and syntaxes are chosen. It is through such choices that

communities are able to express their own identities. Here we can only outline some of the main features of the principal regions of the Aegean world; the Neolithic covers nearly four millennia, and the countless styles which follow one another, sometimes represented by just a few pieces of pottery, can last several centuries, much longer than any of the known Bronze Age styles.

3.2.1 Early Neolithic

Monochrome pottery characterises the beginning of the Early Neolithic (EN); thereafter the appearance of local and regional variations makes it difficult to situate the numerous styles in a precise chronological sequence (Perlès 2001, 111). In Thessaly, during the so-called proto-Sesklo phase, simple motifs such as triangles and zigzags are painted in red on a paler ground (B. Otto, *ArchEph* 127, 1988, 31–46). In the rest of southern Greece, the pottery is plain or barely decorated. In the Peloponnese (Phelps 2004), ‘rainbow ware’ – a mottled ware with a pale yellow to pink ground – is treated in late EN with linear motifs in red (zigzags, chevrons, hatched triangles); this same decorative treatment is also used in the following period at Lerna on pots with cream-slipped surfaces (AEI, fig. 8). At Nea Makri in Attica, incised decoration with intersecting lines is infilled with white (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 123). On the other hand, western Macedonia has pottery decorated with cream or white motifs on polished red surfaces and, to a lesser degree, with red on cream (D. Washburn, *AJA* 88, 1984, 305–323; Wardle 1996).

Across most of the Aegean incised or impressed decoration appears in the latter part of the EN period, from the Adriatic (southern Albania) to western Macedonia and Thessaly (the ‘Magoulitsa’ style), with dotted lines or

cardium shell impressions on burnished monochrome pottery (Aram-Stern 1996, 557, pl. Ia). On Crete, which seems to have its own ceramic development, there is no painted pottery, but rather burnishing combined with relief banded decoration (Momigliano 2007, 21–3).

3.2.2 Middle Neolithic and the Sesklo Culture

Pottery shapes, motifs, and techniques multiply during the MN period, the time of the ‘Sesklo’ culture in Thessaly. The main groups – dubbed Sesklo I, II, and III – are styles more than chronological entities. In the diverse Sesklo I style (Aram-Stern 1996, 519–20, figs. 8–9), baggy cups with everted lip and shallow plates are decorated in red-on-white in the ‘solid style’ – checkerboard and ladder motifs probably inspired by basketry and textiles (AE1, pl. XIV). A typical motif of the Sesklo II style sees bands or lozenges flanked by curvilinear ‘flames’ surrounding the bodies of flat-bottomed basins (AE1, fig. 9). Then in the third group (Sesklo III), linear motifs (parallel lines, chevrons, zigzags) are painted in white on red or brown on orange, on a slipped or burnished surface; the ‘scraped’ decorative technique, known since the EN, is performed in various ways (J.-P. Demoule *et al.*, BCH 112, 1988, 12–16; G. Schneider *et al.*, BCH 115, 1991, 22, figs. B and 6). On an Otzaki vase (AE1, fig. 10), the slip that is applied all over the vase is scraped in parallel bands before dry, which produces a light-on-dark decoration with chevron friezes. The same kinds of painted decoration with red on cream are also found in the nearby sites of west Macedonia (Aram-Stern 1996, 383–5, figs. 39–41). They are sometimes combined with impressed decoration (using *cardium*, or triangular stamps), as on a tall goblet with ring base, whose horizontal bands accentuate the different parts of the vessel: base, neck, and maximum diameter (AE1, fig. 11).

In the central Greek regions of Boeotia, Attica, and Euboea, we see the same broad trends as in Thessaly to the north and the Peloponnese to the south. At Chaironea, for example, a particular style is taken up on vases that consists of carefully executed hatched lozenge motifs and pendant triangles from the rim against a pale slip (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 102). In the Peloponnese the so-called Urfirnis technique is predominant throughout the MN (Vitelli 1993, 199–204). It is tried on new forms that are globular, conical, and carinated, often with high pedestal feet. The dark slip takes on a metallic sheen in firing, with a mottled look ranging from orange-red to black (AE1, fig. 12). Sometimes it only covers the vessel base, while the rest of the light-coloured surface is used for decorative motifs. These are most typically arranged in horizontal zones adorned with various geometric elements: lozenges, checkerboards, chevrons, and zigzags. In some cases, as on a cylindrical bowl from Asea, expansive motifs adorn the entire upper body (AE1, fig. 13). On Crete, relief and incised decoration develops some new types, and pattern-burnished vessels display more or less lustrous vertical lines (Momigliano 2007, 23–6).

