

ARC 212 ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE AEGEAN

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Course 02: Aegean Neolithic



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Aegean Neolithic

Aceramic Neolithic

Ca. 6800 – 6500 B.C.

Early Neolithic

ca. 6500 – 5800 B.C.

Middle Neolithic

ca. 5800 – 5300 B.C.

Late Neolithic

ca. 5300 – 4500 B.C.

Final Neolithic

ca. 4500 – 3200 B.C.



Key Neolithic Sites around the Aegean

Aegean Neolithic

Franchi Cave

FRANCHTHI CAVE
ARGOLID

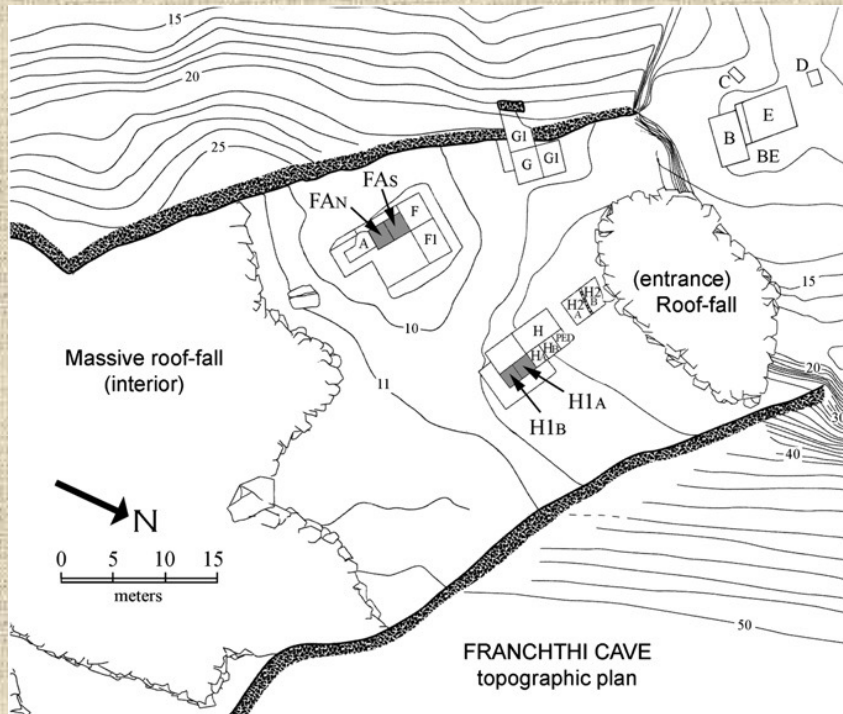
Franchi Cave

Melos



Aegean Mesolithic

Francthi Cave



Franchthi Cave
Bone Fish Hooks

In the following years, sometime around the end of the 8th and beginning of the 7th millennium BC, important developments took place especially on fishing practices. We also see domestication of many different kinds of wild species. These examples form the earliest domesticated plants of Greek mainland.

Greek Mainland during the Neolithic Period (Southern Greece)

Franchthi Cave

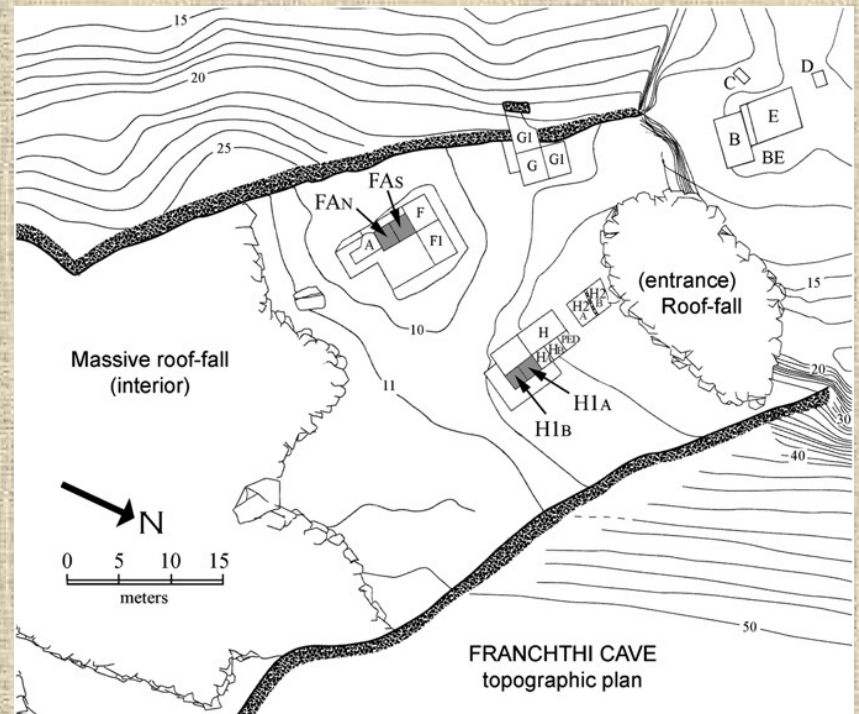
Early Neolithic (ca 6000 – 5000 BC) (Renfrews Simple Village Farming)

The beginning of the Neolithic period at Franchthi Cave is characterized by three new features:

- 1- The appearance of domesticated forms of sheep and goat;
- 2- The appearance of domesticated forms of wheat, barley, and lentil;
- 3- The appearance of polished stone tools and a significant increase in the number of grinding stones and sickle elements (flint and obsidian flakes)

On present evidence, there seems to be a brief period at the beginning of Early Neolithic when pottery was not yet made (in other words, an {Aceramic}Neolithic phase), but this is of short duration.

Thus another major feature of Early Neolithic culture which sets it apart from the preceding Era of Hunting and Gathering (i.e. Paleolithic and Mesolithic) is the appearance of pottery.



Greek Mainland during the Neolithic Period (Southern Greece)

Franchti Cave

Early Neolithic (ca 6000 – 5000 BC) (Renfrews Simple Village Farming)

During the Neolithic Period, the settlers of Franchti Cave, for the first time began to built houses in front of the cave, outside, towards the sea.

