ABSTRACT – It is generally accepted that the Greek Final Neolithic witnessed many social and economic changes. However, few studies have explored the archaeological material of the period in a systematic and fully contextual manner. After analysing new material from a rescue excavation at Proskynas in east Lokris, central Greece, in combination with previous evidence, it is clear that most of our knowledge has come from the funerary domain, where acts of consumption and display of material culture took place. These included the deposition of artefacts in a mortuary context and in pits dug into the bedrock in the vicinity of the graves. The aim of this paper is to provide a contextual approach of the social and mortuary practices of the period in central and southern Greece and discuss their role to the creation of cultural identities. It is also suggested that these collective acts that occur primarily within the funerary domain may also imply a shift of interest from the domestic to the mortuary arena, which emerges as a new place for social negotiation at the end of the Neolithic period.

KEY WORDS – Final Neolithic; central and southern Greece; mortuary practices; pits; structured deposition; identity
does not fit into the classic three-age system, and how it is approached implicitly determines the terminology employed (Bankoff, Winter 1990). In Greece, the later stages of the Neolithic spanning from 4500 BC to 3500/3300 BC or 3100 BC (Andreadou et al. 1996:538; Johnson 1999; Tomkins 2009.127) are rendered by the German archaeologists (in Thesaly) as belonging to a Chalcolithic period (Wace, Thompson 1912; Alram-Stern 1996; 2003), according to the terminology in Asia Minor and the northern Balkan peninsula, while in recent decades, especially for southern Greece, the term ‘Final Neolithic’ has been used (Phelps 2004.103). The term ‘Final Neolithic’ (hereafter FN) as used in this paper, was suggested by Colin Renfrew (1972.68–80) to define the character of a cultural horizon of the last Neolithic phases, characterised by relatively homogeneous pottery assemblages in the areas of Attica, Euboea and the north-western Cyclades (the so-called ‘Attica-Kephala culture’, named after the excavation at Kephala (Fig. 15.14) on the island of Kea). On the other hand, some scholars (Zachos 1987.3–5; Coleman 1992a) prefer the term ‘Late Neolithic II’, because this period lasted well over 1000 years, covering most of the Late Neolithic.

What is generally accepted, however, is that this extremely long period witnessed many social and economic changes, such as intensive exploitation of the marginal land of the Greek landscape (Runnels, van Andel 1987; Demoule, Perlès 1993; Watrous 1994; Cavanagh 2004; Tomkins 2008; 2009), the introduction of metals and metallurgy and wide-range exchange links (van Andel, Runnels 1988; Perlès 1992.154–155; Broodbank 2000.163). In terms of pottery, it is characterised by an increase in coarse pottery and vessels fired at very low temperatures, often bearing traces of burning on their surface (Demoule, Perlès 1993.401; Vitelli 1999.65; Cavanagh 2007). It is argued that all these new vessels, including a variety of pithoi, jars and deep bowls, would have served new uses, associated with practices of storing and processing food (Halshead 1995.17; Vitelli 1995.58).

Most of our archaeological knowledge of this period in southern Greece was based on the excavation of the Kephala cemetery on Kea (Coleman 1977) and the cemetery of Tharrounia (Fig. 15.15) on the island of Euboea (Sampson 1993), where small built graves were investigated. The rest of our information comprised preliminary reports on material from excavations both at open air sites and in caves of the central and southern Greek mainland and the islands, such as that from the Acropolis North slope (Immerwahr 1971), Eutresis (Group II) in Boeotia (Caskey, Caskey 1960), Lerna (Caskey 1957; 1958; 1959; 1960) and the Franchthi cave in the Argolid (Vitelli 1999), the Zas cave on Naxos (Zachos 1999) and many other sites, such as those included in Phelps’ study of the Neolithic pottery sequence in the Peloponnese (Phelps 1975; 2004). The evidence for the Final Neolithic has improved notably through intensive surface surveys (van Andel et al. 1986; Runnels, van Andel 1987; Wells et al. 1990; Runnels et al. 1995; Cavanagh et al. 2002), while new excavated domestic remains include the fortified sites at Zagani in Attica (Steinhauer 2001) and Strophylas on Andros (Televantou 2008), where occupation seems to continue into the Early Bronze Age (but the material is currently under study).

