



Beyond Oikos: outdoor spaces, daily life and sociality in Neolithic Greece

ABSTRACTS

A look beyond the house: social space, daily life and sociality in Neolithic Greece

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In the European Neolithic and beyond, the house and household, as both physical and analytical units, have been dominant in the study of various expressions of human life, especially related to the development of social space, community practices and group coherence. In contrast, outdoor open-air spaces, as archaeological and theoretically challenging areas, remain considerably under-examined and overlooked. The interplay between indoors and outdoors, private and public, communal and individual, continues to shape the boundaries of settlement spaces throughout the various approaches and interpretations of Neolithic histories. Recent advances in archaeological research, however, suggest that space was not segmented but continuous, while cohesion was achieved through various communal quotidian performances, both in domestic and public spheres.

The paper poses questions of how people were living and how communities were organised during the Middle and Late Neolithic period in Greece (5.800 – 4.500 cal BC), by exploring daily practices involved with domestic routines and craftsmanship production. Choosing combustion features, such as hearths, ovens, fire pits, food preparation benches and kilns as focal points of outdoor areas, our analysis tackles daily performativity, commensality, interaction and social reproduction. The paper will examine the many domestic and craft practices that were performed in the open-air outdoor spaces from selected Neolithic sites, focusing primarily on quotidian routines and craftsmanship production. Outdoor spaces will be here approached as dynamic multi-task locales of daily routines, subsistence practices, crafts and sociality. We will focus on selected unpublished case studies sites from Thessaly and Macedonia that provide rich datasets for analysis and comprehensive interpretations, at varying scales from local to regional. The sites discussed in this presentation are Imvrou Pigadi in Thessaly, together with Kleitos, Makri and Makriyalos in Northern Greece.

Beyond the dwelling: household and communal activities in courtyard spaces: the case of Barcin Höyük in NW Turkey

Rana Özbal (Koç University), Elisha van den Bos (Barcin Höyük Research Project) & Fokke Gerritsen (Netherlands Institute in Turkey)

Throughout the continuous occupation at the Neolithic site of Barcin Höyük between 6600-6000 BCE dwellings were set among courtyards and flanked by porticos. This gave the settlement a different appearance than older, conglomerated Neolithic settlements like Aşıklı and Çatalhöyük in Central Anatolia. Especially in the earliest phases (6600-6200 BCE), when houses were agglutinatively aligned with their doorways opening to a common outdoor area, courtyards displayed a communal character. These open areas, with little evidence for fencing, appear to have been used for a variety of purposes including daily tasks and the disposal of the



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dead. In the later phases of occupation (6200-6000 BCE), houses became freestanding units, and there are indications that the shared nature of external areas changed.

In this paper we apply different approaches to attempt to understand how these courtyard spaces were used and how this may have differed from the porticos and dwelling interiors. Spatial analysis of houses, porticos and outdoor clusters of installations and burials is combined with microdebris analysis of floors, and sediment geochemistry of indoor and outdoor surfaces.

This multi-disciplinary approach allows us to map functional differentiation in the user spaces at Barcın Höyük and suggest diachronic changes which may align with changes in social organization. Domestic installations such as ovens and storage bins were more often found indoors, while hearths, fire pits, basins, and refuse areas were found in the courtyards, suggesting a division in more private and more communal domestic tasks. Microdebris analyses and sediment geochemistry results contribute to this picture and demonstrate that courtyards were used intensively and likely also functioned as enclosures for animals. Compared with enclosed spaces and porticos, courtyards were subjected to less maintenance activities but were clearly distinguishable from the noticeably dirtier midden dumps. During the earlier phases, adult burials placed in courtyards, attest to the collective character of the open areas of the settlement. This contrasts with infant burials, which were placed indoors and presumably connected to the immediate arena of the home. In the later phases, clusters of both adult and infant burials are found close to houses, suggesting increasingly household-oriented practices.

Neolithic Land Use in Southeastern Europe: case studies on exploitation of wild plant food and woodland resources from sites in Bulgaria

Elena Marinova (Baden Württemberg State Office for Cultural Heritage)

Beside the introduction of agriculture, which played crucial role for the Neolithic way of life, another important aspect of this way of life is the use of wild plant resources and related with it shaping of the natural environment by the first farmers. The archaeobotanical research with studies of the plant macro remains provided information on gathered wild plants and wood used for fuel used directly from the inhabitants of given site. This information allows to access the composition and alternation of the vegetation cover outside the houses and human build settlement realm. The current paper will present case studies from several Neolithic sites from the modern territory of Bulgaria to explore the question how the surrounding of those sites looked like and how it developed under human impact. The Neolithic population had access to and made use of rich in underground oak forest or even wooded steppe and riparian vegetation. Land use and management by early Neolithic communities in the region favoured the opening of forested areas and lead to an increase in area of forest edge zones and secondary forests. Such changed habitats were useful for grazing animals, collecting fruits, fodder, firewood and the protection of arable fields.

