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**AEGAEUM 39**

**Annales liégeoises et PASpiennes d'archéologie égéenne**

# **METAPHYSIS**

## **RITUAL, MYTH AND SYMBOLISM IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE**

**Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference, Vienna,  
Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology,  
Aegean and Anatolia Department, Austrian Academy of Sciences  
and Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Vienna,  
22-25 April 2014**

Edited by Eva ALRAM-STERN, Fritz BLAKOLMER, Sigrid DEGER-JALKOTZY,  
Robert LAFFINEUR and Jörg WEILHARTNER

PEETERS  
LEUVEN - LIEGE  
2016

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## MEN WITH CAPS: CHALCOLITHIC FIGURINES FROM AEGINA-KOLONNA AND THEIR RITUAL USE\*

In recent years, the Final Neolithic<sup>1</sup> or Chalcolithic<sup>2</sup> period of Greece has increasingly become a subject of archaeological research. According to radiocarbon data this period covers about a thousand years, i.e. approximately 4300 to 3100 BC, and is divided into earlier and later phases. As the first finds were identified in Attica and Kephala on Kea, the earlier period in Southern Greece was named the Attica-Kephala Culture.<sup>3</sup> It is at least partly synchronous with the Rachmani Culture in Thessaly and with Karanovo VI in Bulgaria.

Southern Greek social networks of this period may be identified by the occurrence of characteristic pottery wares. For the Attica-Kephala culture, both settlement patterns as well as the introduction of coarse vessels point to major social and economic changes.<sup>4</sup> One of the main technological innovations is the introduction of metallurgy.<sup>5</sup>

Interregional connections are not only present in economic terms, but also in the spiritual world. This is clearly seen in the distribution of so-called ring idols or ring pendants which are known from the Balkans to the island of Crete.<sup>6</sup> In reference to figurines, this connection between the Aegean and the Balkans in terms of ideology and ritual is of special interest.

Chalcolithic figurines are found all over Greece (Pl. VII).<sup>7</sup> They are quite abundant in Northern Greek tell settlements, and arrangements of figurines in Balkan settlements point to their ritual use.<sup>8</sup> Although illuminating Central and Southern Greek settlement contexts are still lacking, the finds from the area of the Kephala cemetery<sup>9</sup> point to their ritual significance also in this area of Greece. Compared to settlements, figurines are abundant in caves which according to their liminality as well as their context were most probably places of ritual gatherings.<sup>10</sup>

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\* Correction of the English text by Marco Pietrovito.

<sup>1</sup> C. RENFREW, *The Emergence of Civilisation. The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C.* (1972) 68–80.

<sup>2</sup> A. DOUSOGLI, “Die chalkolithische sog. “Attika-Kephala Kultur” des südwestägäischen Raumes. Chronologische und räumliche Gliederung und auswärtige Beziehungen,” *Studia Praehistorica* 11–12 (1992) 275–279; J. MARAN, “Das ägäische Chalkolithikum und das erste Silber in Europa,” in C. IŞIK (ed.), *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasien und des ägäischen Bereiches. Festschrift für Baki Ögün zum 75. Geburtstag, Asia Minor Studien* 39 (2000) 179–184.

<sup>3</sup> RENFREW (*supra* n. 1) 170.

<sup>4</sup> E. ALRAM-STERN, “Times of Change. Greece and the Aegean during the 4<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC,” in *Western Anatolia before Troy. Proto-Urbanization in the 4<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC?*, 22.11.–23.11.2012 *Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna* (in print).

<sup>5</sup> K. ZACHOS, “The Neolithic Background. A Reassessment,” in P.M. DAY & R.C.P. DOONAN (eds.), *Metallurgy in the Early Bronze Age Aegean, Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology* 7 (2007) 168–206; K. ZACHOS, “Η μεταλλουργία στην Ελλάδα και στη ΝΑ Ευρώπη κατά την 5<sup>η</sup> και 4<sup>η</sup> χιλιετία π.Χ.,” in N. PAPADIMITRIOU & Z. TSIRTSONI (eds.), *Η Ελλάδα στο πολιτισμικό πλαίσιο των Βαλκανίων κατά 5<sup>η</sup> και 4<sup>η</sup> χιλιετία π.Χ.* (2010) 76–91.