However, since most of the traditional archaeological research in Greece (Tomkins 2008.21) has so far been concerned mainly with describing the pottery style and cultural relations with other regions, few studies of FN archaeological material have explored the relationship between the elements of the material culture of the period in a systematic, focused and fully contextual manner. The recent research at the site at Proskynas in the province of Phthiotis in central Greece, in combination with all previous evidence, proved to be fundamental to a better understanding of the social and mortuary practices of the period. At the same time, it gave rise to further questions and archaeological discussion.

The site at Proskynas, central Greece: a case study

The site at Proskynas (Fig. 1) next to the modern village of that name is located on a low hill of soft limestone in the area of east Lokris in central Greece. The site overlooks a small, fertile valley, while the Eubocean Gulf is situated 3km to the north. The wooded foothills of Mt. Chlomon, dividing east Lokris from neighbouring Boeotia, rise immediately to the south.

The area of east Lokris (Fig. 1), a narrow, coastal zone and the south-eastern district of the province (nomos) of Phthiotis, has been a field of interest for archaeologists since the early 20th century. Many rescue and systematic excavations of Bronze Age settlements and cemeteries have enriched our knowledge about the whole period (Dakoronia et al. 2002). Nevertheless, when the investigation of the Neolithic period is concerned, very little has been
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done in this region. A significant site close to the coast of the Gulf of Euboea has been located at Theologos (ancient Halai) (Fig. 1). The earlier excavations were carried out from 1911 to 1935 by Hetty Goldmann and Alice Walker Cosmopoulos (Goldmann 1940), while John Coleman’s fieldwork in the past 15 years has revealed deposits dating back to the Early and Middle Neolithic (Coleman 1992b). Other important sites that usually appear as mounds (magoules) have been located in northern Phthiotis and in the western part of Lokris (Alram-Stern 1996.305–311), such as at Elateia (Fig. 1). However, archaeological investigation here was limited and its unpublished material is known through Weinberg’s (1962) preliminary report.

The earliest phase of occupation at Proskynas, i.e. the FN, is represented only by burials and pits dug into the soft bedrock. The Neolithic deposit was a

The excavation and occupation phases
The rescue excavation at Proskynas (Fig. 2), covering approximately 1500m² and undertaken by the 14th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities under the direction of Eleni Zahou, before the extension of the main national road, investigated four phases of occupation dating respectively to the Final Neolithic, Early Helladic II, Middle Helladic and Late Helladic periods. Unfortunately, the site had gone unnoticed when the initial construction of the main national road destroyed a large part of it in 1962.

The Final Neolithic remains lay immediately above bedrock on the flat surface of the hill and almost at its centre. On the same area, after a period of abandonment, a settlement was founded in the early Early Helladic II period (hereafter EH) (Zahou 2004; 2009), while during the Middle Helladic and Late Helladic period, settlement relocated to the west side (Zahou 2009.10–13). This kind of human activity and horizontal shifting on the hill makes Proskynas a non-tell site, in the sense that the area was not as densely occupied as that of the tells (magoules), thus without intensive and extensive rebuilding on the same parts of the hill. The stratigraphy and spatial practices at the site indicate that occupation between the different periods was interrupted for some time (Zahou, Psimogianou forthcoming).

The earliest phase of occupation at Proskynas, i.e. the FN, is represented only by burials and pits dug into the soft bedrock. The Neolithic deposit was a
thin, undisturbed stratum, only 20cm thick, lying immediately above natural bedrock and containing pottery of different wares, lithics, shells and animal bones. The Final Neolithic in the area of Lokris was until then unknown. In northern Phthiotis, Rachi Panagias (Fig. 1), a tell-prehistoric-site adjacent to the Lake Domokos area has shown occupation levels from the 4th millennium BC according to the radiocarbon dates and the characteristic pottery ware. Examples include bowls of the so-called ‘Bratislava type’, decorated with patterns of spirals and incised lines and triangles (Zahou 2002).

The Final Neolithic archaeological evidence: the burial area

The Final Neolithic archaeological evidence at Proskynas consists of a burial area, where seven burials and a series of pits were investigated. They extend over the hill on the E-W axis. The EH buildings and constructions followed the same orientation and were founded exactly above the FN burial site (Fig. 3).