3.2.3 Late Neolithic and the Dimini Culture

Rich decorative variety characterises this long period (Bonga 2013). The sequence is best known from the site of Dimini in Thessaly, where four phases are distinguished with corresponding local styles. The first phase (Tsangli-Larissa), preceded by a transitional period (Zarkos; J.-P. Demoule *et al.*, BCH 112, 1988, 50), consists of vases with shiny black surfaces, supposedly from Larissa, but in fact produced in workshops that are widely scattered, even as far as coastal Asia Minor. They are decorated with fluting, incised or painted white, and vases with

vertical motifs are painted in a wide range of techniques (black on red, brown on brown, polychrome in black and white on a red ground). A ‘grey-on-grey’ ware, showing a high level of technical skill, decorated with fine lines on shapes that are often carinated, is characteristic of this first phase (Aram-Stern 1996, 134, 550, fig. 16). A matt-painted decoration also first appears, developing further in the second phase (Arapi), in black on red or in polychrome brown and red on a pale ground. On a globular jar from Dimini, this decoration uses spiral motifs and wavy criss-crossing bands, perhaps imitating basketry; it is perfectly adapted to the shape of the vase and typically covers it completely (AE1, pl. XVI). Much later and completely independently, similar effects are produced on the ‘Kamares’ pottery of Minoan Crete.

The following phases of the LN have a shared repertoire of motifs (spirals, wavy lines, chevrons, checkerboards, lozenges). They are extremely varied in their arrangement but are probably all mimicking basketry or textile. In the Dimini III phase, decoration is most often in white (Haghia

Sophia style: Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 117) or brown (Otzaki style) on a lustrous red ground. In the last phase, Dimini IV or ‘classic Dimini’, a new style, the most typical of the period, employs large meanders and checkerboards in brown on light (Figure 3.1); vases with incised decoration (sometimes infilled with white or pink clay) exhibit the same elements (AE1, fig. 15): interlaced or criss-crossing bands, spirals, and fine infilling motifs covering the entire surface (Aram-Stern 1996, 327–8, fig. 27). Spiral motifs are sometimes included in perfectly ordered compositions (AE1, fig. 16).

In the other regions of mainland Greece a fairly clear distinction can be drawn between the styles of the earlier LN (LN I, contemporary with Tsangli-Larissa and Arapi), and later LN (LN II). In east Macedonia (Dikili Tash I, Sitagroi II), earlier LN pottery is very varied (Z. Tsirtsoni, *BCH* 124, 2000, 1–55; C. Commenge, in Treuil 2004, 27–61): so-called black topped ware (closed vessels, often carinated, whose blackened necks contrast with their red bodies), sometimes with simple geometric motifs painted in red or white, or graphite-

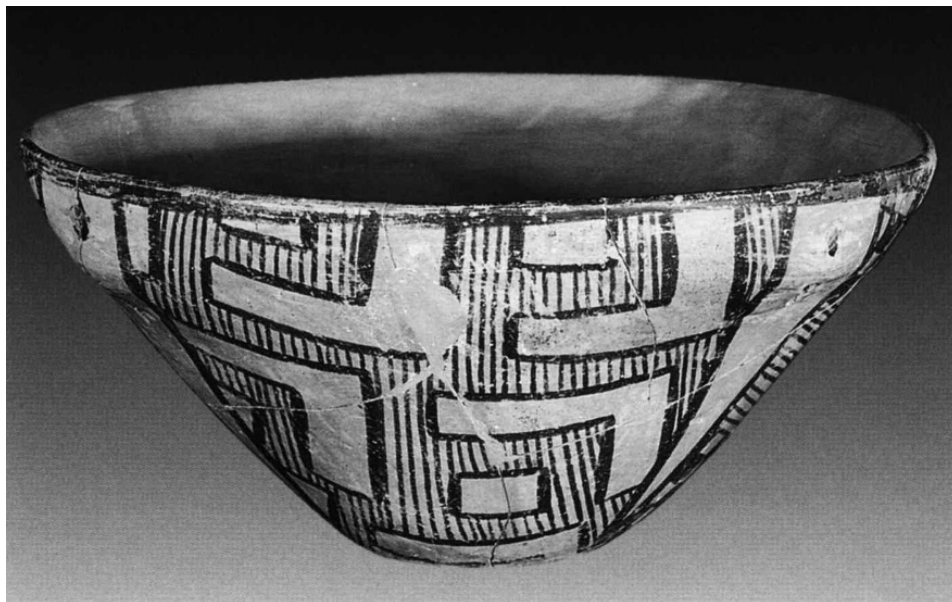


Figure 3.1 Dimini, bowl, ceramic. H. 13.3 cm. LN II (5000–4300 BC). Volos, AM BE 14484 (© HMCS/HOCRED). Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 113, photo V. Tsonis (© M. Goulandris).

decorated at the interior (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 81–3); and dark-on-light wares, the dark being dark brown and the light being grey, cream, or orange (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 79). On the last of these, the motifs are often adapted to the form of the vessel being decorated: collared globular jars with groups of vertical wavy lines, or jugs with groups of fine vertical or diagonal lines, chevrons, curving lines, or true spirals (so-called Akropotamos style; *AEI*, fig. 17). In Thrace the Paradimi I–II pottery group, also found in southeast Bulgaria, is characterised by black topped ware, which sees a grey polished finish with incised or impressed decoration, the former often with white infilling (Alram-Stern 1996, 441–2, fig. 52).