When common becomes communal. Collective open-air activities in neolithic settlements

Kostas Kotsakis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)



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The area surrounding the neolithic settlements has received little research attention. Open-air activities overlap, are uncoordinated, and are repeated, resulting in a palimpsest of evidence. Identifying and categorising specific actions in such a broad context is impossible. On the other hand, activities confined within dwellings represent carefully coordinated, regulated, location-specific activities frequently identifiable from the associated material culture.

This distinction serves as the foundation for establishing a dichotomy between the domestic domain, in which the household is the dominant agent, and the open-air sphere, which we regard as common, i.e. open to all. The community plays a role here, but it is unclear and abstract.

However, we can identify in the archaeological record events of collective open-air activity, either because the location of their place has unusually distinctive qualities or because the associated material culture implies some performative element. The community's involvement is more straightforward in these cases, and its role is more explicit. To that end, I'll present and discuss two examples from Paliambela Kolindros (6600 BCE) and Makriyalos (5300 BCE).

Ditched exterior: enclosures on the Neolithic tells in Pelagonia

Goce Naumov (Centre for Prehistoric Research)

One of the major spotlights of prehistoric archaeology is the architecture and its household including the building features, material culture and organic remains preserved in its interior. This surely provides a thorough insight into the daily life of the people inhabiting the settlements and houses where they dwelled. But on the other side, there is not much focus on the exterior areas, due to lack of data related to space out of the buildings, but it is also a result of reduced interest in issues beyond the spatial organization of the settlement or households.

However, the implementation of geophysical prospection and more intensive excavation of areas out of the buildings indicate that the outdoor space is far more dynamic than it was previously elaborated. In this direction the detection of ditches in the Neolithic settlements demonstrates the engagement of the society in enclosing their living area and the variety of purposes that are in the background of these massive social operations. Such acts are evidenced on numerous Neolithic sites in the Balkans and particularly in a number of tells in the valley of Pelagonia.

Therefore, this paper will elaborate the practice of enclosing the tells in Pelagonia and the diversity of ditched systems used to mark or protect the inhabited area. Consequently the motives behind this action would be discussed in relation to recent fieldwork research and the relationship with enclosing practices among the first farming communities in the Balkan region.

Geoarchaeological approaches and contrasts to buried wet and dry settlement sites: Case Studies from Late Bronze Age Must Farm (UK) versus Neolithic Drenovac (Serbia)

Charles French (University of Cambridge)



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Micromorphological analyses combined with a suite of geoarchaeological, geophysical and chronological techniques are very adept at identifying landscape change at a variety of scales, even down to events in the life-cycle of an individual dwelling. Two very well preserved but contrasting examples are explored: the fire-destroyed Late Bronze Age pile dwelling at Must Farm in the Cambridgeshire fenland of England, and the hillwash-buried early Neolithic settlement of Drenovac in central Serbia.

At Must Farm, the use of micromorphological analysis has been extremely adept at identifying the multiplicity of juxtaposed fabrics of different origins that comprise the matrix of the ‘occupation’ horizon and collapsed, burnt *in situ* structures. Excellent preservation has produced evidence of probable former organic floor surfaces as well as internal insulated walling and/or ceiling building materials.

The geoarchaeological evaluation of the Drenovac Neolithic settlement has revealed an extensively transformed valley-scape. The valley and the settlement are buried by considerable depths of *c.* 1.5-4m of colluvial, loessic-like sediments overlying a buried palaeosol. The hillwash deposits range from at least the earlier Neolithic at about 6000 BC coincident with the earliest Starčevo settlement, and continued apace with at least eight major phases of eroded soil aggradation for four millennia until the later Bronze Age. There is also a distinctive phase of hillwash accumulation between the earlier Starčevo and later Neolithic Vinča phases of settlement. Consequently, this may push the onset of the impact of Neolithic agriculture even earlier than normally suggested.

At the on-site, individual house scale, evaluative geoarchaeological investigations of two excavated structures have revealed that the site was built on disturbed clay-enriched brown forest soils. The collapsed, two-storey structures were kept very clean and free of settlement-derived rubbish material, both inside and outside the buildings, and were then highly burnt, abandoned and collapsed, and buried by hillwash.

Microarchaeology and the organisation of early settled life at Neolithic Svinjarička Čuka, Serbia

Barbara Horejs (Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences, HEAS Human Evolution and Archaeological Science, University Vienna) & Lyndelle Webster (HEAS Human Evolution and Archaeological Science, University Vienna)

The development of early villages in the Neolithic Balkans remains a vivid discussion, which is closely related with the *Neolithisation* process in this region starting around 6200-6000 calBC. While the ‘Neolithic village’ is known as a key concept and represents a crucial parameter in the social and cultural transformation in west Asia, this specific cultural concept was adopted differently in various localities during the dispersal into southeast Europe. This contribution will focus on the early and middle Neolithic communities along the Vardar-Morava corridor and the structure of early agricultural sites in Starčevo-Neolithic times, *c.* 6000–5300 calBC. New data from the case study of Svinjarička Čuka in south Serbia will be presented and aspects of its diversity in structures and ‘houses’ discussed, with special focus on distinct activities analysed via GIS and a new microarchaeological approach. Soil micromorphology has only recently begun to be applied to the study of Starčevo settlements. A 2022-2023 pilot study at Svinjarička Čuka offers initial insights into functional