In the southern part of the excavated area and across the national road, eight pits developed in a row (Fig. 3.pits 16–20, 8–10). The pits (Fig. 4a–b), round or ovoid in shape, with a maximum depth of 0.50m and with a diameter up to 1.50m, were filled with burnt cultural material, such as sherds or large parts of coarse open vessels, bones, shells and obsidian or flint blades. Some pits were coated with clay and after being filled, were sealed with stones. Nearby, and to the north, a number of round postholes, 0.30m in diameter were found which seem to have

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2 The use of bedrock for FN activities is witnessed in many cases in the Peloponnese and central Greece (see discussion in the text below). As was observed, the FN layer in Peloponnesian sites is mostly described as a thin, dark-red or brown stratum lying directly above bedrock (e.g., Aspis Argos, see Touchais 1980; Alram-Stern 1998.25; Vitelli 1999.99). This was also the case at Karystos on Euboea (Keller 1982.12), several sites in Attica (e.g., Koropi, Merenda, Thorikos, see Spitaels 1982; Alram-Stern 1996.216–218; Kakavogianni et al. 2009), on Aigina Kolonna (Felten, Hiller 1996), on the Cyclades (e.g., Grotta Naxos, Hadjianastasiou 1988.11–12; Agia Eirini Kea, Wilson 1999) and on Crete (Nowicki 2008.205).

3 Final Neolithic pottery has recently been identified (both pers. exam.) at the sites on the islet of Mitrou, Tragana (Fig. 1, see Van de Moortel, Zahou 2006) and Kynos, Livanates (Fig. 1, see Dakoronia et al. 2002.41–48).
The pit graves were ovoid and shallow, containing only single burials (Fig. 3.burials IX, VI, VII, XIV, XIII). The skeletons of the adults were found in situ and in a contracted position (Fig. 5a-b) without offerings or fixed orientation. Adjacent to some of these graves, pits containing cultural debris like those found in the southern part of the hill were also investigated (Fig. 3.pits 11, 21).

In contrast, the burnt human remains of a 15-year-old juvenile had been placed in a burial pot (Fig. 6) that was found in the same funerary area (Fig. 3.burial I), while the second child had been deposited in a rectangular grave, dug into the bedrock, lined and covered with small flat stones (Fig. 3.burial IV; Fig. 7). We cannot be sure about the criteria that determined these choices. Whether or not other members of the Neolithic ‘community’ of Proskynas received a similar or different type of manipulation after death remains unknown, and the occurrence of more burials on the area of the hill that has not been excavated may be possible. Next to the burial pot, two shallow pits had been cut into the soft bedrock (Fig. 3.pits 1, 2). One contained only burnt soil, while a red-burnished pithoid jar (Fig. 8) was placed in the other, which was lined with stones.

The whole burial site had been sealed with small row stones and every EH building was founded above a FN pit grave, after a period of abandonment (Zahou, Psimogiannou forthcoming), as can be seen in the case of Grave IX under Building Delta (Figs. 3, 9).

4 I would like to thank Dr. Anastasia Papathanasiou at the Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology, Athens for conducting the osteological study. The samples collected from the adult burials were submitted to the Radiocarbon Laboratory at the University of Oxford and produced radiocarbon dates in the later 5th millennium BC (around 4400–4300 BC).

5 A large number of pithoid jars has been found above the platforms and around the graves of the cemetery at Kephala, Kea (Coleman 1977.52–53) and the cemetery at Tharrounia, Euboea (Sampson 1993.233).

6 The practice of covering FN burials with a pile of stones is attested at Lerna (Vitelli 2007.122) and in the paralia of the Franchthi cave in the Argolid (Vitelli 1999.90), in the Kouveliiki cave B in Laconia (Kontaxi 1996.712), as well as at other locations (see Dousoglou 1998.136–145).

The burial area of Proskynas has yielded important ceramic (Psimogiannou 2008), faunal and lithic (Manos 2011), and molecular\(^8\) (Veropoulidou 2011) assemblages. In terms of the pottery, a large number of sherds or partially preserved vessels were concentrated around the graves. The ceramic assemblage of the burial area is large and shows close similarities to styles found in this period in southern Greece and the Aegean, as well as the ceramic material from the pit contexts (Fig. 10).