The second half of the LN period sees two main styles: a graphite-decorated ware and a black-on-red ware. Meanders and spirals are the dominant motifs in the first style, characteristic of the Goumelnitsa and Karanovo V–VI cultures in Romania and Bulgaria. On a bowl from Dikili Tash (*AEI*, pl. XVII), curvilinear meanders are juxtaposed with incised and impressed decoration: parallel incised lines, infilled with white paste, form panels on the lower part of the vase, while on the upper part there are similar lines painted in graphite. The large impressed dots are also infilled with white. The second style, in black on red, employs linear motifs that are similar to those of graphite-painted ware. In later levels a freer style, dubbed Galepsos, has black discs or half-discs and triangles on the red ground (J.-Demoule, in Treuil 2004, 95–100). It is typified by a small bottle from Dikili Tash with two flat handles (Figure 3.2), decorated with symmetrical motifs, straight or incurving, that accentuate its shape. At Dikili Tash archaeologists have noted the variety of techniques and the many decorative combinations, such that “the graphite-painted motifs and the incised or excised motifs merge and blend” (M. Sfériadès, *BCH* 107,



Figure 3.2 Dikili Tash, two-handled jar, ceramic. H. 11 cm. LN II (5000–4300 BC). Philippos, AM A 495 (© HMCS/HOCRED). Photo EFA (Ph. Collet). (For the color version, please refer to the plate section.)

1983, 655). On both the inside and outside of the vase, horizontal or diagonal lines contrast with the meanders’ curving lines, or define triangles filled with various motifs. There are plenty of other local styles, like the white-on-red decoration of chevrons and horizontal lines at Thasos (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 88). In the ‘Marica’ style (Treuil 2004, pl. G), finely striated incised bands are covered in white paste; the intervening zones are graphite-painted and the vase’s upper and lower edges are highlighted with a red ochre band, creating a polychrome effect in white, red, and silvery grey.

In the Peloponnese and central Greece, changes in ceramic technology, typology, and decoration go along with social changes, as in the rest of the Aegean world. One such social change is the decrease in the number of sites. The ceramic changes are seen primarily in the adoption of black-polished ware, whose semi-globular bowls, carinated basins, and fruitstands are treated with a white-painted decoration of arcs or pendant triangles, or with simple burnished motifs. But the Peloponnesian LN is also characterised by the frequent occurrence of

matt-painted ware, in brown, red, or black on a buff ground. These vases, with convex or carinated profiles, are decorated in rectilinear styles within a framework of vertical or horizontal bands (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 137). In LN II the ‘classic Dimini’ style spreads widely and vases with polychrome meander decoration are attested from central Greece to the northeast Peloponnese. These are sometimes joined by incised wares with multiple local variants. The so-called Gonia ware imitates basketry and textile motifs, and the term ‘Gonia group’ has been suggested for this cultural horizon (J.-P. Demoule, in Treuil 2004, 140). At the close of the period, the Prosymna style is defined by bands of delicate motifs (triangles, diagonal hatching) lightly incised on the vessel’s upper half (Blegen 1937, 272–3).

In the Cyclades it is the Saliagos group that is the basis for defining the LN (Sotirakopoulou, in Alram-Stern 1996, 594–5, 599, fig. 3, 601–3, figs. 6–10). Its most characteristic style consists of groups of lines and chevrons in white on dark, especially on tall pedestalled fruitstands (AEI, fig. 18). It probably originates from southwest Anatolia, from where it spread via the east Aegean and Dodecanese before then arriving in Euboea and in a more restricted way on mainland Greece. On Crete new motifs appear too in LN I, painted in orange-brown on a buff ground; incised decoration (chevrons, diagonal lines, zigzags, lozenges) proliferates, especially on carinated bowls (Momigliano 2007, 27–32).

3.2.4 *Final Neolithic and the Rachmani Culture*

Named after a site near Volos, the Rachmani culture is really only the Thessalian version of a broad cultural community that now encompasses several Aegean regions (central Greece, the Peloponnese, the Cyclades) and which has been named the ‘Aegina-Attica-Kephala’ culture (Alram-Stern

1996, 157–9; Treuil 2004, 131–4). In Thessaly, the Rachmani I phase is especially characterised by crusted wares with pink and white paint added after firing. Such wares were already prevalent in east Macedonia. Rachmani I also sees abundant relief decoration, as on the so-called elephant trunk handles. The Dimini motifs of lines, triangles, and zigzags and its surface techniques (infilled incisions) continue. On a Rachmani cup, its rim decorated with groups of vertical lines, a frieze of spirals and triangles adorns the vessel’s lower body (AEI, fig. 19); this combination of curvilinear and rectilinear motifs is repeated at the vase’s interior. A scoop (or brazier) found at Sesklo, of a type common in Attica, Euboea, and the Cyclades, uses the same effect, alternating a line of meanders with incised chevrons infilled with white paste (AEI, fig. 20).

In the Peloponnese the Final Neolithic (FN) period is well attested at a limited number of sites, such as the cave of Alepotrypa in the gulf of Diros (Papathanasiou 2018). Its fine pottery frequently receives a white or red infilled decoration; on other vases, chevron motifs inspired by basketry are made by burnishing (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 138; Alram-Stern 1996, 240, fig. 15). On jars a high-relief rope cord decoration, which appeared in the second half of the LN period, continues, now in combination with vertical and diagonal lines that form triangles or zigzags (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 140), occasionally together with spirals.