<sup>6</sup> K. DEMAPOPOULOU, *Κοσμήματα της Ελληνικής προϊστορίας. Ο νεολιθικός θησαυρός* (1998) 51–58 nos. 3–35; 62–67 nos. 56–58, 62–74; S. HANSEN, *Bilder vom Menschen der Steinzeit. Untersuchungen zur anthropomorphen Plastik der Jungsteinzeit und Kupferzeit in Südosteuropa* (2007) 282–286 fig. 175.

<sup>7</sup> Ch. PRZYTYLA-WOJCZYK, *Anthropomorphe Figurinen des griechischen Chalkolithikums*, unpublished MA thesis University of Heidelberg (2010) pl. 21 fig. 192.

<sup>8</sup> See below.

<sup>9</sup> J. E. COLEMAN, *Keos I, Kephala, a Late Neolithic Settlement and Cemetery* (1977) 8.

<sup>10</sup> For a ritual use of caves see P. TOMKINS, “Domesticity by Default. Ritual, Ritualization and Cave-Use in the Neolithic Aegean,” *OJA* 28 (2009) 125–153; 139 on the abundance of ring pendants in caves.

However, a find from excavations conducted by Florens Felten under the auspices of the University of Salzburg at the well-known harbor site of Kolonna on Aegina,<sup>11</sup> already settled during the Attica-Kephala period,<sup>12</sup> may shed some light on the meaning of figurines during the Chalcolithic period in Southern Greece.

This most interesting context was found in 1994 under the floor of House 8, Room c, in a small circular stone-enclosed area (Pl. VIII).<sup>13</sup> It consists of 12 complete and 6 fragmented clay figurines ranging from 5.1 to 6.6 cm, six of them having been placed in miniature vessels. This find is supplemented by a context of three figurines coming from an Attica-Kephala stratum under the floor of House 1 (Pl. VIII).<sup>14</sup>

The layer related to the enclosure in House 8 was about 15 cm thick and characterized by pattern-burnished and crusted ware as well as characteristic lug handles of the Attica-Kephala Culture. The layer below contained no finds at all whereas the layer above belonged to the latest Chalcolithic period or the very beginning of the Early Bronze Age.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of their production, we have to say that the figurines were simply formed from lumps of clay, with details such as the head, nose and penis shaped with the fingertips. However, according to remains of white crust with red paint left on the rough surfaces of some figurines (Pl. XIc), we have to imagine that, when new, they probably had a most colorful appearance.

As to their typology, their shapes have to be seen as a deliberate decision of the producers, the end-product corresponding exactly to their purpose. Typologically these figurines may be divided into naturalistic and schematic types. All naturalistic figurines were apparently of males, with a plastically rendered penis. Their legs were stretched out transversally so that they appear to have been sitting (Pl. IXa, Xe).

The head of one of the figurines has several perforations, a feature rarely seen in Greece and in the Aegean (Pl. XIId).<sup>16</sup> However, such perforations are abundant on figurines from the Karanovo VI as well as Gumelnița cultures, designed for the attachment of jewelry.<sup>17</sup>

Four other figurines are characterized by their headdress consisting of pointed caps. In three cases these caps were formed separately so that they were removable. One of the figurines is especially well-preserved and clearly identifiable as a male (Pl. IXa).

The schematic, cross-shaped type which is widely distributed in the Balkans in phase Karanovo V/VI,<sup>18</sup> but also in Thessaly,<sup>19</sup> Attica<sup>20</sup> and Kephala on Kea<sup>21</sup> may be separated into two groups, the first being oblong without any indication of sex. Two of the figurines have pointed heads reminiscent of the small male figurines with removable caps. In analogy to the naturalistic type they seem to be depicted in a sitting position (Pl. Xf, XIa). However, the heads of three figurines are flattened, and these figurines appear to be in a standing position (Pl. IXc, XIb). The second, of an even more

<sup>11</sup> I am much obliged to Florens Felten and Vasso Felten who entrusted me with this material and provided me with important information on the context of the figurines.