Early Neolithic pottery is mostly (70%) dark monochrome burnished ware in the form of hole-mouthed jars and deep hemispherical bowls fired at relatively low temperatures.

A variety of painted ware with patterns in red or red-brown paint appears after the beginning of the Early Neolithic but never exceeds 5% of the total pottery.

Chipped stone: the percentage of obsidian has risen from 10% in the Upper Mesolithic to 40% in EN and blades become more popular.

In the category of worked bone, fish-hooks appear for the first time.

Eight EN burials, two are of children and six of infants younger than one year. An adult (17-year-old) female burial dates to the transition from Early to Middle Neolithic. All except one are simple inhumations in shallow pits without any grave goods. The exception is an infant only a few weeks old who was buried with a small footed vessel made of marble and about half of a clay vase.



Franchti Cave: Early Neolithic deep hemispherical bowls with burnished surface.
Middle Neolithic: patterned, plain, burnished
Final Neolithic: course, undecorated or plastic decorated

Greek Mainland during the Neolithic Period (Southern Greece)

Francthi Cave

Middle Neolithic (c. 5000 – 4500 BC) (Renfrew's Diversification of Village Farming Pattern)

This period is distinguished from the preceding EN and the subsequent Late Neolithic on the basis of minor changes in the pottery.

There is a smooth transition from EN to MN pottery. Basically, early MN pottery is made of a finer fabric, is harder, and is more uniform and lighter in both surface and fracture color than that of the preceding EN period.

Another characteristic of early MN pottery is the application to it of a reddish slip or wash, either as a solid coating or in the form of simple linear patterns. This early MN slipped ware gradually develops into the pottery characteristic of mature MN, so-called {Middle Neolithic Urfirnis}

The percentage of obsidian has risen again, now to 75% of the total.



**Urfirnis pottery characteristic of Southern
Greece Middle Neolithic Period**

Greek Mainland during the Neolithic Period (Southern Greece)

Franthi Cave

Middle Neolithic (c. 5000 – 4500 BC) (Renfrew's Diversification of Village Farming Pattern)

Two adult burials belong to women whose ages at death are estimated to have been 33 and 39. The older woman was buried with a whole pot, some bone tools, and some obsidian blades. Her bones were packed so tightly into the pit in which they were found that the excavators assume the burial to have been a secondary one, a mode of burial which does in fact appear to begin in southern Greece during the MN period to judge from finds at other sites.

Just before the end of the MN period appears the first einkorn wheat.

Late Neolithic (c. 4500 – 4000 BC) (Renfrew's Diversification of Village Farming Pattern)

This period, like MN, is distinguished primarily on the basis of changes in pottery. (more matt than lustrous Urfirnis wares....)

The percentage of obsidian is now up to 85%. Wild grape pips appear during LN and continue into Final Neolithic.



Neolithic Pottery from Franthi Cave



Franthi Cave: Early Neolithic deep hemispherical bowls with burnished surface.
Middle Neolithic: patterned, plain, burnished
Final Neolithic: coarse, undecorated or plastic decorated

Greek Mainland during the Neolithic Period (Southern Greece)

Franchthi Cave

Final Neolithic Period (c. 4000 – 3000 BC)

This period has only been recognized as a major sub-phase of the Neolithic, distinct on ceramic grounds from the preceding LN.

On the southern Greek Mainland, and particularly at Franchthi, the pottery of this period is characterized by a predominance of coarse, unpainted wares exhibiting a variety of odd handle types and a preference for plastic, as opposed to painted, decoration. Small amounts of a number of odd wares (e.g. red-on-white painted; crusted; dark slipped-and-burnished; pattern-burnished) also occur during the period.



Franchthi Cave
Neolithic pottery

Greek Mainland during the Neolithic Period (Southern Greece)

Franchthi Cave

Final Neolithic Period (c. 4000 – 3000 BC)

Obsidian now accounts for 95% of the chipped stone at Franchthi. For the first time at Franchthi, the buried population in the FN period consists both of adults (4) and children (2), the adults including both women (3) and men (1).

With Final Neolithic, the prehistoric occupational sequence at Franchthi Cave ends. A few odd bits of Bronze Age material suggest that the cave was visited sporadically over the ensuing two millennia, and finds of specialized votive material at the back of the cave show that it served some sort of cult purpose in Classical times, but it never served again as a principal residence for any significant number of people. The reason for its abandonment ca. 3000 b.c. was the steady rise in sea level.



Franchthi Cave
Neolithic Jewellery

Aegean Neolithic



The earliest farming settlements of western Aegean are found at Knossos in Crete and in Thessaly region in Greek Mainland. These finds date to 7th millennium BC. These earliest farming settlements are situated on virgin soil where there was no occupation before. These first farmers were definitely experienced and came to settle these areas with the knowledge of farming. Lichic industries also show a variation in this period.

Aegean Neolithic

Greek Mainland - Thessaly

**Sesklo Settlement
Middle Neolithic**



Neolithic settlements of Greek mainland were generally located in open plains and usually adjacent to rivers, lakes or sea coasts. As in the case of Franchthi Cave, Caves were also used for habitation.

Wood and wattle-and-daub architecture has been the most common type. Structures with low stone foundations with mudbrick are also common. The walls and the roof of these houses were plastered. Floors were also similarly plastered multiple times.

