Daniela Hofmann
Jessica Smyth   *Editors*

# Tracking the Neolithic House in Europe

## Sedentism, Architecture, and Practice

Springer

# One World Archaeology

Daniela Hofmann · Jessica Smyth
Editors

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Sedentism, Architecture and Practice

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction: Dwelling, Materials, Cosmology— Transforming Houses in the Neolithic

**Daniela Hofmann and Jessica Smyth**

This volume is the result of a session organised at the World Archaeological Congress in Dublin in 2008. The inspiration was the editors' common interest in the house as a key element of what is traditionally defined as a Neolithic lifestyle. One of us is particularly focused on the geographical and chronological end points of the European sequence, where houses are plentiful and distinctive but short-lived. The other was working in the Early Neolithic of central Europe, where monumental longhouses form an almost iconic style of building. In both areas, the house was a key element of the new lifestyle, but the ways in which it gained its social and cosmological relevance appeared to differ quite starkly. Our initial question therefore was about the transformation of one type of building and dwelling into another. How were ideas and practices associated with architecture transmitted at each step as the Neolithic spread north and west?

Rather than offer a general overview of the many roles and social implications of houses (along the lines of the landmark volumes by, amongst others, Parker Pearson and Richards 1994 or Samson 1990), we wanted to home in on the intricacies of a particular sequence. This clearly required expert help. Across Europe, the pace of new discoveries has been accelerating, making it difficult for one scholar to produce an overview at a continental scale, in addition to obvious language barriers. Our plan therefore was to persuade a colleague from each geographical area of Europe that was linked in the continental strand of Neolithisation, from the Near East to Ireland, to check for similarities and differences at each stage of the transition. This was simple in theory—following essentially in the steps of Hodder's oft-quoted 1990 study—but much more complicated in practice. Traditions of research and classification have resulted in a mosaic landscape of scholarship, in which it is hard

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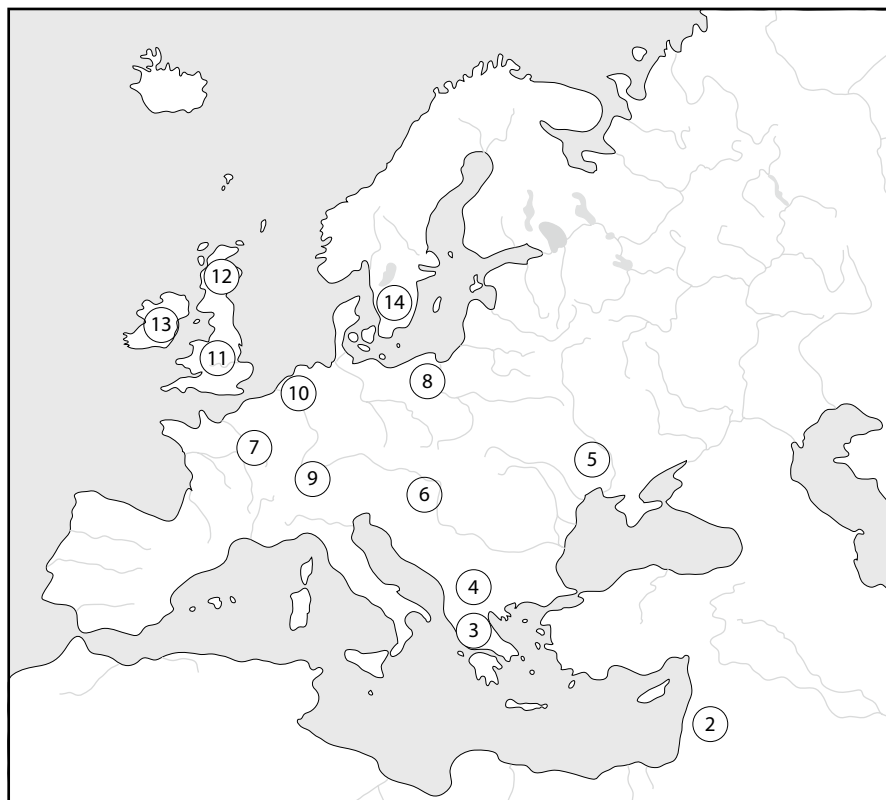
**Fig. 1.1** Map of areas covered by the chapters in this volume

if not impossible to keep track of what is going on in all regions and therefore to address change and continuity from a shared perspective.

