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Domestic space in the Geometric Cyclades

– a study of spatial arrangements, function and household activities in Zagora on Andros and Kastro on Siphnos

Anastasia Christophilopoulou

Household archaeology and the definition of households

Household archaeology takes the household and its material correlate, the dwelling, as primary analytical units, and focuses mainly on socioeconomic relations within and among households.[1] Households are interpreted both as primary social units, but also as primary producing and consuming units.[2] Bruce G. Trigger identifies the household along with the community and the region as the basic levels of archaeological settlement pattern analysis.[3] We cannot embark on an investigation of early Greek households without having a fairly basic idea of 'what a household means'. Households can take on different forms and sometimes add or delete members, so that arriving at a narrowly constructed definition can be difficult. As elusive as it may be, many archaeologists and anthropologists see three elements that are essential to the definition of the household:

1. A sense of place
2. Performance of domestic functions
3. Establishment of familial relationships[4]

With respect to the first criterion, a household is often a group of people who shares a common dwelling, but this is not always so. In some cases households may not be contained in the same structure or even in the same community. Conversely, not all people who share a dwelling belong to the same house. Despite these exceptions, 'household' still communicates a geographical sense of place, a sense of home, where most, if not all, members meet face-to-face on a regular basis and this seems to be the basic notion of the household. The place may not always be a single dwelling and at times individuals may be physically displaced from the rest of their household, but for the most part, households, regardless of size, must be localized to be viable.

Performance of domestic functions is another defining characteristic of households. Many households are communal units that prepare and consume food as a group. Households are largely, but not always entirely, self-sufficient economic units; this is often accomplished through a division of labour. The most basic intra-household divisions are age and gender, but in the larger, more complex households, rank or class distinctions may exist. On the other hand, flexibility is a hallmark of household labour, with most members being capable of performing a variety of domestic functions.

Finally, households are typically characterized by familial relationships. Household members may not all be related by the bonds of kinship or affinal ties, but they are generally treated that way. All members are guaranteed the "necessities" of life as long as the household can provide those necessities. Membership does not mean, however, that all people in the household necessarily have the same privileges beyond access to the "necessities", or that they are all treated equally. Even in the smallest households children are treated differently from adults, and the status of women often differs from that of men.

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[1] Wilk & Rathje 1982; Hayden & Cannon 1982.
[2] Sahlins 1972.
[3] Trigger 1968.
[4] Bender 1967; Ashmore & Wilk 1988.

Greek household archaeology: a new discipline?

The archaeology of houses in the Greek context is a relatively new discipline compared with the examination of houses, households and the family in the Roman context. Since the development of the first ideas about the structure and meaning of Greek houses, a very strict hierarchical structure has emerged, in which the 'literary text stands at the top and the humble pot at the bottom'.[5] Under this rule, material culture in the archaeology of Greek houses was only used to illustrate the world already known from the literary sources. But during the past three decades things have definitely changed. The true potential of the archaeological data has been recognised, as the influence of new archaeology and more recently of social archaeology has finally filtered through household and classical studies.

At about the same time, a number of pioneering research cases has successfully enlightened aspects of Dark Age and Geometric societies on the basis of burial evidence.[6] The new methodological disciplines along with a considerable increase of available data have given way to similar case studies in the Dark Ages and in Iron Age domestic contexts. The work of Käre Fagerström who first looked at the distribution of artefacts in Greek Iron Age architecture, or that of Franziska Lang discussing social relations in 6th century BC houses exemplify this new direction.[7] Most importantly, this development has brought with it the consciousness that not only the Classical period was bound with textual misconceptions, but also the Dark Ages and the Geometric period, where similar misconceptions occurred related to the Homeric texts. Also, we have become aware that the absence of closely related textual sources can give way to interpretation of household behaviour and functions in this early period from the architecture and the material culture evidence itself with the aid of ethnographic and cross-cultural research.