The pottery represented comprise ‘tableware’, meaning pots appropriate for the consumption and presentation of food and/or drink, such as cups and bowls, but including larger vessels such as large deep bowls, wide-mouthed jars and pithoi intended to cater both for preparing or cooking food and even for some kind of storage. It is interesting to notice that the largest quantity of pottery was concentrated around the two child burials. In the vicinity of the burial pot, a particularly high concentration of vessels of matt-painted and polychrome ware, mostly cups and fruit-stands, was found (Fig. 11.a,b,c). Coarse vessels, jars or deep bowls were also found nearby. More intriguing, however, is the fact that no two pots are alike, every piece is unique. The drinking vessels of the matt-painted and polychrome ware show high variability and diversity in decoration and may have been used for individual consumption and display (Pappa et al. 2004; Urem-Kotsou, Kolsakis 2007.242). Furthermore, most were found incomplete, something that raises the possibility that these objects were probably never deposited as complete items. The same practice is reported from the Alepotrypa cave, where the human remains of two children were laid on a stalagmite floor and then covered by great quantities of intentionally broken matt-painted and polychrome ware (Papathanasopoulos 1996b.176; Papathanasiou 2001; 2009).

![Fig. 5a-b. Pit burials; a. adult, man, 45 years old; b. adult, man, 30–35 years old.](image)

The second child at Proskynas had not only received different mortuary treatment – different kinds of pottery ware seem to have been deposited around this grave. Most belong to coarse vessels, showing close similarities to the pottery from the cemetery at Kephala. These vessels include deep bowls (Fig. 12), jars and baking pans (Fig. 13), some bearing red-crusted (Fig. 14) and pattern-burnished decoration, features with a broad distribution throughout the Aegean during this period. One marble figurine of the schematic type\(^9\) had been placed adjacent to the second child’s grave, while a lithic pendant had been placed inside.

Final Neolithic social and mortuary practices in context

Looking back: a review of the evidence

The archaeological analysis of the FN material at Proskynas provided evidence to support an interesting discussion of the social and mortuary practices of the period (Psimogiannou 2008.104–114). Examination of both old and new archaeological evidence in central Greece, in the Peloponnese and the

\[^8\] According to Veropoulidou (2011), the shells collected from the pits and burial area were the result of food processing.

\[^9\] Similar figurines have been found in the Alepotrypa (Papathanasopoulos 1996a.225) and Tharrounia caves (Sampson 1993. Fig. 201).
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Aegean islands has indicated that the digging of pits was a common and widespread social practice in the Greek Final Neolithic, since specific cultural elements deposited in pits have been found in a surprisingly wide range of sites (Fig. 15). These pits are described as open-air pits not associated with any architectural or structural remains, filled with burnt material and then sealed with stones. The fact that they were dug into the pure bedrock, on hills of limestone with notable visibility, but in most cases without previous Neolithic occupation levels, seems to have been a deliberate choice.

This was the case (see Fig. 15) in Eutresis Boeotia (Caskey, Caskey 1960.129–137), in the Acropolis North slope (Immerwahr 1971.3, the so-called Neolithic ‘wells’) and especially at many sites in the Peloponnese, such as in Prosymna (Blegen 1937. 23–29) and Halieis in the Argolid (Pullen 2000), Tsoungiza in Corinthia (Pullen 1990. 33; 2011), as well as Ayios Dhimitrios in Elis (Zachos 1987.4–48), Nichoria in Messinia (Howell 1992) and Viodokilia in Pylos (Korres 1977; 1978; 1979). In the 1960s, various isolated pits in the bedrock were explored while examining the Hellenistic settlement at Kastro Tiganii on Samos (Felsch 1988). Similar FN ‘wells’ filled with cultural debris have also been found recently on east (Manteli 1992) and central Crete (Pylarinou, Vasilakis 2010).