The pottery of Attica, known especially from the Kitsos cave excavations, is like that from the Peloponnese and the Ionian islands. As for the Cycladic pottery of this period, its shapes and motifs largely derive from mainland Greece. At Saliagos, however, the polychrome decoration is more reminiscent of the Cretan FN. Although long misunderstood, the FN period on Crete is now well defined, at both Phaistos and Knossos, with vase types analogous to those of the Aegina-Attica-Kephala group (L. Vagnetti, *Cretan Studies* 5, 1996, 29–39; P. Tomkins, in Momigliano 2007,

32–44). Surface treatments are varied: crusted wares, burnished parallel or criss-crossing lines (anticipating the Partira ware of the early Early Bronze Age), simple scoring, relief bands, and mottled effects (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 163). At Phaistos in particular we see experiments with polychromy, with infilling of red, orange, or yellow on a dark ground.

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Chapter 4

FIGURINES AND MODELS

FIGURINES AND MODELS PROVIDE US WITH A PICTURE, albeit limited, of the Neolithic world: people, houses, furniture, boats, birds, and quadrupeds (S. Nanoglou, in [Fowler 2015](#), 621–37). Most typically in ceramic, these representations are also made, as in later periods, in rarer or more precious materials, such as marble, bone, or shell.

4.1 FIGURINES

4.1.1 *Anthropomorphic Figurines*

Neolithic figurines come in a wide variety of forms, which makes them difficult to group chronologically. Two main categories are typically distinguished: schematic, known from the very beginning of the Early Neolithic (EN), and naturalistic. This seemingly convenient distinction is perhaps not all that salient: the more naturalistic figurines often tend towards stylisation too when certain features are accentuated. The co-existence of these two categories does signal, though, that they may not have had exactly the same functions.

Ceramic figurines, which are the most abundant, are tightly connected to vase production: clay paste, surface treatments, and decoration are similar. The simplest are modelled from a single piece of clay; other more complex examples are made in multiple parts and joined together with clay slip or wooden pegs. Hollow figurines (with hollow bodies, or sometimes limbs) are rare; they were made like pots, or perhaps modelled around a core in a perishable material. Stone figurines, in marble

or limestone, are usually in the same types as those in ceramic. In the Final Neolithic (FN), so-called acrolithic figurines, like those from Rachmani, have schematic and very elongated heads in stone, of conical or trapezoidal form (AE1, fig. 33), which were inserted into a clay body.

4.1.1.1 NATURALISTIC FIGURINES

Naked female figures are by far the most common. Local variations are many, but a few principal types do recur throughout the period: standing, sitting on the ground or on a seat, sometimes cradling an infant.

The *standing figurines* (AE1, fig. 21) are usually steatopygous, with broad thighs, and arms brought to the chest; the stomach is often rounded and folded, which could signify



Figure 4.1 Ierapetra, female figurine, ceramic. H. 14.7 cm. MN or LN (6000–4300 BC). Heraklion, AM coll. Giamalakis 249. (© HMCS/HOCRED). Photo © AMH.

pregnancy (AE1, fig. 24). A marble figurine from Aegina (AE1, fig. 23) with an oval head and long neck, with broad square shoulders, and arms above the breasts, follows a ceramic figurine tradition known since the EN in Thessaly and Macedonia and in the Middle Neolithic (MN) period in Boeotia (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 188, 204, 205, 236). Rarer still, a composition of two figures intertwined at the shoulders comes from Thessaly (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 234). A fragmentary male marble figure from Knossos, arms held at the chest in the same pose as that later seen in Middle Bronze Age (MBA) ‘adorants’, is of exceptional quality (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 247).

The *seated figurines* are often shown with legs crossed, which keeps them stable. This is the case for a Cretan figurine from Ierapetra (Figure 4.1), which has a ‘bird’s head’ face, like many other examples, and a sort of flat cap; the body bears incised decoration filled with white paste. This pose, attested since the EN period in Thessaly, is found on Late Neolithic (LN) figurines from Naxos and Saliagos – the first marble figurines from the Cyclades (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 240, 243). Others are sat with legs thrown off to one side (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 209, 235). This posture, which breaks with the typical frontality of Neolithic Aegean sculpture, existed in the Near East and is also found in the Balkans (S. Hansen, in Lichter 2005, 202–3).