Domestic space in the Geometric period of the Greek islands: methodological questions

The aim of this paper is to draw the image of the house and household in the Late Geometric and 7th century BC Cyclades and the Eastern Aegean by examining examples of houses from the Late Geometric town of Zagora on Andros and the 8th and 7th century BC houses in Kastro in Siphnos. We are aiming toward the identification of households and household activities from the examination of physical structures in the island environment. The fact that not all the excavated rooms in the two settlements examined can be grouped into houses with certainty reflects the ambiguity about what constitutes a house in a 8th and 7th century BC town where various degrees of social independence may have existed. This article also aims to indicate that the analysis of household evidence in the Geometric context reconfirms a number of factors in the relationship between household material culture and household behaviour already noted in different archaeological contexts. One of these factors, first expressed by Michael B. Schiffer, is that "archaeological contexts are not systemic contexts" and that the material culture of households might therefore be best employed to investigate patterns of household behaviour which are likely to persist over generations.[8] Indeed, in the examples examined here, floor assemblages were indeed always a palimpsest of activities that are more likely to represent behaviours that cover several generations. Moreover, the investigation of household behaviour through material culture must also bear in mind the changing use of space through the day and the year. Pierre Bourdieu has demonstrated the potential for the daily changing of relationships between people, household objects, and space.[9] This idea has also been taken into consideration

[5] Nevett 1999, 2-3.
[6] Whitley 1987; Morris, 1987.
[7] Fagerström 1988; Lang 1996.
[8] Schiffer 1985, 18-41.
[9] Bourdieu 1977.

when examining the following examples. The potential for the use of and access to particular household spaces to change throughout the day and the year, as demonstrated by Bourdieu, serves to warn scholars not to make over-simplistic associational relationships within assemblages, or ascribe static functions to such spaces.

Two paradigms of 8th to 7th century BC households on Greek islands

Houses in Zagora are the first and richest set of examples to be examined here. The groups of houses in the promontory of Zagora on the southern half of the west coast of Andros fall into two main categories; the units in the central area and the units excavated near the wall of the settlement. We shall here examine three groups of houses of the central residential quarter and their implications in terms of use of space, communication, and alterations that occurred through time. The first house (Fig. 1) comprised four rooms: D15, D16, H17, and H20.[10] Room D15 was an open courtyard, probably with a shed. A passage gave access to the courtyard and room D16 on the one hand and to rooms H17, H18, and H20 on the other hand. H17 was another courtyard with a similar shed on the northern side. Room H20 was at first used as a feasting and dining room; later turned into a work room for women.

The second house is more important. The focal point of this group is room H19, which opens onto the courtyard H21. Only its northern half was roofed.[11] The size of room H19 is considerable (51 m^2), but the room must have been imposing not only in size but also by its furniture, the impressive Π-shaped bench and the large hearth, and also by the paved area in the south-west corner, which is so far a unique feature in Zagora.[12] In the Late Geometric I phase, those two rooms (H19, H21) were the only rooms of this house. The house seems to have been a one-room house with a porch facing south onto an open courtyard. At the same time the largest original rooms in the settlement constituted similar houses, probably also with porches, facing west. In the Late Geometric II phase, the house resumes its final and most substantial form, as both rooms H22 and H28 become parts of it and rooms H23, H29 have access to the courtyard either by an immediate door or through another room.[13] In terms of use of space room H19, with the long, Π-shaped bench and the large hearth in the centre suggests that it was the main living room. Pithos emplacements have been found on the upper surface of the bench and a bin-like structure close to west bench arm. These bins appear only in Zagora, built close to the walls and are very similar to structures used today in the courtyards of local houses and huts in Andros for watering animals. The bins in the courtyards of Zagora were presumably used in the same way, or for grain storage, if found indoors. The spindle