<sup>12</sup> H.-J. WEISSHAAR, "Keramik des Südwest-Ägäischen Chalkolithikums von Ägina," in C. DOBIAT (ed.), *Festschrift für Otto-Hermann Frey zum 65. Geburtstag, Marburger Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte* 16 (1994) 675–689.

<sup>13</sup> F. FELTEN & S. HILLER, "Ausgrabungen in der vorgeschichtlichen Innenstadt von Ägina-Kolonna (Alt-Ägina)," *ÖJH* 65 (1996) Beiblatt 29–112: 64–67.

<sup>14</sup> FELTEN & HILLER (*supra* n. 13) 35.

<sup>15</sup> For this information I am much obliged to Lydia Berger, University of Salzburg.

<sup>16</sup> PRZYTYLA-WOJCZYK (*supra* n. 7) 105–107: comparable finds in Greece from Theopetra Cave, Skoteini Cave, Corycian Cave, Corinth, Kephala/Kea and Ftelia/Mykonos.

<sup>17</sup> HANSEN (*supra* n. 6) 236–237, fig. 136.

<sup>18</sup> HANSEN (*supra* n. 6) 234 fig. 134, 238–239.

<sup>19</sup> H.-J. WEISSHAAR, *Die deutschen Ausgrabungen auf der Pevkakia-Magula in Thessalien I. Das späte Neolithikum und das Chalkolithikum, Beiträge zur ur- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie des Mittelmeer-Kulturraumes* 28 (1989) 49–50, pl. 66, 6, 8, 9; pl. 82, 24, 26.

<sup>20</sup> L. KARALI, F. MAVRIDIS & L. KORMAZOPOULOU, "Σπήλαιο Λεονταρίου Ύμητου Αττικής. Ένα πετρώδες και ορεινό περιβάλλον. Προκαταρκτικά στοιχεία για την έρευνα των ετών 2003–2005," *ΑΑΑ* 39 (2006) 38–39 fig. 8.

<sup>21</sup> COLEMAN (*supra* n. 9) 8, pl. 72.

schematic short cross-shaped type is difficultly recognizable as a human being (Pl. IXe, IXf, Xb, Xc, XIc). Interestingly, one of these cross-shaped figurines from House 1 was provided with a removable cap, giving it a more realistic appearance (Pl. XIc); further caps were found in the fill of House 1 as well as in House 8. Besides these, there are also two short cross-shaped figurines with slightly raised arms and flat heads (Pl. Xb, Xc).

As to the caps, separately produced caps on figurines are extremely rare, and to my knowledge just one analogy of a female figurine is known from Šuplevec.<sup>22</sup> In any case, it looks as if the users of the figurines saw it as important to change the appearance of the figurines by putting on and taking off the caps.

Concerning the gender of the figurines, we can say that the naturalistic type clearly emphasize the male sex of the figurines by their primary sexual attribute, and this detail probably aimed at calling attention to their reproductive function. In addition, with the exception of the figurine with perforated ears, all are characterized by their pointed caps. As a matter of fact, pointed headgear is also known from other Chalcolithic male figurines,<sup>23</sup> and it is likely that these caps were gender specific as part of male dress. Therefore, at least five further schematic figurines with pointed caps in our assemblage were most probably male.

In contrast, five schematic figurines with no clear indication of gender have flattened heads. Amongst them, a figurine with a flat removable cap from Šuplevec is recognizable as a female.<sup>24</sup> Analogies of flat headgear on other Chalcolithic female figurines,<sup>25</sup> argues towards the flat cap as a part of female dress. Therefore, it should be argued that the five figurines with flat heads from Kolonna were intended to represent women.