A deposit very much like these was unearthed at the site at Aya Erini on Kea (Caskey 1972.360–362; Coleman 1977.99). Further north, at Rachmani in Thessaly, some rescue excavations on the western edges of the tell that became synonymous with the Chalcolithic period of Thessaly, since the archaeological research of Wace and Thompon (1912), revealed pits dated to the FN filled with sherds, animal and human bones, lithics and shells (Toufexis 1997). Similar pits have been investigated recently on a hill at Achinos in the eastern part of Phthiotis (Fig. 1) near the Maliakos gulf (pers. exam.).

Most frequently, however, these pits are reported adjacent to pit graves of the same period, also cut into soft bedrock (Fig. 15), such as at Proskynas, in the Athanen Agora and in the Acropolis South slope (Immerwahr 1971; 1982; Dousougli 1998.137), at Thebes (Toota 2009), Lerna (Caskey 1958.13–137; 1959.205; Vitelli 2007.118–122) and Franchthi (paralia) in the Argolid (Vitelli 1999.87–91), and in the Alepotrypa cave (Papathanasopoulos 1971). The same probably holds for the site at Galene in Thessaly (Toufexis 1997), where a number of deep and

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10 It is mentioned that the FN sites in the Peloponnese are situated above valley bottoms, overlooking the broader areas (Alram Stern 1998.75). The same holds for Proskynas.
wide pits characterised as 'wells' and filled with cultural debris were excavated. Three burials of adults in a contracted position were clustered nearby, while another was found in a pit (Toufexis 1997. 570–571). According to a recent overview of the Neolithic evidence at Phaistos on Crete (Todaro, Di Tonto 2008), the FN remains under the structures of the First Minoan Palace consist of a series of pits cut into the bedrock and related to a burial in the vicinity.\textsuperscript{11}

**The creation of a mortuary arena and the practice of pit-digging**

The picture that emerges from the above current evidence is the high visibility of mortuary places during the FN period (Fig. 15). Indeed, most of our knowledge of central and southern Greece comes from the funerary domain\textsuperscript{12}, including the already known cemeteries of Kephala and Tharronouia that comprise built tombs. Of great importance, however, is the appearance in the archaeological record of other mortuary areas\textsuperscript{13}, where one or more burials were deposited in pits dug into the bedrock. This similar mortuary pattern is witnessed in many locations, some of which have already been mentioned above (e.g., Prosnyas, Thebes, the Athenian Agora and the Acropolis North and South slopes, Lerna, Franchthi), as well as at other sites (e.g., Aria in the Argolid (Dousougli 1998), Akrafinio, Boeotia (discussed in Dousougli 1998.139), Koutsouria in the Argolid (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1971.10), etc.; see also discussion in Dousougli 1998).

To this funerary domain, we can add the deposition of numerous burials in caves in southern Greece (e.g., Tharronouia cave on Euboea, Alepotrypa and Kouvelileiki caves in Laconia, the Cave of Pan in Attica and many caves on Crete) that are usually attributed to the FN period. For example, the Alepotrypa cave has provided a concentration of various burial practices (e.g., single and multiple primary inhumations, ossuaries) and more than one hundred individuals have so far been identified (Papathanasiou 2009). The presence of the material culture in the Alepotrypa cave is considered to be associated with these graves and ritual activities (Cavanagh, Mee 1998; generally for a discussion on caves see Tomkins 2009). As has been suggested (Cavanagh, Mee 1998.11), the large number of ani-

\textsuperscript{11} Pits related to burials in the vicinity dated to the beginning of the EBA were also found in cemeteries on mainland Greece and the Cyclades, such as that of Tsepi, Attica (Pantelidou-Gofas 2008) and Ano Kounphonisi, Cyclades (Zapheiropoulou 2008).

\textsuperscript{12} In central and southern Greece there are less 'visible' settlement traces in contrast to burial places. Domestic or building remains, except from Srofylas and Zagani (mentioned above in the text), have also been found at Kephala, Kea and Sfakovouni in Arcadia (Abram-Stern 1996.264), and farther north in Microthebes (Adrymi-Sismani 2007) and Petromagoula (Hatziaggelakis 1984), Thessaly. Most of the material is under study.

\textsuperscript{13} The use of the term 'burial or mortuary areas' (instead of cemetery) does not exclude the possibility that more burials had been deposited. We have to keep in mind that the presence of a low number of burials may also be due to limited excavated area (e.g., Aria in the Argolid).
mal bones and pots around the burials in the cave probably indicates offerings and the consumption of food, while traces of burning imply that fire formed part of the ritual.