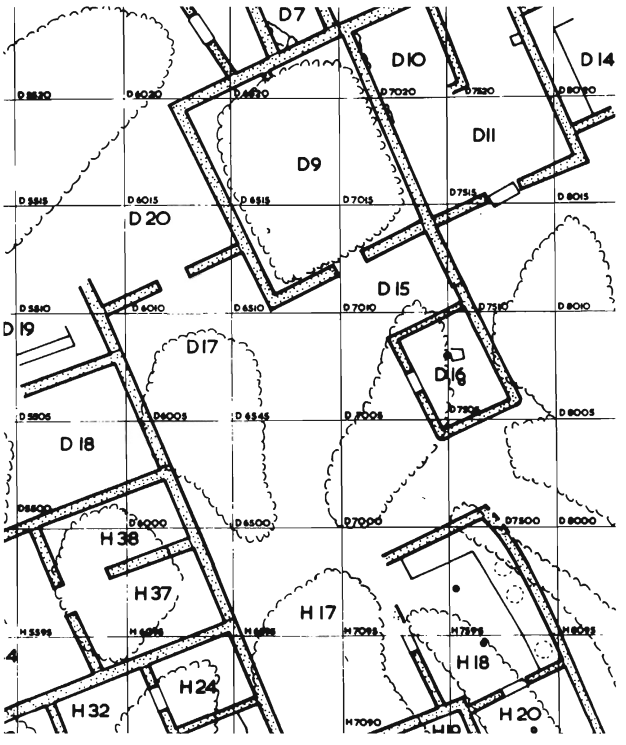

Fig. 1. Zagora: house complex of rooms D15, D16, H17, and H20 (from Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, pl. 6, plan VI).

[10] Cambitoglou *et al.* 1971, 33; 1988, pl. 6, plan VI.

[11] Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, pl. 9.

[12] Room H19 is the second biggest room in the whole settlement, after room D8, which was also a roofed room with a floor area of 53.1 m^2.

[13] Cambitoglou *et al.* 1971, 30.

