

Figurines of Neolithic Thessaly - Volume I

PREFACE

The present Corpus is the first of a series of volumes including figurines from Neolithic Thessaly.

In 1986 the Academy of Athens entrusted me with the Project of studying Greek Neolithic art. The challenge was great: for the first time the art of Neolithic Greece would be given the attention it deserved, by being studied as a whole instead of forming part of the publications of individual excavations or given a brief mention in books on the Prehistory of Greece in general, which in fact deal mainly with the Bronze Age.

A first result of the Neolithic Project at the Academy of Athens Research Centre for Antiquity was the creation of a large bibliographical and photographic archive of figurines from Greece, continuously updated with recent finds, as well as some publications for evaluation and comparison of this material.

It was well known that a large number of Neolithic surface finds from Thessaly, mainly figurines (some more than 2,500 items to date) were in important private collections. In 1987 Professor Kostas Gallis, Ephor then of the XV Ephorate of Antiquities, Larisa, entrusted me with the study of these figurines in view of their publication as a Corpus. He himself, because of his expert knowledge of the topography of Neolithic Thessaly, undertook the task of investigating the exact provenance of the figurines, in collaboration with the collectors and of preparing the appropriate maps of the various find spots. We were both well aware of the significant contribution such a Corpus would make to the promotion of Neolithic art and to the work accomplished so far in systematic excavations in view of further research. We also knew how important the compiling of a Corpus of an archaeological material spread among different collections in various places was for its safety.

The Academy of Athens, showing great sensitivity to our proposal, has kindly sponsored the publication of the Corpus. These circumstances made possible the composition of this volume, which presents 362 Neolithic figurines from Eastern and Western Thessaly, the cradle of Neolithic civilization in Greece on account of its geographical location, natural environment and resources.

The majority of these figurines were formerly in the collections of Dr Dinos Chouliaras, Mr Manolis Karamanolis, Mr Kostas Theodoropoulos and Mr Takis Tloupas. Since 1992 they have been located in the Larissa Ephorate of Antiquities and will be exhibited, together with other figurines, in the new Larissa Archaeological Museum when it is built.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Academy not only for creating the appropriate circumstances which facilitated me in the writing of this Corpus, but also for financing the recording of the material and its final publication.

I am particularly indebted to Professor Spyridon Iakovidis for advising me to enlarge

considerably my original plan, as well as for reading my manuscript and making extremely useful comments on the entire work, up to its publication. His consistent moral and practical support during my entire research work at the Research Centre for Antiquity of the Academy of Athens and his helpful suggestions on various problems has been invaluable.

I am deeply grateful too to the Ephor of Antiquities Professor Kostas Gallis, who helped me throughout my efforts, either by bringing me into contact with the collectors and avoiding delays due to bureaucracy of the Ministry of Culture, or by making useful observations concerning the quality of the publication.

Special thanks are also due to the collectors Dr D. Chouliaras, Mr E. Karamanolis, Mr K. Theodoropoulos and Mr T. Tloupas, for making their collections available for publication, as well as for the friendly environment they created for me during my stay in Larissa and their kind help in facilitating my task of photographing, classifying and studying the material in their homes, often at the expense of their privacy.

I thank all the members of the Larissa Ephorate of Antiquities for their active cooperation in those aspects of my research conducted in its premises.

Last but not least, I wish to thank Mrs A. Doumas for her help and great skill in revising the English text.

INTRODUCTION

Thessalian figurines may be attributed to nearly all phases of the Neolithic in the area. They do not always follow the pottery sequence related to habitation phases. Their dating is difficult because their use may have exceeded the chronological phase during which they have been modelled. Whatever the case, during the Late Neolithic Thessalian figurines become more and more stylized and they diminish in number until they eventually disappear altogether.

Almost all Thessalian figurines found to date are made of clay or stone (including marble) with a few exceptions made of carved shell. No wooden figurine has ever been found, but this must not lead to conclusions such as the non-use of this material for figurine making. Wood deteriorates quickly, especially underground, and it is very possible that wooden figurines, which have now perished forever, were made as well. On the other hand, the limited use of stone and the even more restricted use of organic raw materials, such as shell or bone, may well be due to the difficulties they present in working, compared to a lump of soft clay. Some golden figurines are rare and unique cases.

The clay used for Thessalian figurines comes from different sites in the area, resulting in a considerable range of colours from white to yellow and red, including a number of intermediate hues. A simple treatment of the clay is indicated by inclusions of stone particles, sand or plant remains. Non-plastics (inorganic tempers) were added to this clay in order to prevent the cracking of the objects when dried and fired. It is difficult to tell with certainty whether these tempers (especially sand) occurred naturally in the clays or were added by figurine makers.

Surface treatment, including decoration, is the final stage in the finishing of a ceramic artifact before firing. Though a great number of figurines were left rough, a considerable proportion were either burnished with a hard, blunt tool or (more frequently) polished with a soft yielding tool, such as a piece of leather, a handful of fleece or even a finger. A sharp colour contrast between the surface and the biscuit, often seen on figurines, may be due to the application of a slip or to mineral pigments (paint) or even to salts in the clay which rise and coat the surface during drying and firing, producing a creamy or white deposit.

Stone figurines, produced more intensively during the final phases of the Thessalian Neolithic, are considerably fewer than clay ones. Various local stones of grey, green, white or other colours were used though there was a certain preference for white marble. Stone/marble figurines seem to have existed though as early as Early Neolithic, but because of the undeniable difficulty in carving this hard material, simplified or stylized forms were produced, lacking the naturalism generally observed in Neolithic miniature art.

Most of clay figurines were modelled around one or many clay or perishable cores, fired and then given incised, impressed, painted or plastically applied human features. Surface decoration seems to be purely optional, since it is not related to any particular form or function and does not consistently render the same features or patterns. It follows the techniques used in pottery.

The aim of the present volume is primarily to present this precious material than to interpret it and discuss its function(s). The material presented is classified into two main parts, Heads and Bodies, each part distinguished as representational and stylized, according to its prevailing features. The total number of items included are 362, i.e. 120 heads and 242 bodies, including seven items representing just parts of a body, such as a leg or a penis.

Figurines in this volume bear a serial number, followed by their file catalogue number in the Archives of the Research Centre for Antiquities of the Academy of Athens (ORF), as well by their inventory number of the Archaeological Museum of Larissa. The inventory number of the Museum comprises the Greek letters MA (i.e. Museum of Larissa) and the first two Greek letters of the name of the collection to which each item belonged**. Next comes the name of the site they were found. For many sites of Eastern Thessalian plain the name of each location is followed by a site number, (ATAE), according to Gallis 1992. (ATAE stands for the initials in Greek of the words Inventory No of the topographical archives of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Larissa). Some of the sites in the Western Thessalian plain are also rendered in the same way.

Measurements are maximal, in centimeters, H height, W width and T thickness. The measurements are followed by a definition of colour according to Munsell Soil Colour Charts and a full description of each item.

**ΘΕ for Theodoropoulos, ΤΑ for Τλουπας, ΧΟ for Χουλιαρης, ΓΚ for Γατζιρουλης. Surface finds of the Ephorate of Antiquities bear the first letters of the find spots.