As I have already explained, 18 of these small figurines come from a stone-encircled area. Twelve of them were found in the fill, four complete figurines being male (Pl. Xe-f, XIa) and two female (Pl. XIb), with six further fragments: three heads with caps and three torsos. Six of the 18 figurines were placed in four more or less coarse miniature bowls with a 5 cm diameter, with one exception placed in a bowl with a 9 cm diameter (Pl. IXc, IXd, Xb, Xd).

Such miniature bowls are rarer in Southern Greece,<sup>26</sup> but quite abundant in Northern Greek settlements as of the early Neolithic period.<sup>27</sup> They are also well-known from the Rachmani-strata of Pefkakia Magoula,<sup>28</sup> although we know little about their contexts. Hints of their ritual use come from the Early Neolithic cremation burial group of Souphli Magoula where they were perhaps connected with burial ritual through firing them while cremating the bodies.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, arrangements of figurines together with miniature bowls and furniture in various Chalcolithic Bulgarian settlements like Ovčarovo<sup>30</sup> or Gradešnica<sup>31</sup> clearly point to the ritual connection of miniature bowls with

<sup>22</sup> HANSEN (*supra* n. 6) 278, 281 fig. 172.

<sup>23</sup> A.J.B. WACE & M.S. THOMPSON, *Prehistoric Thessaly. Being Some Account of Recent Excavations and Explorations in North-Eastern Greece from Lake Kopais to the Borders of Macedonia* (1912) 163 fig. 110; COLEMAN (*supra* n. 9) 8; pl. 73, 160.

<sup>24</sup> HANSEN (*supra* n. 6) 278, 281 fig. 172.

<sup>25</sup> Th. SPYROPOULOS, *Monuments archéologiques et Musée d'Arcadie* (1991) from Sphakiovouni; L. ORPHANIDIS, "Neolithic Figurine Art from Ftelia," in A. SAMPSON, *The Neolithic Settlement at Ftelia, Mykonos* (2002) 1411-42 figs. 145-146; pl. 21,3 from Ftelia.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. K.D. VITELLI, *Franchthi Neolithic pottery 2: The Later Neolithic ceramic phases 3-5, with a contribution on the post-Neolithic remains by James A. Dengate, excavations at Franchthi Cave, Greece* (1999) 78 figs. 58a-e, 59a, 60a ("cups").

<sup>27</sup> Ch. MARANGO, *EIAIATA. Figurines et miniatures du Néolithique Récent et du Bronze Ancien en Grèce* (1992) 164-165.

<sup>28</sup> WEISSHAAR (*supra* n. 19) 36-37, type 114 and 115.

<sup>29</sup> K. GALLIS, "Ausgrabungen der neolithischen Siedlungen und Friedhöfe von Platia Magoula Zarkou, Souphli-Magoula und Makrychori 2 in Thessalien," in E. ALRAM-STERN, *Die Ägäische Frühzeit. 2. Serie, Forschungsbericht 1975-1993. 1. Band. Das Neolithikum in Griechenland mit Ausnahme von Kreta und Zypern* (1996) 532-533.

<sup>30</sup> H. TODOROVA, *Kupferzeitliche Siedlungen in Nordostbulgarien, Materialien zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie* 13 (1982) 67-77.

<sup>31</sup> B. NIKOLOV, "L'art plastique des idoles du village de Gradešnica," *Arheologija (Sofia)* (1970) 56-68.

figurines; such arrangements perhaps representing communal gatherings in villages.<sup>32</sup>