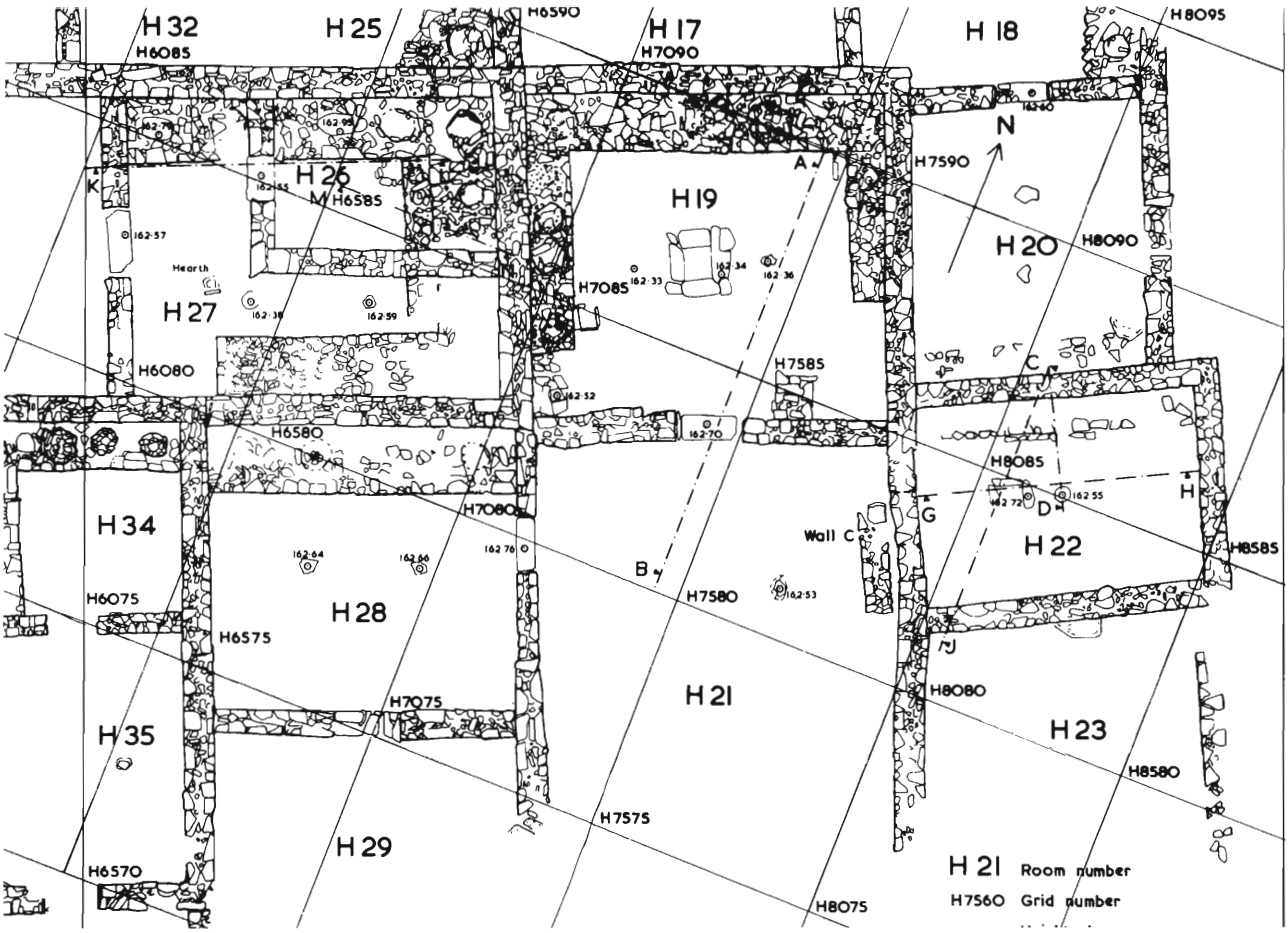

Fig. 2. Zagora: house complex around courtyard H21 (from Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, pl. 9, plan IX).

whorls that were found on the floor near the bench, arranged in groups as if they had been stored in boxes, show that the room also served as an every-day room for women to sit and work.[14] Coarse ware was clustered around the impressive large hearth. The main activity areas of the room were its northwest and west area, the west being related with the preparation and consumption of food. More important is that in this big, substantial room all activities from storage to food preparation and consumption, as well as weaving took place. It seems that whatever was the use of the rooms surrounding H19, this was an important all-purpose room, allowing any necessary activity from the whole complex. We should consider it as a very busy daytime working room as well as a room where dinner was prepared. To complete the image of this house, room H28 seems to have permitted both the activities of a storage room and of a kitchen, but without a hearth. When it was joined with the courtyard, a bench was also added to it. Again, there is evidence in the floor sequence that in the earlier phase the room functioned as a reception space while in its latest phase the abundant coarse ware, the bench, and the pounders are evidence of food preparation activities. Room H23 yielded a good quantity of fine and important pottery and may have served as a reception room as well. The character of the pottery in this room implies relative wealth and the presence of fragments of fine kraters speaks of a reception room in a style so far unparalleled on the site.

Another interesting complex is the house related to rooms H26 and H27 (Fig. 2).[15] This complex

[14] Cambitoglou *et al.* 1971, 31, 47.

[15] Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, 127, 155, pl. 11, plan XI A, B.