The WAC session itself confirmed our suspicions. Papers were very diverse in their approach and outlook and in the kinds of evidence the authors felt were important. Nevertheless, exchanging ideas in this way challenged many of our 'regional' assumptions about the process of Neolithisation. There is still a real need to re-invigorate comparative exercises of this kind, which have been somewhat neglected in our efforts to keep up with floods of regional data, and perhaps partly also because of a theoretical focus privileging the local and contingent.

We therefore decided to publish the volume, commissioned additional papers to fill in geographical blanks and invited three discussants to draw out wider strands. The papers in this volume are organised geographically (and by extension broadly chronologically), beginning with the Near East and working their way north-west (Fig. 1.1), so that similarities and differences between adjacent regions are easier to draw out. Nigel Goring-Morris and Anna Belfer-Cohen (Chap. 2) provide a detailed introduction to the Near Eastern evidence, challenging especially the idea of an easy progression from 'simple' to 'complex' architecture. The diversity and

complexity they reveal serves as a useful backdrop to the further sequence, showing that the house was a dynamic social arena from the beginning. Moving to the European continent, Stella Souvatzi (Chap. 3) characterises the house in Neolithic Greece as an 'active social framework for life'. She then tackles the complex and diverse social relations that could be played out through such structures and the varying groups they harboured. Goce Naumov (Chap. 4) is particularly interested in the way the house and the human body can be seen as symbolically connected in the Neolithic of Macedonia. His contribution draws on the rich evidence of anthropomorphic house models and settlement burials to interpret architectural changes more generally.

The following two contributions take us from the south-east European heartland into the vast loess areas of central Europe. Natalia Burdo, Mikhail Videiko, John Chapman and Bisserka Gaydarska (Chap. 5) discuss the Cucuteni and Tripillian houses of eastern continental Europe and track their development from domestic dwellings into structures with a range of more specialized functions. They argue that this sequence can only be understood with reference to the wider worldviews and aesthetic universe of their inhabitants. In Chap. 6, Eszter Bánffy is more explicitly concerned with how the transition between south-east European and central European styles of Neolithic life took place. For her, the key transformations happened in western Hungary, and with the active involvement of both local foragers and (incoming) agriculturalists. This brought into being the iconic longhouses of the *Linearbandkeramik* culture (LBK). Penny Bickle (Chap. 7) and Joanna Pyzel (Chap. 8) then follow the further transformations of these imposing structures into the more diverse dwellings of the LBK's various regional successors. Bickle introduces the evidence from the Paris Basin, arguing that the performance of community was central to reframing the wider role of the house. In Pyzel's narrative of the Polish lowlands, the main distinction between LBK and Brześć Kujawski culture (BKC) houses is their relationship to older buildings, pointing to wider changes in how the past and the passage of time were experienced through architectural choices. In a last central European chapter (Chap. 9), Daniela Hofmann describes the impermanence and fluidity of houses in the Alpine foreland. Here, it is the daily routines and practices of maintenance, rather than the stability of a particular structure, that carry community life forward.

Moving to north-west Europe, similar points are also made by Luc Amkreutz (Chap. 10) for the Lower Rhine Area. He argues that the creation of persistent, remembered places was not achieved through house structures as such, which remain fleeting and adaptable in the manner of a 'vernacular architecture', but through practices of inhabitation. In Chap. 11, Jonathan Last examines the long shadow that the architectural sequence of central Europe has cast on the interpretation of houses in Britain. Yet, rather than dismissing the relevance of continental trajectories, he points to new avenues of commonality in how houses were integrated into a wider universe which now increasingly incorporated other kinds of architecture, such as longbarrows. Continental parallels also play a large role in Alison Sheridan's overview of the first British and Irish houses (Chap. 12), although she makes the case that we must pay closer attention to the dynamics of Neolithisation and the subse-