As in Sesklo and Dimini in Thessaly, the settlements began to be surrounded by defensive walls during the later phases of the Neolithic.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (South)



Middle Neolithic Urfirnis Pottery
Lerna



Terracota Neolithic Figurine
Lerna



Economy and Crafts

Evidence from the settlements indicate the use of cereals and legumes already from the earliest times. There seem to be specialized craftsmen producing the lithic tools. These people were experts on sickle blades. Stone vases, figurines, and production of other stone tools also show a certain development. Apart from these, different craftsmen seem to become experts on production of pendants, beads, weights and spindle whorls as well as pottery. Bone and horns were used as borers and burnishing tools and Spondylus shells were extensively used in jewellery production like beads and bracelets.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (South)

Alepotrypa Cave Grave Neolithic

Burial Traditions



Relatively small number of burials have been found dating to this period. Most of these were simple pit burials within settlement areas. Very rarely multiple burials have been found. Infants were usually buried in jars. The graves are normally small and the dead were buried in hocker position. Pottery and / or other grave goods were also found in these graves. Later in time, with the idea of extramural cemeteries, the dead began to be buried outside the settlement. Cremation burials have been found in two different cemeteries in Thessaly. Franchthi and Alepotrypa Caves in southern Peloponnese were also used for burials. Using caves as burial grounds is also a common practice in Crete. And the case in Crete lasted longer.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Western Aegean
Early Neolithic
Middle Neolithic
Late Neolithic
Final Neolithic

Western Anatolia
Early Neolithic
Late Neolithic
Early / Middle Chalcolithic
Late Chalcolithic

Comparing Western Anatolian Neolithic and Chalcolithic with the western Aegean

- Aceramic Neolithic
- Early Neolithic (ca. 6000-5300 b.c.)
- Middle Neolithic (or "Sesklo culture") (ca. 5300-4400 b.c. at Sesklo itself)
- Late Neolithic (ca. 4300-3300 b.c.)
- Final Neolithic (ca. 3300-2500 b.c.)

Pre Pottery Neolithic

This period has been identified at some half-dozen sites and can be roughly dated to shortly before 6500 B.C. Argissa Magoula is the most detailed investigated site. At Argissa, there is evidence for domesticated cattle and for some domesticated plants (wheat, barley, oats). At this site, six shallow oval cuttings were found in the bedrock. Associated post-holes, hearths, and pebble floors indicate a small permanent settlement. The houses have been interpreted as "pit-huts" with sunken floors. No fired pottery occurs, but attempts at making it are preserved in the form of fragments of simple sun-dried pottery. Up to 60% of the chipped stone is obsidian.

Early Neolithic 6000-5300 BC

The three subdivisions of this period are based on changes in the pottery. These are:

Early Ceramic
Proto – Sesklo
Pre-Sesklo

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Early Neolithic 6000-5300 BC

Early Ceramic

There is now evidence for domesticated sheep and goat. Plant remains at Sesklo, Souphli, and Achilleion include wheat, barley, pea, and lentil, all of which were already present in the Aceramic Neolithic. Pottery at Argissa is red or reddish-brown burnished ware in the form of simple hemispherical bowls and hole-mouthed jars, both shapes familiar from the Early Neolithic at Franchthi Cave.

Proto-Sesklo

Pottery becomes much better made and more varied. The first pattern-painted pottery occurs in a red-on-white style.

Nea Nikomedia

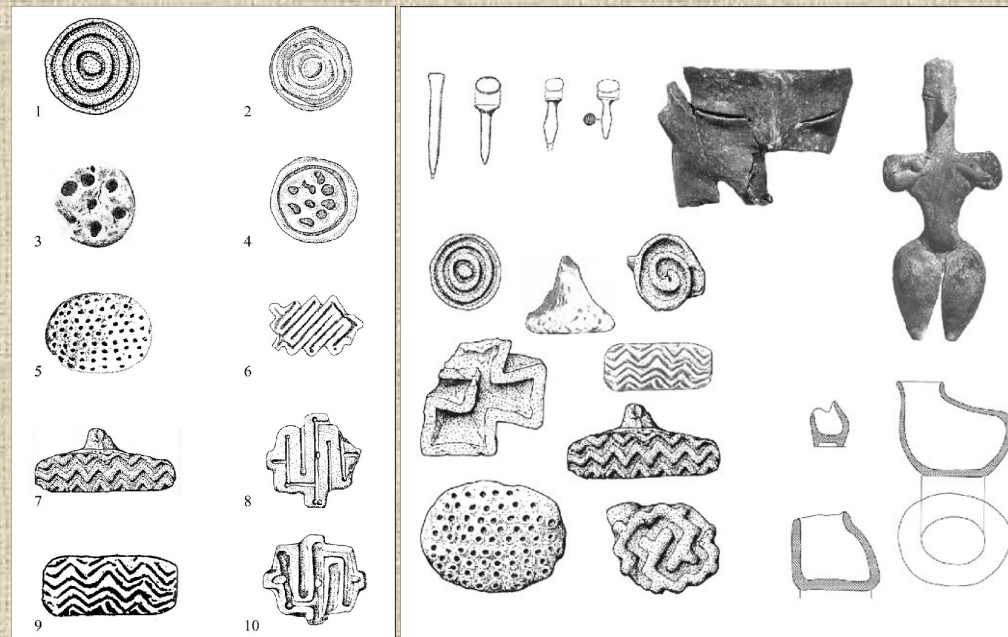
The richest Proto-Sesklo site is Nea Nikomedeia, located 60 kms. southwest of Thessaloniki. The site has four building levels broken down into two main Early Neolithic phases. Radiocarbon dates from the site suggest an occupation period of ca. 5800-5300 BC. The layout of the architecture at Nea Nikomedeia is that of an "open settlement" with free-standing structures. The buildings are rectangular in plan. The use of mudbrick is unknown at the site. In the first architectural period, four houses are grouped around a larger structure (12 x 12 m.), possibly a shrine, or perhaps a chieftain's hut. Sheep and goat are the most common animals, but domesticated pigs and cattle were also present. Hunting and fishing are also well attested by the surviving animal bones.



Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Early Neolithic 6000-5300 BC

Proto-Sesklo



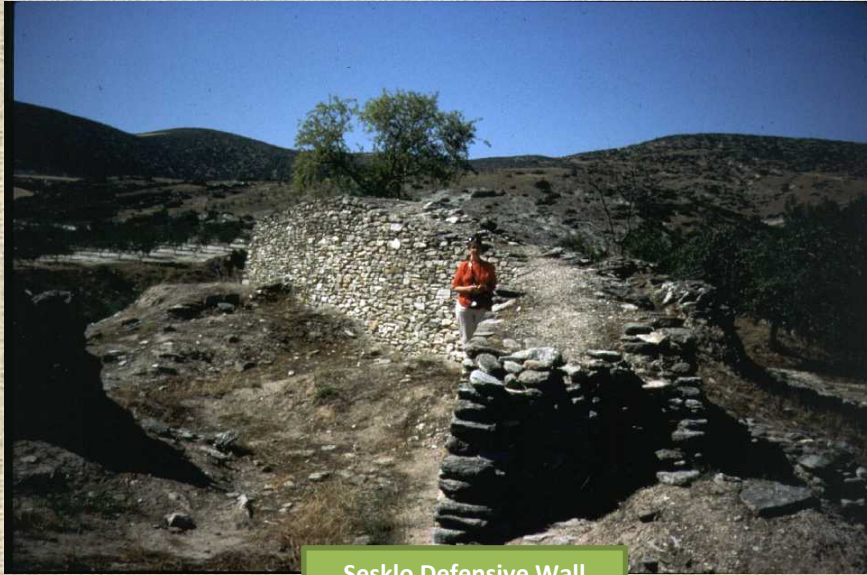
The most common type of pottery is monochrome, either plain burnished or slipped and burnished. There is also pattern-painted pottery, either red-on-cream or, less commonly, white-on-reddish-brown. Large female figurines of terracotta feature slitted eyes and fat buttocks; they may have been intended to represent pregnant females. A number of figurines, together with two polished stone axes and a cache of 400 flint blades, were found in the "shrine". Other stone objects include "stamp seals" (also called "pintaderas") designed to create geometric impressions. Clay sling bullets are more common than stone arrowheads. The dead were buried within the settlement area in a contracted position in shallow pits outside houses or within ruined buildings. Grave gifts are absent except in one case where a pebble was stuck in the mouth of a male skeleton.

Pre-Sesklo Kùltürü

This is an intrusive northern or northwestern culture found only in northern Thessaly, where it succeeds the Proto-Sesklo culture. Pre-Sesklo is characterized by the appearance in quantity of impressed wares: at first, barbotine and nail-impressed, then later a finer ware exhibiting impressions made with cardium shells. Figurines are crude and pear-shaped and lack any facial features or incised decoration. This intrusive culture is gradually absorbed and has almost entirely disappeared by the time of the emergence of the Sesklo culture in the Middle Neolithic period.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Middle Neolithic / Sesklo Culture
c.a. 5300-4400 BC (at Sesklo)



Sesklo Defensive Wall



SESKLO
PLAN OF NEOLITHIC ACROPOLIS
SOLID WALLS - MIDDLE NEOLITHIC (5800-
5300 BCE)
HATCHED WALLS - FINAL NEOLITHIC
(4500-3200 BCE)

Sesklo Settlement Plan

The culture of this period in Thessaly develops directly from the Proto-Sesklo culture of the Early Neolithic period and differs from its predecessor largely in being richer, more complex, and more uniform. The Sesklo culture extends from Servia in western Macedonia south to Volos area, an area of distribution comparable in size to that occupied by the contemporary Middle Neolithic culture of southern Greece characterized by Urfinis pottery. The hallmark of the period is the elaborately decorated red-on-white-painted Sesklo ware. Monochrome red-slipped ware is also very popular.

Sesklo consists of an acropolis surrounded by a lower town, the whole estimated to have covered some 25-30 acres and to have housed some 3000-4000 inhabitants. The acropolis of Sesklo appears to have been enclosed within a wall approximately one meter thick, not a very impressive fortification but nevertheless a barrier of sorts, while at some other sites contemporary fortifications take the simpler form of a surrounding ditch. The acropolis of Sesklo is covered with square and rectangular buildings.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Little – Late Neolithic Sesklo Architecture



Sesklo Megaron

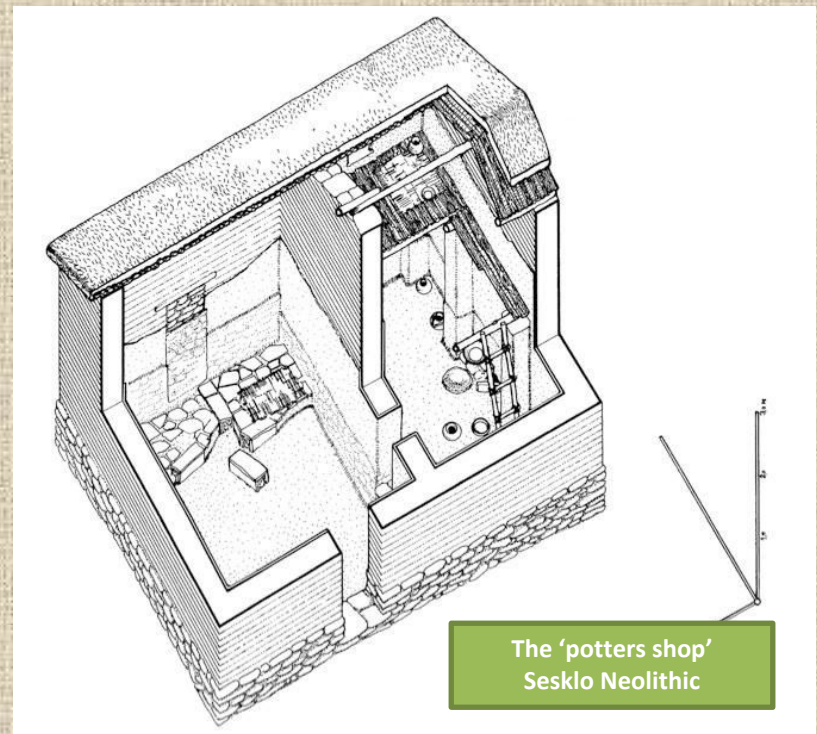
A Megaron building is located at the center of the settlement. Mud-brick structures are common in Early Neolithic at Sesklo, in contrast with the wattle-and-daub architecture typical of EN Nea Nikomedeia).