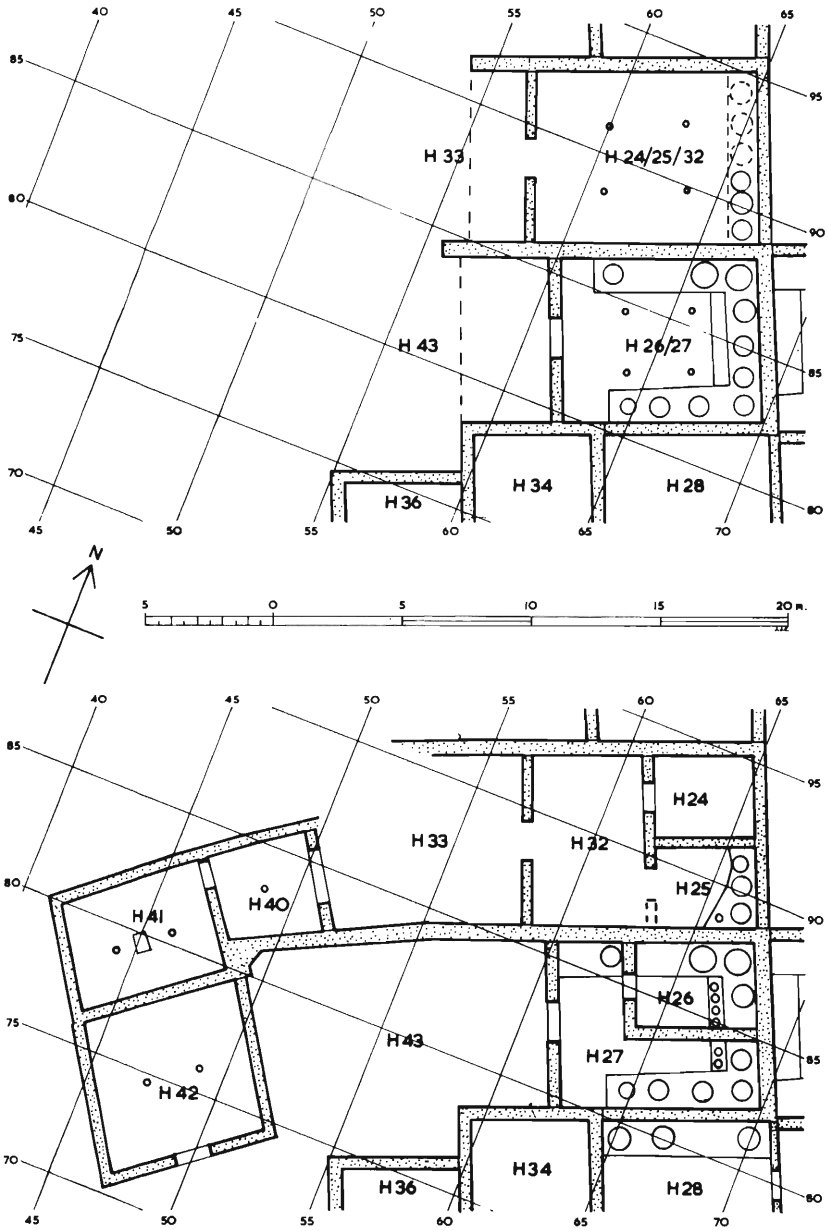

Fig. 3. Zagora: the two phases of house complex H26-H27 (from Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, pl. 11, plan XI A, B).

exemplifies the development from one-room houses and megara built between 775 and 725 BC, into functionally specific multiroom houses after 725 BC. Initially, room H24/25/32 was a simple house (Fig. 3).[16] Sherds from its floors show that cooking, storage, eating, and drinking all went on in this one room.[17] By 700 BC in the same room, the occupants divided this room into three smaller rooms, all used solely for storage.

At this time two more rooms were added (H40, H41), the first one serving as an anteroom and the second as a reception room.[18] In this final phase, when entering the new house from the courtyard and turning right the visitor would enter into the public area of the house, as evidence for feasting indicates, and then could turn left to the storerooms at the back. As seen by the previous examples, Zagora rather constitutes a not so problematic case when it comes to identifying households from physical structures. Our next example, the

[16] This phase is illustrated in Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, pl. 11, plan XI A.

[17] Morris 2000, 285, fig. 7.7 (a).

[18] Cambitoglou *et al.* 1988, 127, 155, pls. 8, 11, and 12.

Fig. 4. Siphnos, Kastro hill in a photograph from the time of the excavation in 1939 (from Brock & Young 1949, pl. 2).

settlement excavated on the summit of Kastro in Siphnos is more problematic in this respect.[19] However, this material is worth to reexamining here in the context of comparison with other Late Geometric settlements in the Aegean. The acropolis is situated on the north-western half of the summit of Kastro hill, and the Geometric houses were discovered at the bottom of the deep pocket of earth enclosed by the acropolis wall (Fig. 4).