In contrast to these assemblages, the figurines from Kolonna were not placed outside but inside the bowls. One bowl (Pl. Xd) contained two figurines of the same schematic flat-headed cross-shaped type, probably of female gender (Pl. Xb-c). Another miniature bowl (Pl. Xa) contained two schematized, cross-shaped figurines of the type wearing removable, pointed caps (Pl. IXe-f). Therefore, they probably represent two males. Two further figurines, the naturalistic male figurine with his removable cap (Pl. IXa), as well as an oblong cross-shaped probably female figurine with flat head (Pl. IXc) were each placed in a miniature bowl (Pl. IXb, IXd). The figurines of both pairs differed slightly in size giving the impression of a younger and an older person. This arrangement in pairs of the same gender is probably not a chance occurrence, although parallels are lacking. The only possible analogy which has come to my knowledge are two pairs of figurines, one pair being definitely female, coming from Sphakouvouni in Arcadia and exhibited without indication of their context in the Museum of Tripolis.<sup>33</sup>

But why place figurines inside miniature bowls? For a deposition of figurines in a vessel there exists a parallel in a Cucuteni assemblage from Ghelăiești where the central jar of a deposit of vessels contained an arrangement of four female figurines.<sup>34</sup> A few examples of the deposition of figurines come from open house models, which are in short a different type of container, appearing from the Late Neolithic period onwards and particularly associated with the Karanovo VI, Gumelnița and Cucuteni Cultures. Amongst the more famous examples are a model from Cucuteni Culture site Ghelăiești<sup>35</sup> and the house model of Platia Magoula Zarkou in Western Thessaly dating to the late Neolithic Tsangli phase.<sup>36</sup> This southernmost example had eight figurines lying on the floor of the house. Four figurines represented two couples, and a smaller female figurine as well as three small figurines probably represented children. In that sense these figurines which were interpreted as individuals of a core family inhabiting a household<sup>37</sup> could be compared to the figurines from Kolonna which were also grouped in pairs although not as couples but as individuals of the same gender.

Would it then be possible that, in analogy to a house model, the miniature bowls from Kolonna actually represent spaces which were connected to certain figurines? This interpretation is supported by the fact that all but one of the miniature bowls were broken before being deposited with the figurines. Therefore they were out of use as containers of foodstuffs or liquids. Instead, each container opening to one of its sides constituted space for one or two figurines. If this interpretation is correct these figurines should be interpreted in analogy to the house model of Platia Magoula Zarkou, members of the village community of Kolonna consisting of a virile man, a woman and pairs of women and men. These figurines were complemented by figurines and fragments of figurines loosely added to the context.

Finally, we would like to give an explanation for the deposition of the figurines at Kolonna. As already explained above, the figurines were put into a stone enclosure and set in a layer resting on the virgin soil.<sup>38</sup> According to the excavators this layer should be connected with the levelling of the area for the construction of the houses of Stadt I, dating to the Attica-Kephala period.<sup>39</sup> It was therefore set beneath the original floor level of the Chalcolithic village of Kolonna, although unfortunately impossible to put into relation with any particular structure in this area since all settlement remains of

<sup>32</sup> MARANGO (supra n. 27) 165-166.

<sup>33</sup> SPYROPOULOS (supra n. 25).

<sup>34</sup> Ș. CUCOȘ, "Un complex ritual cucutenian descoperit la Ghelăiești (Jud. Neamț)," *Studii și cercetări de Istorie Veche* 2, 24 (1973) 207-215.

<sup>35</sup> D.W. BAILEY, "The Figurines of Old Europe," in D.W. ANTHONY (ed.), *The Lost World of Old Europe. The Danube Valley, 5000-3500 BC* (2010) 120 fig. 5-5.

<sup>36</sup> K. GALLIS, "A Late Neolithic Offering from Thessaly," *Antiquity* 59 (1985) 20-24.

<sup>37</sup> K. GALLIS, "Tracing the Relation of a Neolithic Figurine to a Specific Individual of the Neolithic Society of Thessaly (Greece)," in R.M. BOEHMER & J. MARAN (eds.), *LUX ORIENTIS. Archäologie zwischen Asien und Europa. Festschrift für Harald Hauptmann zum 65. Geburtstag* (2001) 139-143.

<sup>38</sup> FELTEN & HILLER (supra n. 13) 66-67.