The *figurines sat on seats* are more remarkable: one example from Sesklo is of a woman holding a child in both arms to her chest (AE1, fig. 25). Her head, made as a separate piece, is not preserved; lines and spirals in dark on light adorn her body. The most striking are the figurines with ‘integral’ seat: the stool’s rear is reduced to two feet, and the person’s legs, extended in an arch, act as the front feet of the seat and keep it stable (Perlès 2001, 261, fig. 12.2). These are often male, and signify the importance of men in society. Another case comes from Sesklo (AE1, fig. 26). This figurine type is

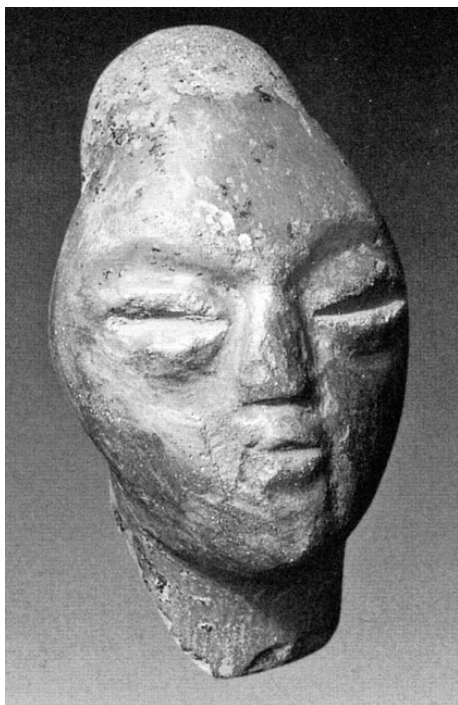


Figure 4.2 Souphli, figurine head, ceramic. H. 7.35 cm. Neolithic. Larissa, AM TL.23 (© HMCS/HOCRED). Papathanassopoulos, 1996 n° 231, photo V. Tsonis (© M. Goulandris).

found until the FN in east Macedonia (at Sitagroi). One chance find from Karditsa, attributed to the FN period, is of an unusual size (nearly 50 cm), and shows a seated male ithyphallic figure (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 228).

Even on the supposedly naturalistic figurines, facial features are hardly shown: a conical nose is often the only feature represented, as on the Cycladic figures of the Early Bronze Age (EBA). Several heads from Thessaly of uncertain date are nonetheless more expressive (Figure 4.2). They often have eyes with a medial slit ('coffee bean'), a stylistic trait known from the Near East (Perlès 2001, 59, fig. 4.5, 258 n. 7), and relief lips; in some cases where one can almost discern individual expressions or physical idiosyncrasies, one might go as far as saying they are portraits. Hairstyles are rarely depicted: a protuberance

on the top of the head may in some cases represent hair and only a few examples have incised criss-crossed tresses which frame the face (AE1, fig. 28).

4.1.1.2 SCHEMATIC FIGURINES

Most often in stone, schematic figurines are simple outlines more or less in the form of a violin: a limestone example from Dimini possesses a wide, flat, triangular head and a long neck. Its lower body is little more than an oval with two stubs as the elbows of arms folded at the chest (AE1, fig. 29). On a ceramic figurine from Knossos, adorned with incised zigzags, the torso is shown in a more precise manner (AE1, fig. 30). A marble figurine from Saliagos anticipates the violin type from the Cyclades (AE1, fig. 31). Analogous forms will continue as late as the MBA in Crete (AE1, fig. 172).

In other examples, the lower body is reduced to a long cylindrical stem. A cruciform type with two broad lateral stubs and a triangular head atop a long neck is represented by a ceramic example from Thessaly, though they also exist in stone; it is painted with red lines and spirals (Figure 4.3). On highly stylised stone heads of the Rachmani culture (Gallis and Orphanidis 1996, pl. 115–20; L. Talalay, *JMA* 17, 2004, 149–51), in the form of elongated axes, and for insertion into ceramic bodies, coloured geometric motifs sometimes show facial features (AE1, fig. 33). Finally, there are pendants in black or green stone (called 'frog' amulets), which are even more schematic (AE1, fig. 34). Found over a huge geographical area across Greece and the Near East, they probably depict women in childbirth; they are comparable to the outstanding stone frog figurines from Nea Nikomedia, whose symbolism could have been connected with fertility (R. Rodden, *Antiquity* 38, 1964, 294–5; Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 200).



Figure 4.3 Asprochoma, female figurine, marble. H. 26 cm. LN (5500–4200 BC). Volos, AM M 2749 (© HMCS/HOCRED). Papathanassopoulos, 1996 n° 213, photo V. Tsonis (© M. Goulandris).

4.1.2 *Animal Figurines and Miniature Objects*

Animal figurines are relatively infrequent and have unstandardised forms that make them hard to identify. Most likely they are roughly modelled cattle or goat (G. Toufexis, in Misdrahi-Kapon 1994, vol. A, 163–8). Bull figurines appear at Knossos from the EN period, but most belong to the end of the Neolithic, especially in the Peloponnese. They might be connected during this period to a growth in pastoralism.

Miniature objects are carefully made and only come in a limited range of types, among which

are models of tables, ovens, and boats (Marangou 1992a; Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 267–70).

4.1.3 *Figurine Functions*

The question of the meaning of these figurines often arises, with many originally explained in terms of a Mother Goddess cult (Gimbutas 1974). All recent studies, though, insist on the diversity of their likely functions, which is supported by the range of types and the co-existence of schematic and naturalistic figurines on the same sites (Perlès 2001, 257). Generally speaking, we are probably dealing neither with simple toys nor with ‘goddesses’, but with a wide range of meanings and uses, even for a single type (Talalay 1993). They could have been used in magical, religious, or cultic practices, as fertility symbols, ancestral images, or childbirth amulets. On different sites they are usually found in domestic contexts and often broken in dumps; they must have been used on multiple occasions, and their ritual breakage could have been intended to remove their special power. We might further note that they mainly occur in the most densely populated parts of Greece, while being very rare in the Peloponnese, and absent from the northeast Aegean and Dodecanese. Their distribution thus seems to correlate with particular socio-economic conditions (Perlès 2001, 260). They might then have been a means of social communication; it has even been suggested that a very particular group of half-figurines from the MN period, showing only the lower body (split-leg figurines), could have been symbols in the true sense of the term, intended to be made complete by the figurine’s other half in the course of exchange relationships between communities (Talalay 1993, 45–6).