It seems that the presence of cultural and material assemblages in the above burial areas might suggest that important acts of consumption and display took place in the funerary domain during this period (Broodbank 2000.221–222). At Proskynas and elsewhere, vessels (not only table wares, but also larger pots) and other artefacts might have been part of special and collective acts involving mortuary rituals or feasting. It is thought that feasting, along with death and burial, is a social activity that is rich in symbolism and defines the boundaries of a group (Hayden 2001; Wright 2004.76). Of the material evidence associated with food, pottery appears to be one of the most powerful tools for investigating both the social aspects of consumption and related issues, such as social relationships and social identity (Appadurai 1986; Tomkins 2007; Urem-Kotsou, Kotsakis 2007).

Other activities, such as the deposition of material culture, either outside graves (Broodbank 2000.171) or in nearby pits, may also have been part of the mortuary practices. As already mentioned, the presence of pits filled with burnt cultural material and sealed with stones in most of these mortuary places is noteworthy. Pits are well-known excavation contexts throughout the Balkan Neolithic and pit-digging had been a widespread and common practice in Greek prehistory since the beginning of the Neolithic. For the most part, these pits have been discussed in terms of human waste disposal and thus usually referred to as 'bothroi' or 'rubbish pits' (Hutchinson 1935; Blegen 1937; Caskey, Caskey 1960.161). However, recent evidence from the European Neolithic and Neolithic of Northern Greece have led some scholars to propose that the depositing of certain materials in pits rather than elsewhere must have been a calculated act (Chapman 2000; Pappa et al. 2004; Skourtopoulou 2006; Tomkins 2007.189–190; Pappa 2008), thus constituting an act of structured deposition.14

Furthermore, the fact that the contents consist for the most part of incomplete objects (e.g., non-con-

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14 For more details see Chapman 2000. Also, Tasić, Tasić 2003.94–95, for a discussion of a 'cult pit' at Vinča and Sremski Karlović, where vessels, charcoal, shells and bone fragments had been placed.
joint sherds or large parts of vessels, fragmentary animal bones) has pointed to an interpretation of the smashing of artefacts and deposition of certain pieces in pits as having been deliberate. It is suggested that through this practice of fragmentation and deposition, the end of the life of these objects removed from circulation was accomplished (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Broodbank 2000.262–263; Tomkins 2009.140–142), while at the same time the life-history or 'biography' of the pit was completed through its final sealing with stones and/or fire (Chapman 2000.64; 70–73; Pappa 2008.334–336).

The repeated and widespread practice of pit-digging and their back filling indicates that the deposition of artefacts in the pits near the graves was not an act of discard, but of careful placement confirming social reproduction. The insistence on pit-digging and high density of structured deposition, as seems to be the case in the aforementioned FN sites, is a special practice probably related to a diverse set of factors. Thus, as Chapman (2000.82) has pointed out, the specially structured deposits of the pits discussed above may be integrated into a much wider set of social practices lying at the root of the FN rationality and fundamental to the creation and consolidation of social relations.

Moreover, through these acts of structured deposition and sealing with stones, a form of agency connected to the corroboration of social memory was expressed. According to Rowlands (1993), one way of creating memory is through acts such as the deposition and destruction of objects and valuables that become memories in their absence (Rowlands 1993.146; Hamilakis 1998; Bradley 2000.157). It is argued that such memory is more emphasised in the case of pits cut into virgin soil or bedrock, “where 'clean' material was removed and replaced by current, 'cultured' material” (Chapman 2000.64), either human artefacts or human bodies (Sofaer 2006). The FN sites are mostly 'new' sites (Darvill 1997.2) on limestone hills, the pure bedrock of which was chosen (perhaps they were already important natural places15, see Bradley 2000.107) for the deposition of the material culture and the social present of the living, a practice that endowed the sites with cultural significance, new memories and meanings (Zahou, Psimogiannou forthcoming).

