

Figurines of Neolithic Thessaly - Volume II

PREFACE

The present Corpus is the second volume of a series including figurines from Neolithic Thessaly belonging to private collections, part of which have been recently transferred to the new Archaeological Museum of Larissa.

In 1986 the Academy of Athens entrusted me with the Project of studying Greek Neolithic art. The challenge was great since 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. A further result was a very rich and important bibliographical and photographic database, not only on the Neolithic figurine art of Greece but on that of other geographical areas as well.

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 collections of Kostas Theodoropoulos, Takis Tloupas, Dinos Chouliaras and Manolis Karamanolis, which were especially rich, have been offered by them to the Larisa Archaeological Ephorate of Antiquities, in view of their contribution to our knowledge of the Neolithic civilization of Thessaly. These collections, along with other smaller ones, were transported there since 1992 and the majority of figurines included will be exhibited in the new local Archaeological Museum upon its erection.

The Academy of Athens, showing great sensitivity to our proposal, has kindly offered, in 1996, to sponsor the publication of the Corpus. These circumstances made possible the publication of the two first volumes on Figurines of Neolithic Thessaly including respectively 362 and 407 figurines from Eastern and Western Thessaly. Furthermore it sponsored my monograph *Introduction to Neolithic Figurine Art: South Eastern Europe and Eastern Mediterranean* (Athens 1998), which is a key to the study as well as an attempt to consider Neolithic plastic art from a more general point

of view, starting from examples from specific areas but with application to figurine materials from any cultural group.

The initiative of the XV Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Studies of Larisa was followed by the XIII Ephorate of Volos. Indeed, when another collector, –Mr A. Bastis, offered figurines and other items of his personal collection to the Volos Museum, the Ephor then Dr V. Adrymi, entrusted me, in 1999, with the study and the subsequent publication of the Corpus of these figurines, given my specialization on the subject.

INTRODUCTION

The precious and abundant material of this volume includes 407 figurines, of which 119 are classified as Heads and 288 as Bodies, including 11 items representing only parts of human body, as for instance a leg, a nose or a foot. It is presented (as in the first volume) with emphasis to its modelling and form. As it consists in casual surface finds, stratigraphical evidence is completely non - existent. Almost all are made of clay or stone (including marble).

The clay used 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.

Most of clay figurines were modelled around one or many clay or perishable cores, fired and then given incised, impressed, painted or applied human features.

Stone figurines are considerably fewer than clay ones. They seem to have existed though as early as Early Neolithic, but they have been more intensively produced during the final phases of the period.

Whatever the material, 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. In clay figurines it follows the techniques used in pottery.

Thessalian figurines display an enormous variety of forms and modelling features (which in some cases are unique) and it is difficult to distinguish clearly definable categories, therefore to establish a definite typology.

Yet, in the course of my long time research on Neolithic figurines in the Research Centre of Antiquity of the Academy of Athens, I have tried to make a practical typological grouping of Thessalian material, in the scope of facilitating my study and further presentation. This grouping is visible in the first volume. However, the material of the second volume, according to its state of preservation (broken, damaged, spare parts), forced me to create some additional categories of figurines which otherwise would not exist since they would have been incorporated in the already existing larger ones.

The second volume has the same classification and order of presentation as the first one. So, as one can easily notice, figurines are again classified into two main parts, Heads and Bodies, each part distinguished in representational (naturalistic) or stylized, according to its prevailing features. Figurines included in this second volume are inserted in the above mentioned typological categories and have quite clearly recognizable subdivisions.

Heads have various forms. The number of stylized ones is quite great, probably since the hard stones they are usually made of are better preserved than any other perishable material.

The second part includes male or female bodies and parts of them. They are principally classified as male or female and subdivisions may depend on arm posture and the rendering of chest. Stylized figurines present a variety of forms, which I tried to group in larger categories, often according to the form of their base.

Figurines in this volume bear a serial number, followed by their file catalogue number in the Archives of the Research Centre for Antiquity of the Academy of Athens (ORF), as well as by their inventory number of the Archaeological Museum of Larissa. The inventory number of the Museum comprises the Greek letters ΜΑ (i.e. Museum of Larissa No) followed by the first two Greek letters of the name of the collection to which each item belonged **. Next comes the name of the site where they were found. Information about their provenance was furnished by collectors. Whenever collectors were not sure about the exact Thessalian find spot, I classify the specimen as of unknown provenance. For many sites of the Eastern Thessalian plain the name of its location is followed by a site number (ATAE), according to Gallis 1992 (ATAE stands for the initials in Greek of the words Inventory Number of the Topographical Archives of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Larissa). Some of the sites in the Western Thessalian plain are also identified in the same way.

Measurements are maximal, in centimetres, 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, ΚΡ for Karamanolis, ΤΑ for Tloupas, ΧΟ for Chouliaras.