Not far off is a two-room rectangular building, identified on the basis of its contents as a potter's shop, in one room of which there are internal buttresses to help support the roof. Such internal buttresses are also attested in House P at Tsangli and appear to be a fairly common architectural feature of this period.

The economic basis of this culture appears to remain largely unchanged from that typical of the Early Neolithic. The percentage of obsidian among the chipped stone at Sesklo rises, probably indicating improved and more extensive exchange networks throughout the Aegean.



Reconstruction of the
Sesklo Neolithic
Settlement



The 'potters shop'
Sesklo Neolithic

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Middle / Late Neolithic, Sesklo Figurines

Figurines continue much as before, although there is now more evidence for male figurines.

Burial Traditions

Not one Neolithic burial has yet been found at Sesklo. In the entire Middle Neolithic period throughout Greece, the only evidence for a "cemetery" is a group of secondary cremation burials in a cave at Prosymna in the Argolid.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Middle Neolithic / Sesklo Culture



Sesklo, Pottery



Red monochrome wares constitute the biggest group in Sesklo Middle Neolithic Pottery. Impressed and incised examples along with painted pottery also occurs. Pottery began to be much better fired and the painted examples bear much more complex motives than ever before. The fabrics of pottery are better lavigated thus thinner and higher quality of pottery was being produced.

The rise in the amount of painted pottery characterizes Sesklo Culture. Painted pottery is in most cases painted as red on White slip. Very rarely White on red examples are also seen.

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North)
Thessaly**

Middle Neolithic / Sesklo Culture



Sesklo, Pottery

Motifs: Zig Zag, lozenges, abstract geometric motifs covering the entire outer surface of the pots.

Another group of pottery is gray painted on gray slipped wares.

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North)
Thessaly**

Middle Neolithic / Sesklo Culture

Sesklo, Pottery



**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North)
Thessaly**

Middle Neolithic / Sesklo Culture

Sesklo, Pottery



White on Red !

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

LARISSA Phase
(Transition from Middle Neolithic – Late Neolithic)



Larissa Phase, Pottery



Ρυθμός Λάρισσας
Larisa style

NEOTEPEH NEOΛΙΘΙΚΗ Ι (5300-4800 π.Χ.)
LATE NEOLITHIC I (5300-4800 BC)

The Larissa phase, originally assigned by Milojcic to the early stages of the Final Neolithic, has more recently been recognized by Gallis to be a phase transitional between Middle and Late Neolithic. Its most distinctive pottery is a fine black- burnished ware decorated in white with linear patterns, a class of pottery which is similar in concept to a contemporary (i.e. transitional MN-to-LN) ware in southern Greece.

To this Larissa phase dates the cemetery at Souphli, the earliest true cemetery of the Thessalian Neolithic, in which the cremated bones of the dead were crammed into black- burnished jars each of which was buried in an individual pit.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) - Thessaly

Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture (c. 4300 – 3300 BC)

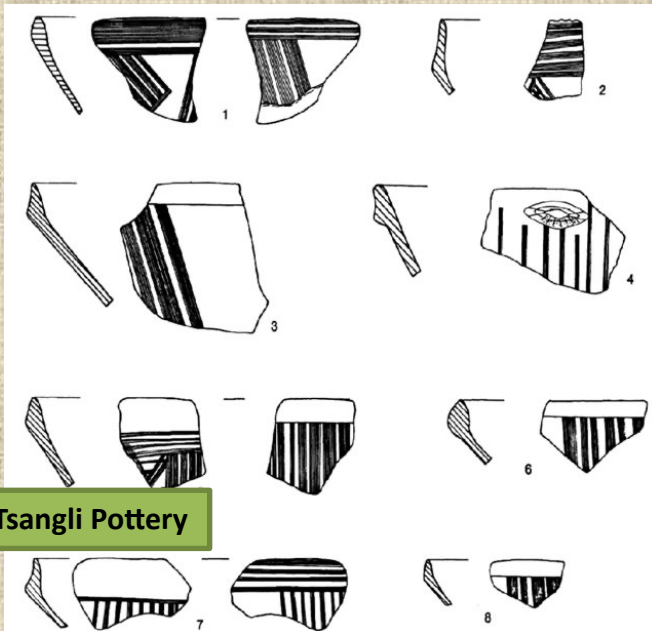
Late Neolithic cultures of Thessaly are evaluated in two chronological groups:

Early:

Tsangli – Arapi Phase: (4300 – 3800 BC)

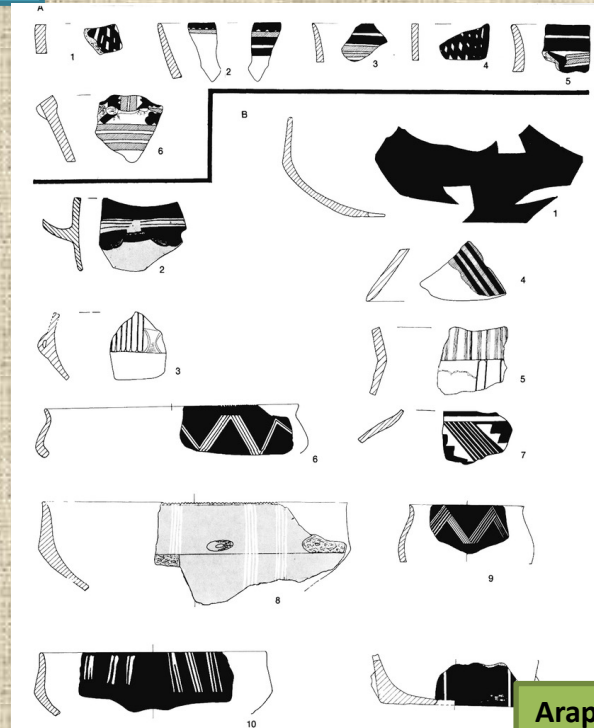
Late:

Otzaki – Dimini Phase (3800 – 3300 BC)



Tsangli Pottery

Tsangli – Arapi Phase (4300 – 3800 BC)



Arapi Pottery



Pottery is either dark-surfaced, plain or incised, or light-surfaced with dark-on-light pattern-painted decoration executed in a matt paint.