Two or perhaps three houses of the Late Geometric period can be reconstructed here. The central house contained a bench similar to some examples from the Athenian Agora, with a curious alcove in the wall serving as a built-in cupboard and another peculiar feature, serving for the gathering of rainwater from the roof.[20] Storage pithoi, cooking pots, and a quantity of loom weights were recovered, and on the basis of these finds the construction of the house can be dated to around the middle of the 8th century BC. The rest of the houses are located in the north-east slope of the acropolis. Most of them present similar, very sim-

[19] Brock & Young 1949, 1-16. The site was excavated by Brock during 1938-39. The settlement has only received preliminary publication and no regular drawings of the excavated houses nor photographs of the time of excavation exist. This material was lost according to the excavator, who also notes that Post-war conditions prevented him from revisiting the island and studying the material in Siphnos, where it was originally stored. A veil of mystery, in addition, continues to cover the fate of an important number of the finds, as according to the Ministry of Education (responsible for Antiquities in that period), during the occupation an Italian officer took all the objects of value into his own custody in order to protect them, including the catalogue of the finds. A number of these objects reappeared later, and was sold to the Benaki Museum by a well-known dealer in Athens while the rest were lost.

[20] Brock & Young 1949, pl. 4.2.

ple internal arrangements, occupied by hearths and benches very close to each other.[21] All are one-room houses and their construction is entirely dictated by the precipitous topography of the north-east slope. Their space seems to have served a combination of activities, such as storage space and sleeping areas, indicated by the coexistence of sleeping benches and large storage vessels. Most of the houses belong to the 7th century, some early in the century, others later and their life span is approximately 30 years (Fig. 5).[22]

There is no proper network of paths between the houses to communicate and we should assume a totally informal system of communication dictated by the topography. Both cases of the Geometric houses on Andros and Siphnos provide parallels for the architectural type of the bench house as encountered in Chios, Emporio, featuring characteristic sleeping benches.

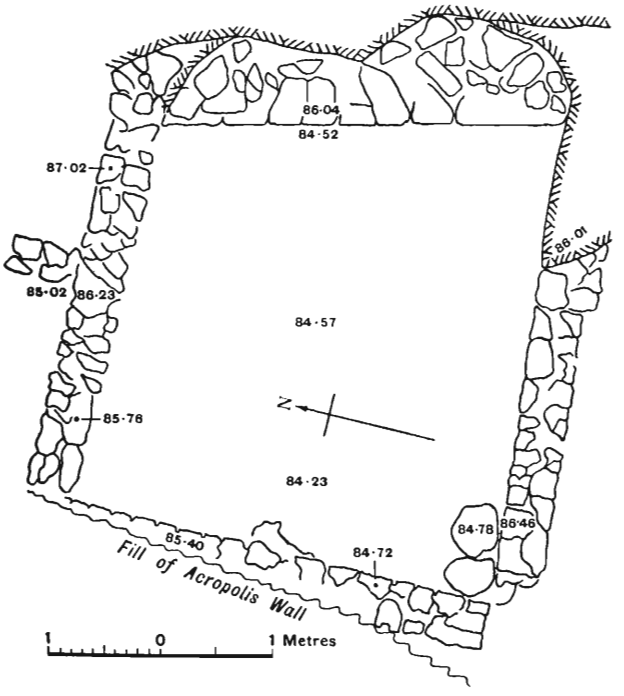

Fig. 5. Siphnos, Kastro: central house on the acropolis (from Brock & Young 1949, fig. Ib).

Conclusions

The first question to ask after having seen these examples is whether we can identify the typical household of the late 8th to 7th century BC? In Zagora, the striking image of the house developed around room H19 is a very special one, but not typical. The same applies to the case of the house comprising rooms H26-H27. These large one-room houses were not the only type current in the Late Geometric I period in Zagora, as houses consisting of a pair of rooms of almost equal size, arranged one behind the other were also present. These one-room households, where no particular separation of activities can be noted, reconfirms Bourdieu's argument that in single-space houses no static functions can be ascribed to spaces, as activities in those spaces tend to change throughout the year and in some cases even throughout the day. However, this phenomenon is no longer the case for Late Geometric II Zagora where, shortly before the abandonment of the town, there was a widespread change from houses with a single large room, and a porch in front, or two rooms arranged one behind the other, to more complex houses with several rooms grouped around a courtyard. This seems to have allowed for an increased separation of different types of activity providing separate spaces for storage and for living rooms.