<sup>39</sup> H. WALTER & F. FELTEN, *Alt-Ägina III, 1. Die vorgeschichtliche Stadt. Befestigungen. Häuser. Funde* (1981) 10-11.

this period have disappeared. However, the delimitation of stones points to the fact that the assemblage was deposited for a special occasion. Similar delimited deposits are known from the Carpathian basin and were interpreted as offerings which were partly connected with the foundation of houses or settlements.<sup>40</sup>

In analogy, a most plausible explanation for this assemblage would be its deposition as a foundation offering placed within a stone encircled space. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the figurines from the jar from the Cucuteni site of Ghelăiești as well as the house model from Platia Magoula Zarkou seem to have had the same function.<sup>41</sup> Therefore we would like to suggest that, in analogy, the assemblage of Kolonna consisting of figurines and miniature bowls was a foundation offering set on the ground to ensure the well-being of the inhabitants of the Chalcolithic village of Aegina.

Eva ALRAM-STERN

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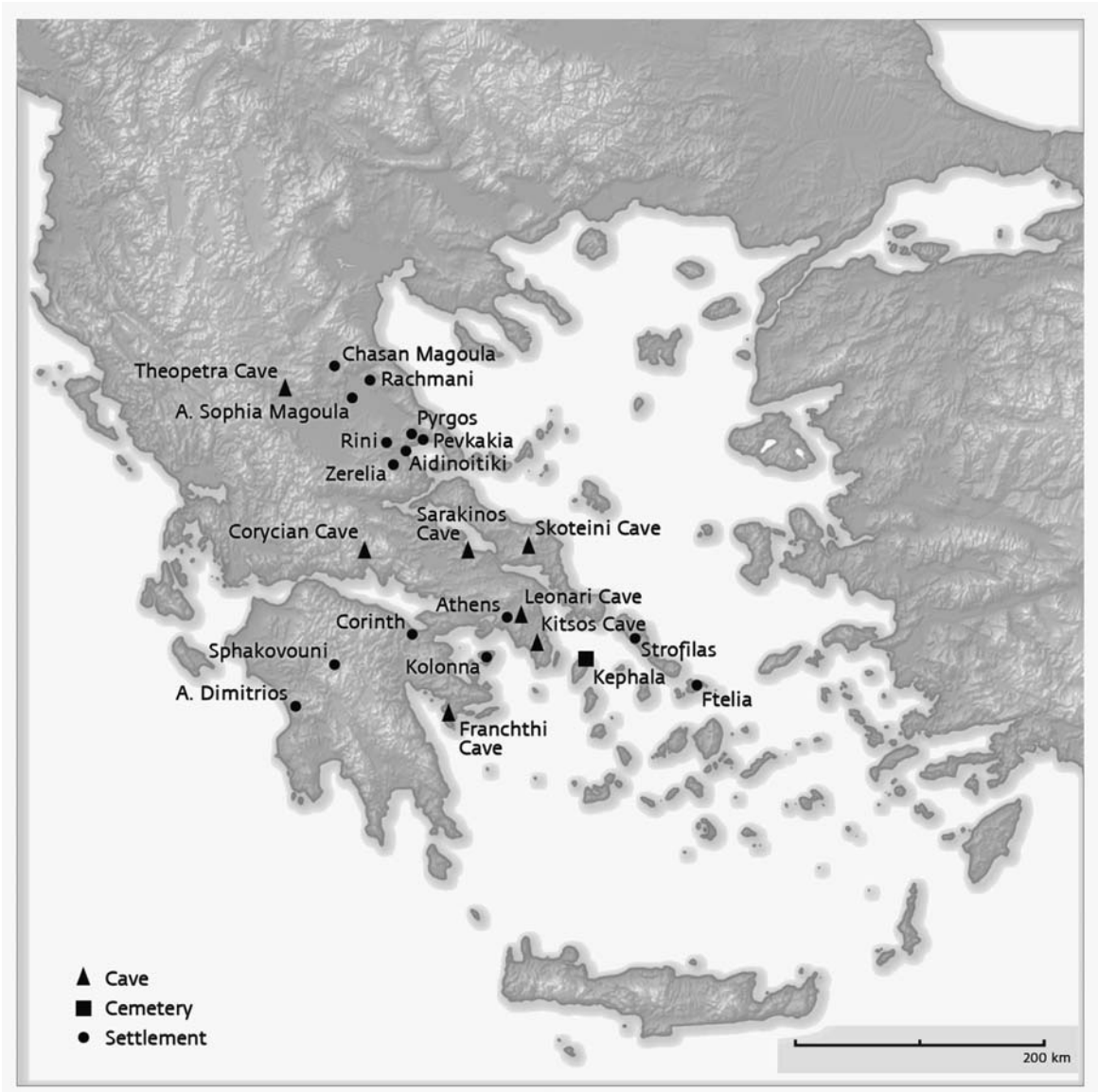
<sup>40</sup> J. MAKKAY, "Foundation Sacrifices in Neolithic Houses of the Carpathian Basin," in E. ANATI (ed.), *Acts of the Valcamonica Symposium '79, The Intellectual Expressions of Prehistoric Man: Art and Religion* (1979) 157–167.