I believe that the mortuary arena of the FN has to be seen as a social arena (the term is obviously borrowed from Chapman 1991; 1993; 1997.142; see

15 It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss issues related to landscape uses. However, see the discussion in Tomkins 2009.134–140, regarding the role of caves as central ritual sites for interaction during the Late and Final Neolithic periods.
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... also Tomkins 2009.142–144), where through a shared understanding of symbolic meanings in the mortuary sphere – social identities are negotiated and social integration and cohesion obtained. It has been suggested that every social practice of public ritual reinforces group identity and social memory is a technique for the control of the present, by incorporating the whole group into a common ritual associated with the past and dead ancestors (Chapman 1993.81; Parker Pearson 1993; Hamilakis 1998). It is also possible that the social memory of the ritual activity conducted on these mortuary areas endowed them with a special status that contributed to their selection as sites of the subsequent Early Helladic settlements (e.g., Proskynas, Lerna) (Zahou, Psimogiannou forthcoming). Thus, the Neolithic past was actively appropriated so as to legitimise the present (Parker Pearson 1993; Williams 1998).

Discussion and Conclusions

The picture that emerges from the current archaeological evidence discussed above, such as the widespread distribution of social and mortuary practices, and increasing spheres of interaction (Broodbank 2000.156–170) represented in homogeneous pottery assemblages (Tomkins 2009.143) and other artefacts both on the Greek mainland and the islands, is of an ‘internalisation’ of practices and an evolving and dynamic social and cultural dialogue in which FN communities were intensively engaged. The mortuary areas mentioned above may have served as fields of social discourse for the formation and manifestation of a shared cultural identity, bearing both mainland and island characteristics (Nazou 2010). It has been suggested that collective acts of display and consumption of material culture that occur primarily within the funerary domain reflect a strong sense of communality (Tomkins 2004.56). At the same time, the individual treatment of the dead, emphasised in Proskynas and elsewhere through the presence only of single burials and the use of non-standardised vessels or the accumulation of prestige goods, laid more emphasis on the visibility of the individual and perhaps on specific members of the community (Chapman 1993; Broodbank 2000.170–174). It is likely that it was a context where the identity of a large group of people was being formed and where the inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals was negotiated.

Some scholars have suggested with respect to similar cases ( Hodder 1990.70–99; Chapman 1991.157; 1994.82–84) that the legitimisation of the mortuary arena as a context for social action may also imply a shift of interest from the domestic to the mortuary arena. In this respect, and taking into account the whole archaeological evidence so far regarding the FN in southern Greece, including the ‘low visibility’ of domestic remains, it is possible that an entirely new social arena was being created at the end of the Neolithic for the expression of social messages related to continuity, ancestors and the living (Chap-
man 1991.160), messages that probably had previously been negotiated and visualised through the presence of the ‘oikos’ and the predominance of tells (magoules) on the Neolithic landscape (Chapman 1994; Kotsakis 1999; Nanoglou 2001; 2008). This broad dispersal throughout the Aegean, manifested in the aforementioned FN practices and probably removed from restricted and communally-held values and beliefs, defined, consolidated and reproduced in earlier times through the repeated materiality of the ‘house’ (Tomkins 2004.53–57; Nanoglou 2008.150–154), may imply that an opening up to the world was also being established and a new, broader cognitive map of social relationships, acting as a unifying web of identity, was being formed (Wright 2004.66–76, for a similar discussion).

It has been argued that mortuary rituals were used as acts of display that contributed to the establishment of complex genealogical systems (Barrett 1990). The changing social strategies from the end of the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age and the development of social complexity have been discussed and explored in various ways and fields (Renfrew 1972; Halstead 1989; 1994; 1995; Nakou 1995; Broodbank 2000; Tomkins 2004). The relationships that the living created with the dead, but also the differences that were created between the dead (Parker Pearson 1993.227) and the way they were expressed and (re)negotiated by the living, may be indicative of a fundamental realignment and reorganisation of human relations. Of course, there are still several issues to be resolved before we can proceed further with the reconstruction of the mechanisms and details of the process that led to subsequent inequalities. Many of these details are still lacking from the archaeological record, or perhaps we have not yet been able to ‘read’ them, since (as always happens) they are well-concealed in every aspect of the social life, material culture and human choices that developed throughout this long-lasting period preceding the Bronze Age.

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