quent period of settling in if we want to contextualise the changing characteristics of buildings. Focusing on the Irish evidence, Jessica Smyth (Chap. 13) examines the very visible and numerous early houses alongside the poorly understood, and often ignored, domestic architecture from later stages of the Neolithic. Again, to interpret the varying level of visibility of houses through the period we must refer to much wider social transformations, in particular how society develops *after* the successful establishment of farming. Finally, Lars Larsson and Kristian Brink summarise the plentiful new evidence for Neolithic houses in southern Scandinavia. Here, it is the interplay between domestic buildings, funerary structures and the way social networks were organised across the wider landscape that eventually leads to some buildings becoming large and long-lived places of renown, whose name would have been known far beyond their immediate surroundings.

In the last section of the volume, these regional overviews are passed through successive filters provided by three discussants. Ian Hodder (Chap. 15) suggests broad sequences which are repeated—largely independently—in the different regions and may point to shared trends inherent in the dynamics of Neolithic lives. His explicitly comparative chapter focuses on the way houses entangle their occupants in certain ways and facilitate specific kinds of developmental trajectories from smaller to larger buildings, until finally the importance of the house as a social arena declines. Lesley McFadyen (Chap. 16) compares the contributors' theoretical approaches and reveals a tension between scholars treating the house as an object and those looking at the dynamics of the building itself and its physical context as part of a wider social engagement. She points to the importance of drawing in other materials, landscapes and time as factors crucial to understanding how architecture was lived through and changed. Finally, Roxana Waterson (Chap. 17) addresses how houses and buildings have been approached by archaeologists and anthropologists. Reassuringly, she sees much common ground, but this is also a call for greater inter-disciplinary and thematic engagement as part of re-establishing the validity of a rigorous and systematic comparative agenda.

In sum, this volume is an extended exploration of the transmission of domestic architecture—at the same time an idea, a practice and a material object. In a first attempt to identify potential axes for broader comparisons, we would also like to briefly address—among a much wider choice of topics actually tackled in the regional chapters and in the discussions—four core themes that have emerged in several of the contributions collected here. In particular, these are the materials from which houses were built, the daily practices in which they were implicated, their wider cosmological significance, and finally the mechanisms by which they were transformed and changed.

## Materials

Many contributors begin with describing what the houses in their regions actually looked like, how they were laid out and which materials were chosen. Regardless of whether this was a matter of simple availability and relative convenience, for

instance in the use of wood rather than clay in the rainier climes of central and western Europe, the result were buildings with a wholly different potential for the entanglement of their occupants (Hodder 2011). Houses made of different materials require different routines of maintenance, have different use-lives and encourage different rhythms of (im)permanence. Across Neolithic Greece, as Souvatzi notes, the frequent rebuilding of structural features, replastering of walls and the well-kept house floors show that a considerable amount of time and energy was invested in house maintenance. At Dikili Tash, for example, the fallen superstructure inside one house included a large roof fragment bearing at least 14 thin layers of plaster, often from carefully selected sources. For both Amkreutz and Hofmann, the material properties of the buildings they study, in the Lower Rhine area and in the Alpine foreland respectively, are directly connected to a perceived fluidity in household and community composition. In both areas, there is a constant need to repair and rebuild, allowing an opportunity to reaffirm or in turn reject membership to a particular grouping.

The sometimes very varied length of house and settlement biographies contained in these chapters also tease out the differences between the *durable* and *enduring* qualities of materials, that is, the difference between the potential of certain materials to last a long time—seasoned oak or fired clay—and their potential to be carriers or signifiers of lasting meaning. Both depended on how materials were differently enmeshed (e.g. Ingold 2007) across Neolithic Europe. There is for example a particular type of maintenance, a 'maintained neglect' perhaps, practiced by the LBK longhouse communities of lowland Poland as documented by Pyzel. Here the massive timber structural posts do not seem to have been dug up following abandonment of the houses but remained visible on the surface for a long time, up to several centuries, and could even be a factor in the siting of much later constructions. Similar practices are reported by Bickle for the communities of the Paris Basin, where it seems most likely that longhouses were left to decay in situ, continuing to be marked in some way after the house was abandoned.