There are no figurines. Relatively little architecture from these phases is known, although the large megaron from Velestino may belong here. Measuring some thirty meters long, this is the largest Neolithic building thus far known in Greece.

A cemetery of cremation burials of the Tsangli Phase at Plateia Magoula Zarkou is located over 300 meters from the contemporary settlement.

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**



Otzaki Pottery

Otzaki – Dimini Phase (3800 – 3300 BC)

Otzaki Pottery



Ροθμός Οτζάκι
Otzaki style

The famous pottery from Dimini showing a marked preference for spiraliform and meandroid patterns belongs to the later of these two phases but is typical of east Thessaly only.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) - Thessaly

Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)



Dimini Pottery



Dimini Pottery (3800 – 3300 BC)

Dimini Pottery

Along with this richly decorated pottery, an incised decoration tradition also exists at Dimini Culture. This style reflects almost exactly the same motifs curvilinear and geometric just as the painted ones. In this case the motifs were cut from the surface of the pot. The decoration covers the entire outer part of the ceramics. White fills in incised decorations are very common. Although it has a very distinct characteristic, Dimini culture remains as a regional cultural phenomenon around Thessaly region of Greek Mainland.

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**

Dimini Pottery (3800 – 3300 BC)



Dimini Pottery



Dimini Pottery

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**



Dimini Pottery



Dimini Pottery

Dimini Figurines (3800 – 3300 BC)

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**

Dimini Pottery (MÖ 3800 – 3300)



Dimini Pottery



Dimini Pottery

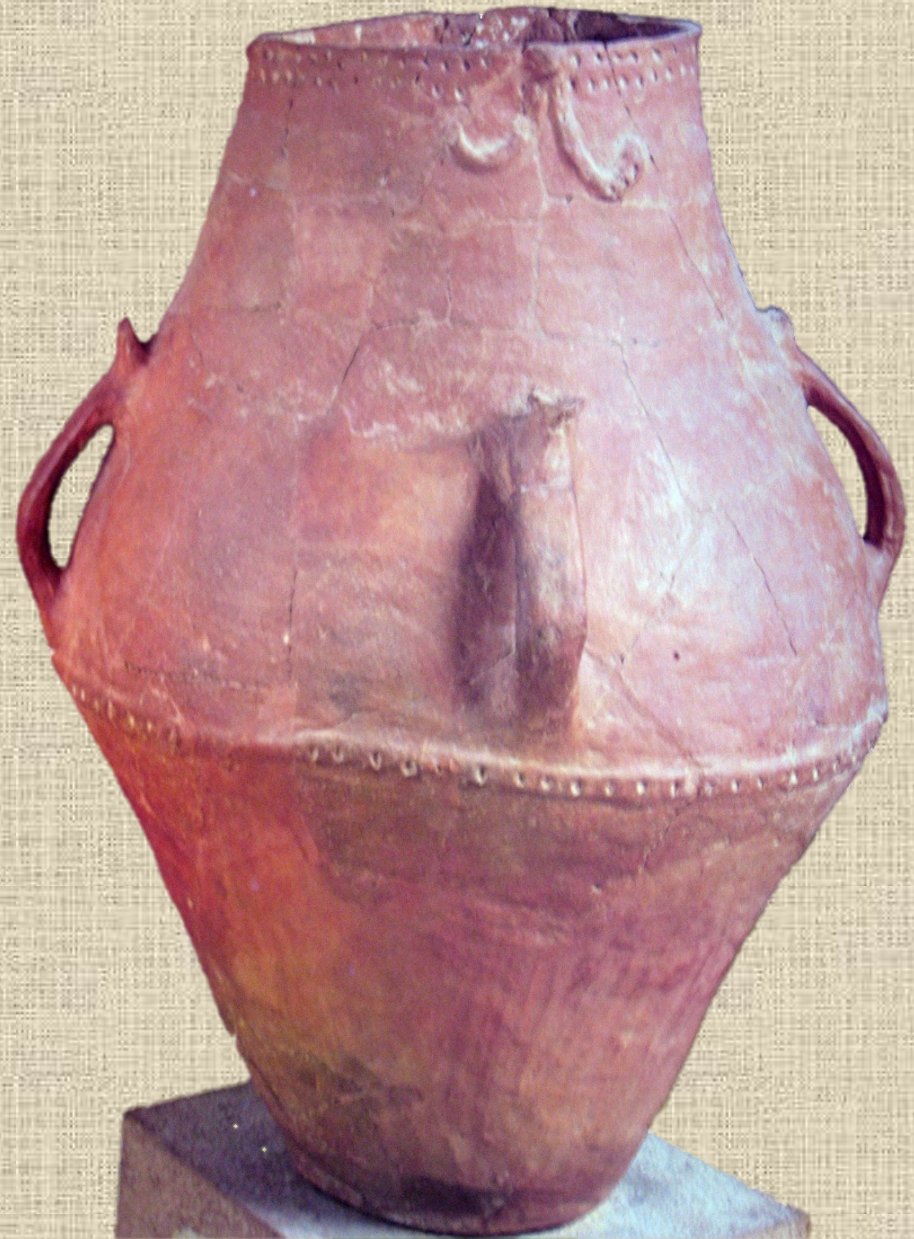
**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**

Dimini Pottery (3800 – 3300 BC)