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differences and the potentially diverse perception of space by these communities. Microscope observations of in situ sediments are helping to identify open and closed spaces and gain clues about their use and function. We will present evidence for the way in which surfaces, buildings and installations were constructed and used, including utilisation of plant and animal resources and possible human-animal interactions within the settlement. The results from multiple lines of macro- and micro-scale evidence at Svinjarička Čuka will be contextualised within the broader Starčevo Balkans, aiming at a preliminary definition of potential socio-cultural patterns as the distinct and new expression of the early agricultural communities in the region.

Organization and use of outdoor spaces in Early Neolithic Starčevo settlements in the Sava-Drava interfluve

Katarina Botić (*Institute of Archaeology, Zagreb, Croatia*)

Defining outdoor spaces in the regional Early Neolithic is not an easy task because the traditional definition of living and working spaces in dug out or pit dwellings is still in use. The paper outlines general ongoing debate in this regard, specifically addressing the micro regional geographic and environmental conditions during the initial phase of the Neolithisation process and the available site-to-site food consumption data to assess the nature of settlement strategy (temporary vs. permanent). The procurement and distribution of raw materials for the production of stone tools is also briefly discussed, as well as the absolute dating of several case study sites to determine the period(s) of change in daily life and settlement organization including the definition of outdoor spaces and their use, with particular regard to pottery kilns, their daily and secondary use as burial spaces.

Faraway, So Close: exploring raw material extraction sites around Neolithic settlements in western Hungary

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South-east Transdanubia in western Hungary is a distinct area within a broader contact zone of south-east and central European pattern Neolithic communities. A series of later 6th millennium cal BC Neolithic settlements have been discovered in the region during the past two decades. Excavations and geomagnetic surveys targeted almost exclusively the domestic spaces of the settlements. However, the location of raw material sources for pottery production and the methods of raw material manipulation are also of fundamental importance. The analysed samples originate directly from ceramic assemblages from the sites, as well as from sediment drillings within and beyond the sites. Both ceramic and sediment samples were analysed petrographically in thin sections.

Ceramic samples related to settlements of the Southern Baranya Hills micro-region in the southernmost part of Transdanubia and the gravel inclusions present in the nearby riverbeds show a high degree of correlation with the composition of ceramics. The Tolna Sárköz/Sárvíz Valley micro-region is located some further 50



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kilometres to the north along the Danube. In this region significant differences could be recorded in the types of inclusions, their amounts and size ranges between the ceramic samples and the analysed sediments. Therefore, the use of the available clay sources for potting in the close vicinity of the sites cannot be justified yet. Raw materials of chipped stone artefacts provide another excellent example. Traits of primary processing are scarce, most of the raw materials entered the settlements in an already prepared state.

This presentation investigates the possible geographical, environmental and social reasons for diverse raw material exploitation patterns. The research was carried out within the framework of the *Transforming traditions of material culture. Spatial and temporal patterns in pottery style, production and use during the second half of the 6th millennium cal BC in SE Transdanubia and beyond* project (founded by the NRDIO, grant code: K-19/132663).

The role of space and socio-political structures in the Early to Late Neolithic settlement systems in the Žitava valley, southwest Slovakia

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In the course of the 6th to 5th millennium BCE, the Žitava valley in southwest Slovakia saw different processes of the establishment, partial dispersal and reorganization of settlement structures that accompanied what is archaeologically labelled as the stages of the Early to Late Neolithic. In the course of continuous fieldwork focusing on the LBK site of Vráble-Velke Lehemy, as well as LBK and Lengyel sites in the Žitava valley, it was possible to document the changing characteristics of the settlement landscape and the use of space. On site-level, the ditch system of the LBK site Vráble demonstrates the importance of open space in the articulation of the communities' socio-political organization. Specific expressions of communal practices can be found in the form of special storage pits presumably connected to sharing economies, as well as a temporal horizon associated with violence and ritual behavior connected to the ditch system of Vráble. In Lengyel contexts, the communal use of space outside of the settlements itself seems to have played a more important role. This is reflected most importantly in the construction of circular enclosures; the Middle and Late Neolithic rondels. These structures seem to have taken over the formerly settlement-bound use of outdoor spaces as a means of social cohesion and the negotiating of social and political structures. The results of our work show how the use of space, both within and outside of settlement sites, changed considerably over the course of the 5th mill. BCE and played an important role in the expression of socio-political strategies and structures. Further, the indication of the presumably conflicted end of the LBK village of Vráble illustrates the meaning of how social space is created and used.



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