4.2 OBJECTS WITH ANTHROPOMORPHIC AND ZOOMORPHIC DECORATION

From the EN period some vases are schematically decorated (circles, incurving lines), either incised or in appliqué, in a way that evokes a human face with eyes and mouth. Their function remains uncertain because of a lack of contextual information (N. Voutiropoulos, *Journal of Prehistoric Religion* 7, 1993, 62–82; [Perlès 2001](#), 264–7). This is true of a bowl from the Alepotrypa cave (*AE1*, fig. 35). On some fragments from Nea Nikomedeia the faces, of men rather than women, are often impressive ([Wardle 1996](#), 84); two of them show human forms. On a Euboean jar a couple are roughly modelled in relief ([Afram-Stern 1996](#), 294, fig. 22). A fragment from Prodrornos (Thessaly) depicts a female figure holding a vase on her back ([Papathanassopoulos 1996](#), n° 208); it is not unlike the later Minoan figurines from the EBA that carry vases too (see below, p. 59). The connection between pottery and this kind of relief decoration was already known in Anatolia, notably at Haçilar.

Several categories of zoomorphic vases are known from Macedonia. One example from Sitagroi in the form of a bull could have served as a lamp (*AE1*, fig. 36). A small jar from Zarkos, used as a burial urn, was transformed into an animal by the addition of a head, tail, and four legs ([Papathanassopoulos 1996](#),

n° 258). Animal protomes are added to vases with some frequency. More extraordinary is the example from Dikili Tash of a large clay ‘bucranium’ modelled around a cattle skull (R. Treuil, P. Darcque, *BCH* 122, 1998, 1–25). These modelled bucrania – with the oldest known example from Catalhöyük in Anatolia – are also found in the Balkans. They could have formed part of a mural or have been attached to a house gable.

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Chapter 5

OTHER ARTS

Ornaments, Seals, and Stone Vases

5.1 ORNAMENTS

ORNAMENTS (BRACELETS, PINS, BEADS) UNDERGO major development in the Neolithic. Aside from clay, stone, and bone, certain imported materials, including shells like *Spondylus*, and metals such as gold, silver (perhaps coming from Siphnos in the Cyclades), and copper, are used for necklace beads, earrings, or small hammered and polished pendants (Kyparissi-Apostolika 2001; C. Perlès, in Dietz 2018, 331–40).

Metal jewellery appears in the Late Neolithic: a cut-out disc of gold sheet in Volos Museum, topped with a trapezoidal projection pierced with two small holes, forms part of a class of pendants of ring-idol type thought to be highly schematic representations of the human body (AEI, fig. 40; Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 299). They occur in various other materials (silver, stone, clay, shell) and have a wide distribution in cemeteries from the shores of the Black Sea to central Europe. They are well represented in the cemetery of Varna. A group of objects in gold has been found close to Pella in Macedonia and includes rings and pendant-idols of this type (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 303). In the Peloponnese, the Alepotrypa cave has yielded a whole series of ornamental elements in silver (Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 41). The geographical diffusion of this jewellery testifies to the existence of an active social exchange network across all of

southeastern Europe, and to the social and economic transformations underway, of which the rich tombs of Varna are the most striking indication.

Spondylus shells are also prestige objects. These red shells from the Mediterranean are worked mainly in Thessaly, east Macedonia, and Thrace. Cut into bracelets and pieces for necklaces, they are exported towards the Danube (J. Chapman, B. Gaydarska, in [Fowler 2015](#), 639–56). In Attica, a miniscule pendant in the form of a bear was found in the Kitsos cave ([Papathanassopoulos 1996](#), n° 294). This craft disappears at the beginning of the Bronze Age.

5.2 DECORATIVE SEALS

Decorative seals, simple stamps in ceramic or soft stone, are known from the seventh millennium BC in the Near East ([Krzyszowska 2005](#), 25–35; R. Skeates, *CAJ* 17, 2007, 183–98). They have sometimes been called ‘pintaderas’, with the idea that they might have been used for imprinting coloured patterns on textiles. These stamps are known from Anatolia to central Europe; we find them in Greece from the beginning of the Neolithic, notably in Thessaly, at Nea Nikomedia and Sesklo. They are less common in southern Greece. The first examples, which are large, are mostly in clay, and have a handle and a suspension hole which allowed them to be worn as pendants. Variable in form, they have a flat oval or quadrangular base, sometimes in the shape of a cross or with a serrated outline, and bear simple geometric motifs, concentric circles, chevrons, zigzags, or spirals ([Figure 5.1](#); *AE1*, fig. 37). Cruciform or meander decoration is common in Thessaly (*AE1*, fig. 39). These motifs are much the same across a huge area, from the Near East to the Balkans, but the repertoire can vary even at a single site. These seals become rarer in the