Dimini Pottery



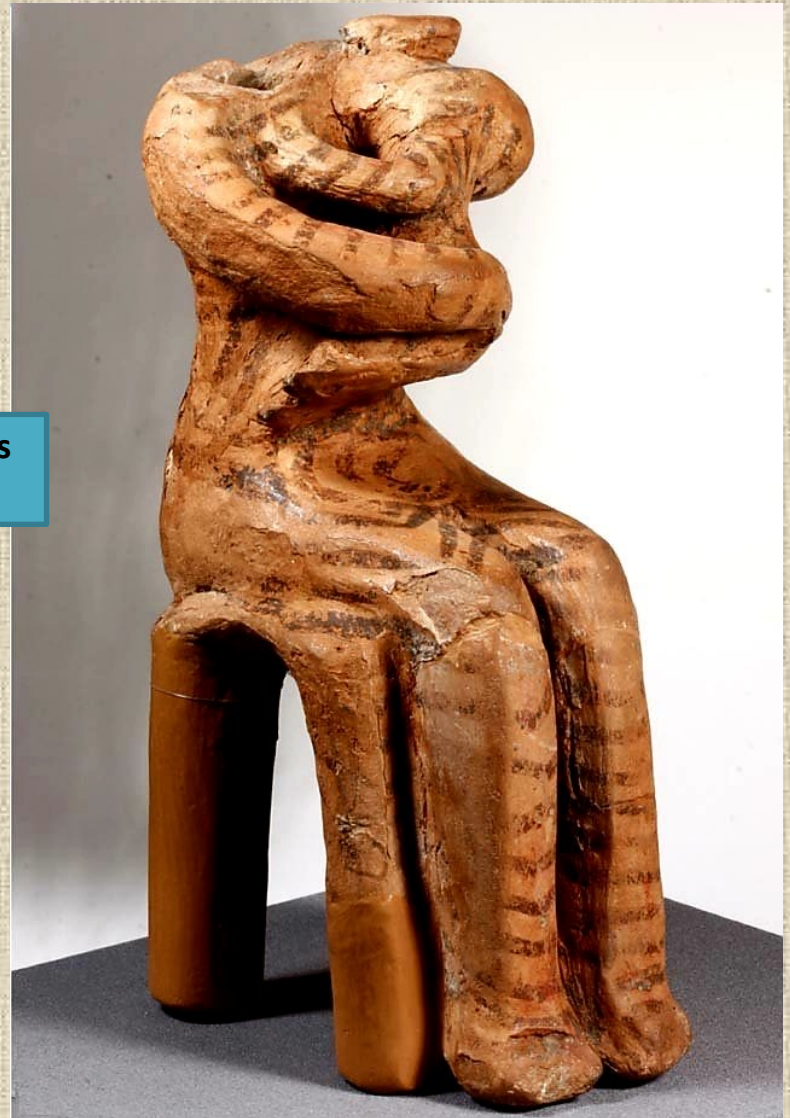
Dimini Pottery

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) Thessaly

Late Neolithic, Dimini Culture



Dimini Culture Figurines
from Sesklo



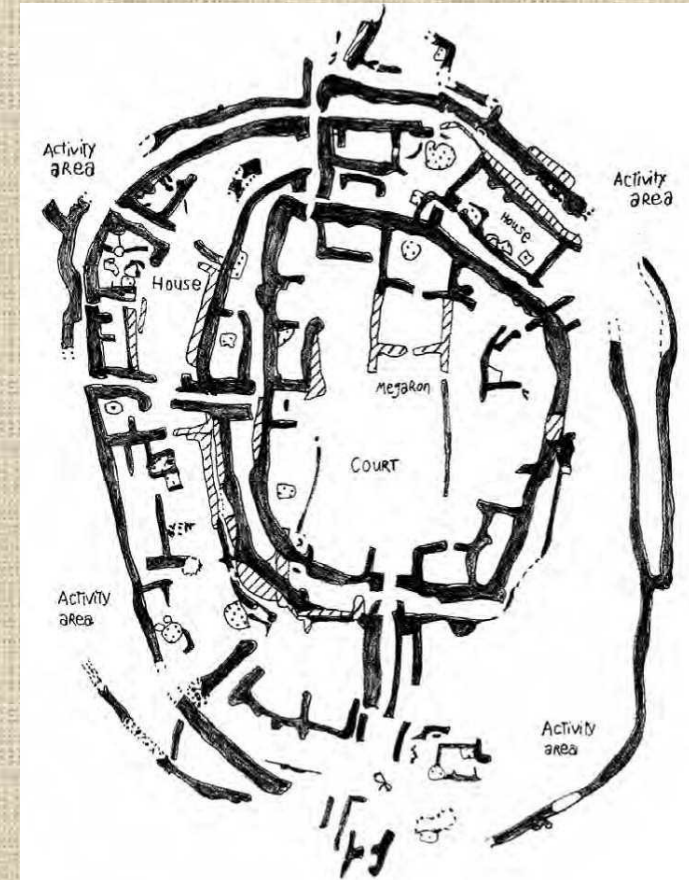
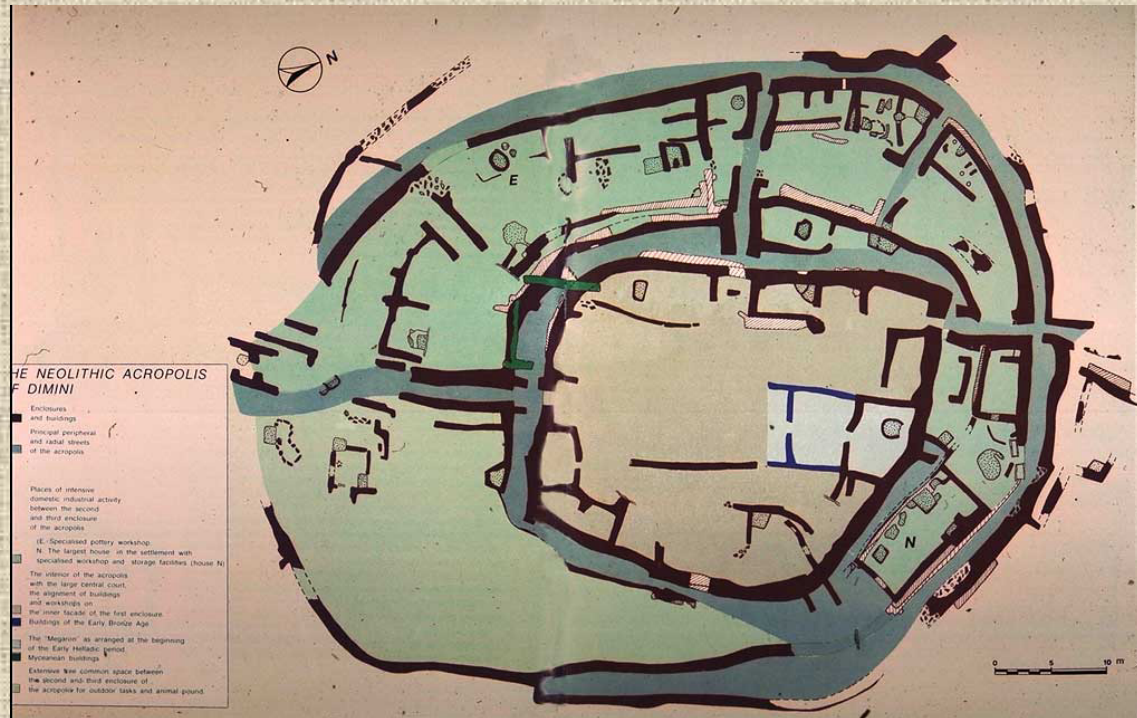
Figurines

