

MACEDONIA : NEA NIKOMEDEIA, 1963

The 1963 excavations of the British School of Archaeology at Nea Nikomedeia were limited to that part of the Early Neolithic mound which was disturbed in 1958/59 by mechanical excavators digging for roadfill. Professor Graham Clark and Mr. Robert Rodden continued the investigations begun in 1961¹, with the close cooperation of Mr. Ph. Petsas, Ephor of Antiquities for Western Macedonia, and assisted by students from Cambridge, Edinburgh and Harvard Universities.

The Early Neolithic occupation-layer was exposed in two areas. In the first, which measured ca. 32 m. by 50 m., complete plans of houses and part of the settlement pattern of the first village were uncovered (P.I. 424 a). The second area, measuring 27 m. by 8 m. was excavated in the hope of defining one edge of the Early Neolithic settlement.

In the areas excavated, there is stratigraphical evidence for two major Early Neolithic building periods: the foundation-trenches and wall-slots of buildings belonging to the primary settlement are clearly overlaid by later two-roomed structures at a different orientation. The houses of both building levels are detached rectangular structures, generally conforming to a common plan and orientation.

Attributable to the primary building phase are four detached houses surrounding a much larger central building. It is not unlikely that this central structure, which underwent rebuilding after a bad fire, served a special — perhaps a «ritual» — function. In the burnt-rubble fill above the floor of this structure, a number of unique finds were discovered: complete, or practically complete female figurines of unbaked clay, two outsized greenstone axes, unusual gourd-shaped pottery vessels, several caches of unused flint blades (each containing up to four hundred blades) and many small, irregularly-shaped clay pellets of unknown use. The building itself was a very large structure, measuring 12 m. each side; two rows of very large posts divided it into three parts. When rebuilt after the fire, this tripartite division was preserved: on each side of this large central room were two much narrower rooms,

1. See A Δ 17 (1961/62): Χρονικά, σ. 231-233, also Robert J. Rodden, «Excavations at the Early Neolithic site at Nea Nikomedeia: 1961 Season» Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society vol. XXVIII (1962) pp. 267-288.

which extended the entire length of the building.

Close by, and nearer to the centre of the mound was a large house, about 8 m. broad and at least 11 m. in length.

Outside the central area, the houses of the first building period are smaller, measuring about 8 m. by 8 m. Generally they are single-roomed structures. One, however, has a long, narrow subsidiary room along one side, and a fenced-off porch area along the opposite wall. A hearth basin, possibly for parching grain, and a storage bin were found on a raised platform at one end of the long, narrow room of this house.

The houses of the second building phase followed a slightly different orientation. They were two-room structures; the main (west) part of the house measured approximately 8 m. by 8 m. and to this was attached (on the east) a second, less substantially constructed room of about the same dimensions.

In both building periods walls were made of mud plastered onto reeds which were woven between a sturdy framework of posts. Where preserved, the floors were made of mud plastered onto matting made from the leaves of marsh reeds or grasses.

Among the more notable of the many objects found during the excavations are the complete, or practically complete female figurines from the central structure. One was a very unusual figure of rather coarse workmanship, with a thick head and outstretched arms (P.I. 424 c). Another comprised only a large, conical head with incised eyes and mouth (P.I. 424 b). Clay models of sheep and goats were also made. The most remarkable animal figurines however, are three frogs, executed in polished greenstone; no parallels for these are known, but the obvious care with which they were made, and the quality of the manufacture, emphasize their importance. Fragments of five anthropomorphic pottery vessels were discovered; these bear faces modelled just beneath the rim, and are similar to examples known from the early sites of Hacilar and Has-suna in Western Asia. The unique small stone studs and marble nails, which also have direct parallels in Western Asia, were again found in large numbers.

During the 1963 season twenty-three burials of Early Neolithic date have been discovered.

All lay in contracted positions in pits dug outside the walls of existing houses or in the fill of collapsed ones. There is no evidence for associated grave-goods, although in one instance a smooth pebble was thrust intentionally between the open jaws of the skull.

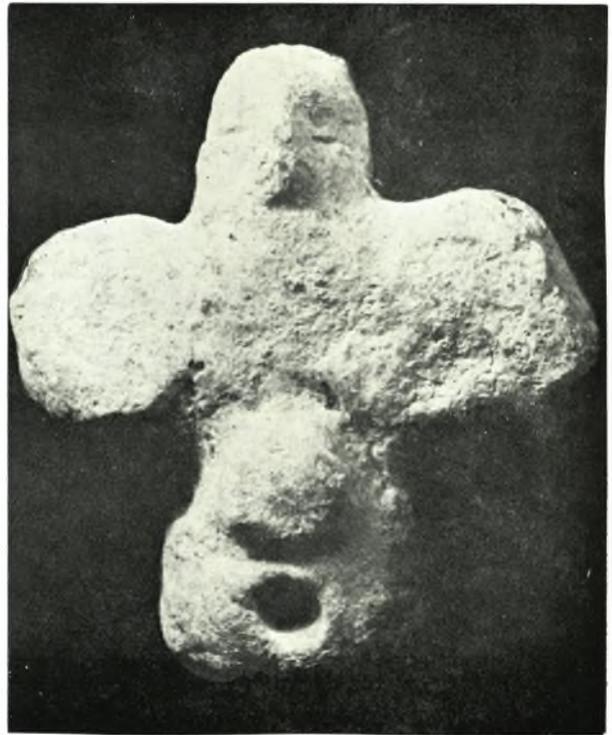
Pottery has been found in very large quantities, including well over forty complete or restorable vessels. The wares from the Early Neolithic occupation level (both building phases) are the same as those described in the 1961 report, and belong to the earliest certainly verifiable village - farming groups in northern Greece.

In view of the radio - carbon date of 6180

B.C. \pm 150 years for the first settlement on the site, particular attention has been given to the collection and preservation of the animal bones, carbonized grains and carbon from the Early Neolithic occupation layer. Over 2000 carbonized grains have been collected, representing wheat, barley, lentils, peas and possibly wild cereal - type grasses. A preliminary examination of over 15.000 identifiable animal bone fragments suggests that sheep and goat played the most important role in the husbandry of these early farmers, and that pig and cattle (wild pig and bison may also be present) were of secondary importance.

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Nea Nikomedeia, 1963: a. Aerial view of the main area, from the north (with grateful acknowledgement to the Royal Hellenic Air Force), b. Conical head with incised features, c. Figurine from collapsed central building

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