<sup>41</sup> GALLIS (*supra* n. 36).

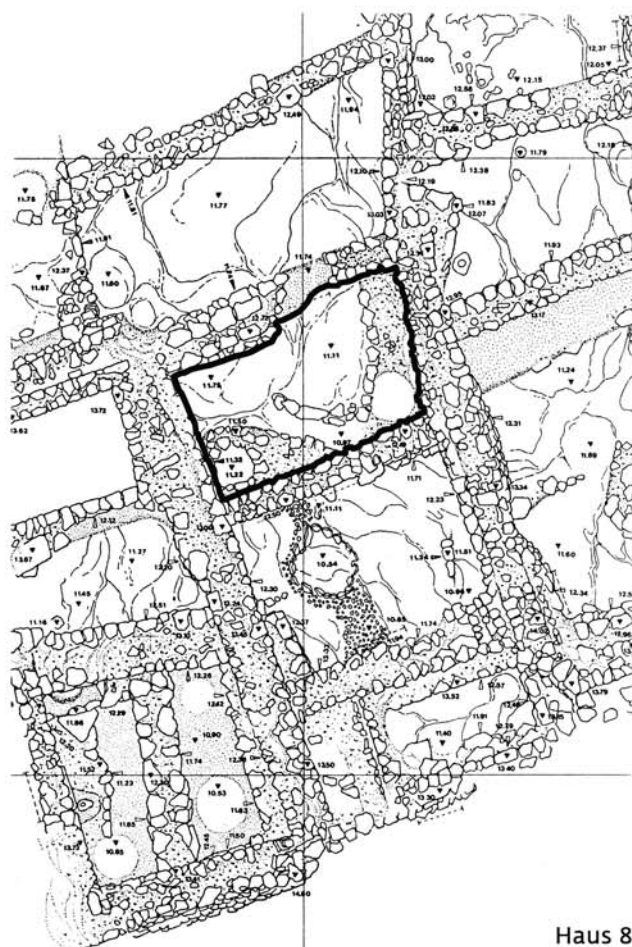
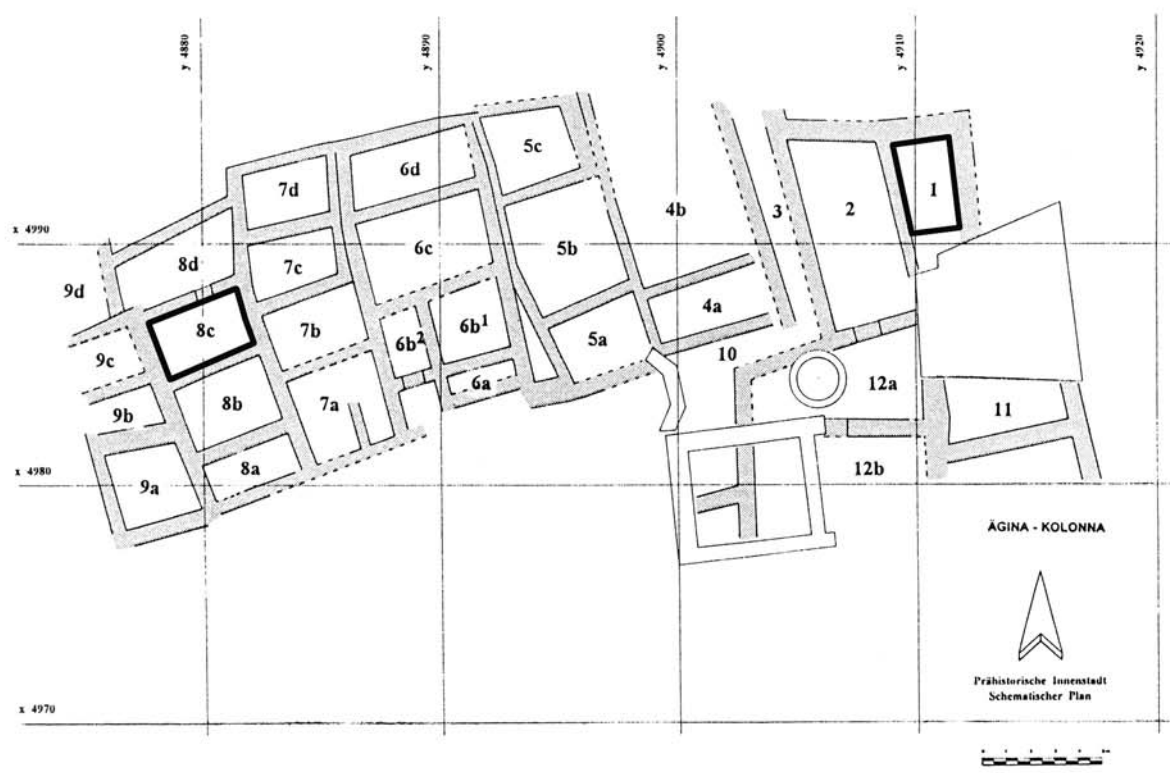
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- Pl. VII     Distribution of Chalcolithic figurines in Greece (M. BÖRNER, after CPRZYTULA-WOJCZYK, *supra* n. 7, with addition of Lions Cave, Attica).
- Pl. VIII    Location of the find-spots at Kolonna and Plan of House 8 (after FELTEN & HILLER, *supra* n. 13, 31 fig. 2 and 3; 59 fig. 20).
- Pl. IXa     Museum of Aigina Inv. No. 6511.
- Pl. IXb     Museum of Aigina Inv. No. 6030, miniature bowl which contained Inv. No. 6511.
- Pl. IXc     Museum of Aigina Inv. No. 6510.
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- Pl. XIc      Museum of Aigina Inv. No. 6524, from House 1.
- Pl. XId      Museum of Aigina Inv. No. 6515 with perforated ears.

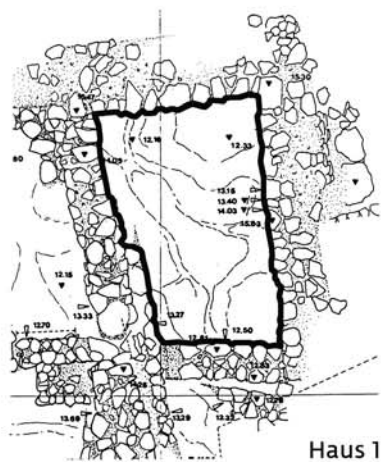
Drawings: E. Alram-Stern – M. Frauenglas; Photos: E. Alram-Stern.



VIII



Haus 8



Haus 1



a  5 cm



b  5 cm



c  5 cm



d  5 cm



e  5 cm



f  5 cm

X



a



b



c



d



e



f





a



b



c



d