Increased spatial differentiation is also immediately connected with the four basic functions of households; production, distribution, transmission, and reproduction. Each of these functions is likely to be more complex as the houses become bigger and more complex. One important factor related to production that might bring people together to live in a more substantial and complex house is task simultaneity. Wilk and Rathje argue that simultaneous performance of many different domestic activities is a basis for large, complex households.[23] Task simultaneity is likely to be important in areas where there is pronounced seasonality in the availability of resources, so that many resources become available at the same time of the year or where a key resource is abundant,

[21] Brock & Young 1949, 12-3, figs. 1a, 4b.
[22] Brock & Young 1949, 14.
[23] Wilk & Rathje 1982, 621. See also Goody 1958.

but only very briefly. Under these conditions a large house may fragment during the season of abundance into small task groups that engage in the production of different resources, harvest a key resource in different locations, or carry out different tasks necessary in this complex exploitation strategy. When the season of abundance is over, the household reassembles and pools the fruits of its labour. Secondly, a big or complex house can also be a symbol of wealth that might signal to others the relative success of its owner, a person who can regularly hold feasts and ceremonies within the house. So, even from this preliminary analysis and without having all necessary information of economic strategies in Zagora or the exact number of family members, we can speak of the existence of wealthy and big house complexes allowing simultaneous performance of many different domestic activities as well as providing enough evidence for increased feasting activities within the house.

Finally, in terms of evolution of house types, even if we cannot speak of a standardised idea of the house in Zagora, still the transitions from one-room or megaron houses to courtyard houses witnessed here is very important if they are seen in a wider context. At most of the other sites of this period this transition takes much longer and we also see old and new styles in use alongside each other. Examples of this situation are provided at the sites of Miletos, where oval huts are still built in the 7th century BC and the first definite courtyard houses appear after 650 BC, or Megara Hyblaia where only after 650 BC the area around the agora looks like the late 8th century Zagora, as the original plots of 100-120 m^2 filled with courtyard houses.[24] Finally by 600 BC the courtyard house was the norm almost everywhere, except in Attica, where the two biggest groups of excavated houses, Lathouriza and Oropos combine rectilinear and curvilinear houses in unusual ways.[25]

The appearance of substantial courtyards in Zagora also offers the first possibility of discussing gendered space in these early societies and calls for further investigation. It is tempting to recognize the courtyard houses as the kind Lisa Nevett identifies as underpinned classical concepts of space and gender, turned inward and accessible only via a narrow door onto the street.[26] The symbolic associations of the outer or public space with male activity and the inner or private areas with female activity so fundamental to the classical thought about gender appears as early as Hesiod and the courtyard multiroom houses which we first see on Zagora by 700 BC and Miletos by 600 BC make this linkage possible. By this we do not mean to suggest that men and women were restricted to particular parts of the house, but to suggest that the ideas about gendered space, which we see in Hesiod and Classical Athens began to take shape in the late 8th century BC. The courtyard house we see at Zagora by 700 BC cuts off the individual house from other units as the oikos could be accessible only through a narrow door guarded by its male kyrios which sheltered his dependent women, children, and relatives from the outside world (Hes.Op. 519-25).[27]

Another question regarding this material is how fruitful the analysis of internal arrangement is in our understanding of the functions of spaces. The study of benches in both examples is enlightening. In Zagora, the bench is the most common feature of internal arrangement, strikingly more frequent than the hearths. Taking into account the different types of material culture excavated around and on top of the benches, it is obvious that the bench was a multi-functioning architectural feature. In Siphnos, benches were also a very common feature in the houses, but there is no evidence of them being multi-functional, since they were only used as sleeping platforms. We should also relate this with the fact that the emphasis on storage space in Siphnos is almost unimportant when compared with Zagora.