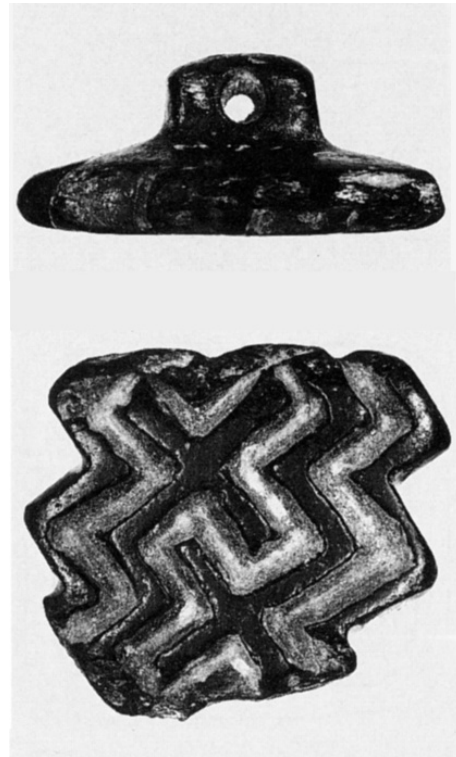


Figure 5.1 Vassilika, clay seal. L. 4.4 cm. LN (5500–4250 BC). Thessaloniki, AM MK 62 (© HMCS/HOCRED). Photo © CMS.

Final Neolithic; a group of clay conoids from Makrygialos in Macedonia is decorated with circles, zigzags, or a rosette (*CMS V Suppl. 3*, n° 408–23). The motifs sometimes correspond to those in the pottery of the time; they may also have been inspired by basketry or textile.

As the faces of these seals were too deeply cut, they cannot have been destined for making imprints in clay. Only very rare examples that were engraved with fine lines, such as a lentoid seal from Tsoungiza adorned with a simple grid (*CMS V Suppl. 1B*, n° 127), could have been true seals, capable of producing clean impressions; but not a single sealing has yet been found in the Neolithic period. As with the figurines, these seals are very rare in the less populated regions, such as central or western Greece and the islands. Most come from Thessaly and a few from Macedonia, densely populated regions where they could have

functioned as means of personal identification, or in inter-community relations. Thus they have been interpreted as markers or tokens used within the contexts of various forms of exchange (M. Budja, *Documenta Praehistorica* 30, 2003, 115–30).

5.3 STONE VASES

Stone vases, whose manufacturing technique is already well mastered, appear from Thessaly to the Peloponnese at the same time as pottery, in the course of the Early Neolithic, at a limited number of sites (Sesklo, Achilleion, Nea Makri in Attica, Franchthi in the Argolid). Often in schist or marble, of small dimensions, they generally imitate simple ceramic forms, such as a hemispherical bowl from Kouphovouno (AE1, fig. 41). Some of them are elliptical vessels with a ring base similar to that found on ceramic vases. Their use remains uncertain – some may have been used for milling. In the Late Neolithic they occur in Macedonia and especially in the Aegean islands (Kea, Naxos, Saliagos, Samos). The most remarkable type at the end of the Neolithic consists of the beakers with lateral lugs and pierced suspension holes, known from Kea (Figure 5.2), Attica (Kitsos), Naxos, Lemnos, and Samos (J. Coleman, in Betancourt 1999, 125–30). A workshop producing these beakers has been discovered in Anatolia in the Izmir region, from where they were distributed to the northeast Aegean (Takaoglu 2005; Takaoglu, *Hesperia* 75, 2006, 289–315).

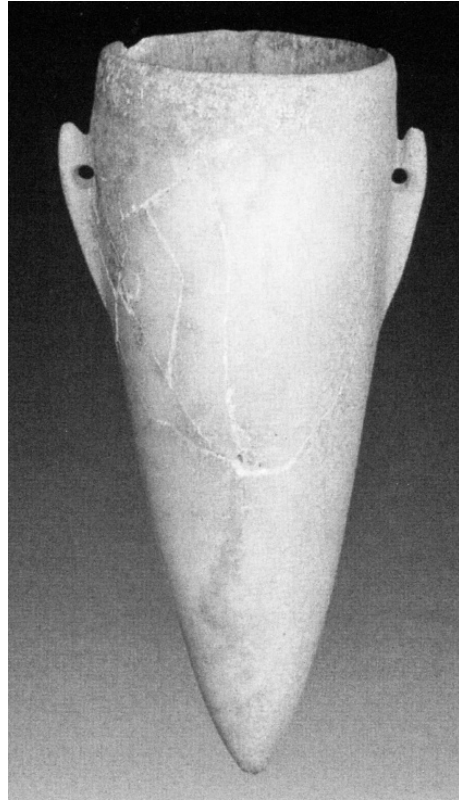


Figure 5.2 Kephala, marble goblet. H. 16.8 cm. FN (4300–3200 BC). Kea, AM Keph. 1.1 (© HMCS/HOCRED). Papathanassopoulos 1996, n° 176, photo V. Tsonis (© M. Goulandris).