These different site trajectories tie in with much recent writing on ontology, in which the traditional Western human-centred cultural logic is critiqued and reworked by several researchers who have reached comparable conclusions from very different starting points (e.g. Latour 2005; Ingold 2007, 2011; Gosden 2008; Hodder 2012; Olsen 2007; Webmoor and Whitmore 2008; Barrett 2011). All have spoken out against models which prioritise human agency and directed thought as a prime mover. Social life is increasingly seen as an achievement of people *and* things, a profoundly interactive process in which human life unfolds through equal input from materials and people, bringing out the characteristics of each other in different contexts (Gosden 2008). Objects are so central to orienting, framing, and carrying forward people's actions, and as a consequence in demanding certain forms of maintenance and interaction, that social life would not exist without them, a process Hodder (2011, p. 162) describes as 'entrapment'.

Taking this as a starting point, we can readily appreciate that houses are much more than extra-somatic memory storage systems (see Cosmology section). There has been a tendency to treat architecture as 'reflecting' ideology, status, or a myriad other abstract concepts archaeologists have long been interested in. Instead, it is

more fruitful to focus on how houses, as material realities, guide the engagement of their inhabitants with the world around them (Barrett 2006; Barrett and Ko 2009). The house is a vantage point to enter the world, not a repository of static meanings and abstract concepts. In Ingold's (2000, pp. 172–188) terms, a house is much less about a process of planned building, and more about dwelling, about a certain style of finding one's way through the affordances of the material world, itself in constant transformation. This is why it may make sense to think of houses at the same time as explorations of the human body, as argued here for example by Naumov, and it is probably no accident that the inherently malleable and transformative material of clay was thought appropriate in this context.[1]

However, as explicit reactions against an over-privileging of human agency in processes of social life and social change, there is a danger in some of the wider theoretical formulations to instead grant too much ontological priority to the materials themselves. The case studies in this volume show that very different sets of materials could lead to broadly comparable outcomes in the way they framed and guided the character and rhythms of social existence. The clay walls and installations of houses from the Near East to Ukraine were constantly replastered, but the slight wooden components of dwellings in the Rhineland and the Alpine foreland also needed regular replacement. In both cases, our authors have argued for fluidity in social relations at various scales, but clearly this was achieved in very different material universes or, in Barrett's (2011) phrase, ecologies. Also, in spite of the different material properties of clay and wood, long-term notions of descent could still be comparable, as the general trend towards changes in layout or relocations of buildings in successive phases goes hand-in-hand with a longer-term rootedness to house plots, and perhaps fields. Similarly, durable materials need not result in durable buildings. For Ireland, Smyth notes that Early Neolithic settlements with houses constructed of oak planks and posts do not endure more than three generations or so, and these timescales may be even shorter for the oak-built LBK houses of central Europe and their successors, discussed by Bickle, Pyzel and Last. On the other hand, Souvatzi shows how at Nea Makri, the pit buildings comprising 12 successive habitation layers could span a period of 2,000 years, and were just as long-lived as houses built of more durable materials.

Are we therefore right to reconstruct similar social entanglements in all these cases, in spite of the very different materials that are being used, or do we need to work harder at drawing out the convergences and mismatches between the potential affordances of materials and their actual use? It is here that studies broadly framed in terminologies of networks or meshworks must take care to give due place to histories of descent and transformation. The previous involvements of materials and objects also have permeated them, making them historically situated in specific ways (see Gosden 2005). In terms of a comparative history of Neolithic buildings, these longer-term trajectories cannot be pushed to the margins, and they could shed new light on how social performances and material qualities are enmeshed in each

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[1] For an exploration of the role of building materials, in this case mud brick, in perpetuating household identity at Çatalhöyük, see Love (2012).

case. There is certainly a fine line to tread between over-emphasising the 'agency' of people on the one hand or their 'entrapment' by materials on the other.

## Practice and Dwelling

The importance of various rhythms of change and history also resonates with our second theme, the routine practices of dwelling and inhabitation that centred on the house. Our contributors are less concerned with discussing the sensory experiences of specific styles of building in any great detail. Instead, several papers try to address the issue of who would have inhabited these structures, how co-residence was organised and whether it would also have resulted in a recognisable social unit, the household, a topic which has already seen much attention in archaeology and anthropology (e.g. Allison 1999; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Souvatzi 2008).