Naturalistic figurines are rare although they certainly exist. More characteristic are schematic figurines in marble which loosely resemble later Cycladic types of the Early Bronze Age.

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) - Thessaly

Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)

Dimini Architecture (3800 – 3300 BC)



The architecture at Dimini and Sesklo is distinctive: small "forts" with multiple enclosure walls and a central megaron opening onto a courtyard. Parallels are fairly common in the Early Bronze Age of western Anatolia (Troy I-II, Karatas Semayük, Demirci Hüyük, Bakla Tepe, etc.). It is at present unknown whether towns existed outside of these fortified Thessalian complexes.

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**



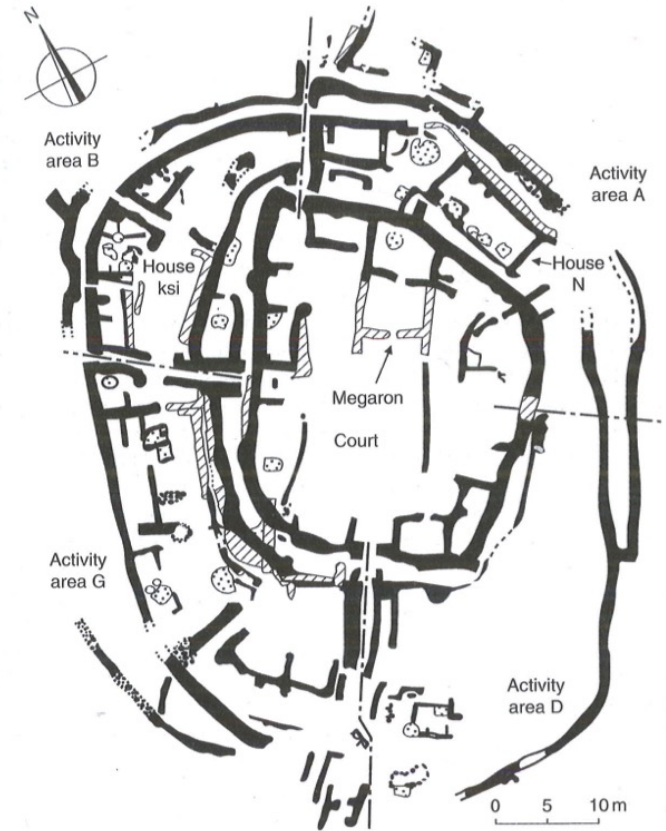
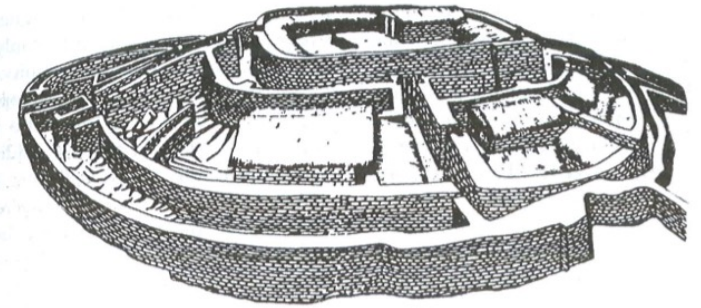
Dimini Architecture (3800 – 3300 BC)

**Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland
(North) - Thessaly**

**Late Neolithic / Dimini Culture
(c. 4300 – 3300 BC)**



Dimini Architecture



Dimini Architecture

Neolithic Period in Greek Mainland (North) - Thessaly

Final Neolithic / Rachmani Culture
(MÖ 3300 – 2500 BC)



Heads of Achrolith Figurines

Rachmani Pottery



Thessalian Final Neolithic is known as the Rachmani phase, a long period which overlaps with southern Greek Final Neolithic but which extends well beyond it so that its end is contemporary with the phase of the southern Greek Early Bronze Age known as Early Helladic II.

The pottery of the Rachmani phase is extremely varied. Distinctive is {Crusted ware}, in which vases are coated after firing with colored "paste" which can be scraped off relatively easily. This Crusted ware has technological parallels in the Final Neolithic of Franchthi Cave.

Figurines of this phase are frequently {acrolithic}; that is, the heads are made of stone, while the bodies are of clay or wood. Copper objects appear for the first time, so the culture is properly described as {Chalcolithic}.

Architecture is poorly known except for the apsidal House Q at Rachmani itself. At the coastal site of Pefkakia in the Gulf of Pagasai, imported Early Helladic II pottery (so-called EH "Urfirnis", including fragments of the distinctive sauceboat shape) is found in late Rachmani contexts, an indication of the extensive intercultural contacts of the middle phase of the Early Bronze Age which distinguish that era from the more self-contained Neolithic period.