The hearths invite us to discuss issues of material culture and behaviour in the houses. If we take the example of hearths in Zagora as being relatively 'clean' of organic debris this leads us to speak of regular cleaning activities in household waste

[24] Morris 2000, 283-4.
[25] Morris 2000, 283-4.
[26] Nevett 1999, 155-8.
[27] West 1978.

material from cooking activities. The hearths were surrounded by plenty of coarse ware in Zagora, but not organic material. In other words, the material from a well-studied Geometric site invites us to speak about accretion and depletion processes in its floor assemblages. For example, depletion processes in which objects are removed from their archaeological deposits within a house, or once used within the structure are deposited away from their locations of use, are obvious in Zagora. The quantity of bone and shell was higher in open air floor deposits, as for example in the south part of room H21, than in enclosed deposits. This tells us something about secondary refuse objects, numerous in Zagora, as hearths were emptied regularly of their contents and deposited in other locations.

The next question invites us to discuss how the architectural alteration and extension of the households illustrates the changing needs and social conditions of a settlement. In Zagora between the Middle Geometric, and the Late Geometric II can this type of growth and unplanned architectural development leading to a concentration of units in the central area be an indication of population growth without any defined social hierarchy? This idea is supported by the fact that the increase of the size of the settlement in the central areas of Zagora is not a continuous chain of events, but rather a more intricate development with ramifications and parallel growth. If it is difficult to answer this we can at least be sure that the alterations between Late Geometric I and Late Geometric II signify an important need in new storage spaces, eventually meaning an increase in the settlement's wealth as well as in its trading contacts with the rest of the Cyclades, Athens, and Euboia.[28]

This leads us to a last question regarding a settlement's general planning, orientation and network of communications. Regarding this question, Zagora can be paralleled with the case of an Eastern Aegean island settlement, the case of Emporio on Chios. Zagora and Emporio provide evidence of two very different situations and also cover successively the time span between the Late Geometric II period and the end of the 7th century BC. At Zagora a single orientation dominates most of the units, but this phase of planned development was of comparatively short duration and was not actually executed as a single project. The same follows for the roads and paths identified in Zagora as a stable and clearly defined road system was not developed. Pathways simply appeared wherever there was unbuilt ground, where people found it convenient to walk. A fixed network of roads had not been constructed because a fixed system of property boundaries did not exist. The small extent of Middle Geometric II settlement followed apparently by the layout of a substantial area in the Late Geometric area, suggesting that most of the site was unoccupied and unclaimed until the middle of the 8th century BC Emporio, providing evidence of a completely different situation. The town was, of course, dictated by the ground and the steep slope, as was also the case in Late Geometric Siphnos. But it is the completeness of the architectural plan that makes Emporio quite distinctive. Emporio presents evidence of a main road suitable for wheeled traffic plus at least four main paths and several stepped paths, but most importantly there was provision to relate the path network with the households.[29]

It follows therefore that the settlement's extent and architectural image existed as a preconceived scheme, which is also shown by the persistence in maintaining two distinctive architectural types, the megara and the bench houses. Architectural development and the town's expansion in Zagora stand at the other end of spectrum. The town seems to expand in any possible direction and the houses follow any permitted expansion either by incorporating adjacent units or by creating additional ones. Roads and paths were predefined in Emporio with the town's architectural plan, but not in Zagora. Again, this explains the importance of the Zagora courtyards. As no established paths existed and the households became more complex, the use of courtyards became very important by providing a means of communicating between substantial in size and complexity architectural units. It is tempting to think of the differences in planning and

[28] Whitley 2001, 84-90.

[29] Boardman 1967, 34-7.

communication networks between Zagora and Siphnos on the one hand and Emporio on the other as differences between a fluid social organisation system of the Middle to Late Geometric period and a more structured idea of a society spanning the course of the 7th century BC.

In our attempt to interpret space through the extremely diversified archaeological material of the Dark Ages and the Geometric period, the shortage of well-studied ethnographic parallels, the lack of textual evidence and the danger of applying biased meanings from text to archaeological reality, we are left to accept the fact that interpreting space is a highly conjectural task. Nevertheless, it is possible to find some sort of agreement between the archaeological material, later classical sources and ethnographic and cross-cultural research concerning space; and that is that few aspects of life were so charged with meaning as household space. This is reason enough to continue our efforts and enhance our descriptions towards the creation of a 'micro-archaeology' of household studies in this early period.

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