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Part II

THE ART OF THE AEGEAN EARLY
BRONZE AGE

Chapter 6

ARTEFACTS AND CONTEXTS

6.1 THE AEGEAN WORLD IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

6.1.1 *Chronological Divisions*

The transition from the Neolithic to the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) does not see any major change in lifeways. Pottery and other forms of material culture carry on largely as before. The only significant development is in metallurgy, though it had already appeared in the Late Neolithic; and even here progress is somewhat slow, the east Aegean excepted.

Though regional differences were hardly weak in the Neolithic, they do nevertheless intensify from the start of the Bronze Age. Three regions clearly assert their identity – the Peloponnese, the Cyclades, and Crete – through particular characteristics in their architecture, funerary customs, pottery, and figurines. Chronological schemes use the common tripartite divisions (Early Bronze (EB) I, II, and III) but adopt separate terminologies according to region (Early Helladic (EH), Early Cycladic (EC), Early Minoan). The term ‘Early Bronze Age’, without further specification, is used in more peripheral areas such as northern Greece and the northeast Aegean islands. Within the three main areas regional diversity has led to the definition of specific cultures that sometimes lack chronological precision (such as the Keros-Syros, Korakou, or Lefkandi cultures). The best-known period across the region as a whole, EB II, has been subdivided into two phases, EB IIA and IIB. The absolute chronology varies according to who is writing, especially for the

beginning of the EBA, which is dependent upon Neolithic chronology. EB I begins around 3300/3100 BC, EB IIA lasts from 2750 to 2500 BC, EB IIB from 2500 to 2300/2200 BC, and EB III until around 2100/2000 BC.

6.1.2 *Regions and Cultural Groupings*

The northeast Aegean, closely connected with Anatolia, plays a crucial role in the development of metallurgy and the spread of certain innovations. The main sites are Thermi on the island of Lesbos, Poliochni on Lemnos, Emporio on Chios, and Mikro Vouni on Samothrace. These are close to Troy, whose first occupation (Troy I) is contemporary with EB I and II, but also other important sites on the Anatolian coast, like Limantepe and Panaztepe. In northern Greece, in Macedonia and Thrace, sites such as Sitagroi and Dikili Tash establish, as in the Neolithic, a link with the Balkans and with Thessaly; in this latter region, one of the richest in the previous period, the changes are much less dramatic than in the southern Aegean.

It is in the Peloponnese, as well as in central Greece, that the changes from the Neolithic period show up most clearly. A number of sites appear in Boeotia (Eutresis, Orchomenos, Lithares, Thebes) and the northeast Peloponnese (Korakou, Zygyouries, Nemea, Lerna, Tiryns), but also in Attica (Haghios Kosmas), Euboea (Lefkandi and Manika), and Aegina (Kolonna). Local cultures are chiefly defined through their pottery: the Talioti group in the Argolid or the Eutresis culture in Boeotia for the beginning of the EH, the Korakou culture for the start of EH II, and the Tiryns culture for EH III. For the latter part of the EH, Lerna in the Argolid remains the reference point for comparison with other Helladic sites.

The Cyclades take an increasingly important position: the growth of maritime exchange and their wealth in metal deposits (copper, silver)

now give them a primary role. Cycladic art is not only about marble figurines: metal artefacts, stone vases, and ceramic vessels are all exported and imitated in neighbouring regions, especially in Euboea and Crete.

It is objects from the Cyclades that present the most difficulties for chronology, since many of them come from looted burials. Indeed, in the Cyclades most of the objects we have come from cemeteries, in contrast to the Neolithic, whose archaeological record is dominated by settlements (Rambach 2000, vol. I, 1–184). So, in the absence of stratigraphy, groups of similar objects have been put together in a system of ‘groups’ or ‘cultures’ for which some sort of chronological ordering is attempted (Renfrew 1972). This classification, running parallel to the traditional tripartite categories, is often employed. Thus, assemblages of funerary material from Pelos (on Melos), linked by common features to the ceramic assemblages of the settlement of Grotta (on Naxos), come to define a southern Cycladic culture – the Grotta-Pelos culture – which runs from the end of the Final Neolithic period and corresponds roughly to EC I (map of sites in Broodbank 2000, 199, fig. 57). In EC II the main culture is the so-called Keros-Syros, defined by the tomb material from Chalandriani on Syros that is associated with the figurines discovered at Kavos on Keros. Various groups complete the sequence, like those of Kampos on Paros (end of EC I, early EC II), or of Kastri on Syros (second half of EC II; A. Angelopoulou, in Brodie 2008, 149–64; P. Zapheirou, in Brodie 2008, 183–94). EC III is represented in particular by the Phylakopi I culture on Melos, which runs until the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) (T. Brogan, *AJA* 117, 2013, 555–67).

The practice that sees the deposition in burials of prestige objects, sometimes intentionally broken (Broodbank 2000, 268), emerges first in the EC II period, especially on Amorgos, Ios, and Naxos. Even if a good number of Cycladic burials did not