Without doubt, the vagaries of preservation often make it difficult to identify gendered spaces or specialised activity zones. The assemblages associated with the houses of the Near East and south-east Europe are perhaps the exception. Here, the hearth is the focus of activities, consistently surrounded by cooking pots and storage vessels, querns, stone and bone tools, weaving paraphernalia and charred food remains, and may also be symbolically charged (see the following section). Interestingly, despite this abundance of (often in situ) material culture and the variability in house dimensions across sites in both Greece and Macedonia, Souvatzi and Naumov note that houses in their respective regions often contain standardised domestic inventories or materials that encompass a number of spheres of practice, with little evidence of specialisation within individual buildings. Different types of activity such as pottery firing, stoneworking and *Spondylus* manufacture seem instead to be identified with certain *areas* of the settlement or are located in the vicinity of more than one house. This echoes the distribution of productive activities across several households identified in the Alpine foreland, but perhaps contrasts with the situation described by Burdo et al. where houses of very similar sizes and probably external appearance take on specialised functions over time.

In this context, it is regrettable that the floor surfaces of LBK and related longhouses in central and western Europe rarely survive intact, as Bickle and Pyzel note. The contents of the infilled *Längsgruben* or loam pits that run along the sides of many such houses must instead serve as a kind of proxy for domestic inventories, with spatial, quantitative and qualitative analyses providing insight into intra- and inter-house activities and social relations. Here again, the activities associated with a single building can only be made sense of with reference to the wider settlement community. Bickle details the patterning identified in the loam pits on sites across the Paris Basin: at Cuiry-lès-Chaudardes, for example, longer houses were associated with more domesticated animals, while shorter houses had higher rates of wild animals in their associated loam pits. There are also hints of a favoured side of the house for deposition, resulting in part at least from people working preferentially on

one side of the house, behaviour possibly influenced by the nature of relations with nearby houses/households.

This tension between inside and outside space provides another important point of comparison between different regions. For example, in the BKC houses of lowland Poland, both Pyzel and Last note the shifting of the weight of the roof from internal posts to the side walls, creating relatively large internal spaces and removing the need for the 'forest' of posts seen in LBK houses. This opening up of inside space is occurring as conditions outside, in between houses, are becoming more cramped. In Macedonia, Naumov argues that the potential for hoarding created by houses, and the inter-household rivalries that this might generate, is regulated by communal use of open areas that reinforces social relationships. Possible grain storage bins located outside structures may have been used by several families, or indeed the whole settlement, sharing out and/or consuming certain resources publicly. Social relations may also have been regulated through the construction of houses, as in several regions across Europe their erection does seem to have been a communal endeavour. For instance, Sheridan argues that the 'large houses' of Scotland and England were used by a number of early farmer households, living together until sufficiently well established to branch out into smaller groups. Elsewhere, we can begin to ask how activities at houses would have related to the kind of social engagement, material effort and emotional investment directed at other locations in the landscape, such as the monumental funerary structures built across southern Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland.

All these questions address the thorny issue of the kind of corporate groupings, if any, that were defined by houses, and how these related to other groups which may cross-cut or encompass the more intimate spheres of daily existence. Many archaeological analyses understandably concentrate on just one scale of analysis, be this broadly individual identities (for example, age, gender or status), the flexibility or perpetuation of households, or larger groups such as 'burial communities' encompassing several settlements, clusters of central places and dependent sites, or entire archaeological cultures. Integrating these varying scales is attempted far less often and remains a key challenge (but see Bickle and Whittle, in press, for a recent discussion). The problem, as many of our contributors also note, is that the house can no longer be seen as co-terminous with a specific social group in which natural solidarity and commonality of purpose would prevail, a point that can also be made for settlement communities as a whole (e.g. Whittle 2009). The way in which social units framed by the house were more or less bounded and could link with other potential groupings at other scales is crucial, and has a direct impact on the specific character of dwelling in a particular place at a particular time. It must also be accorded greater significance in our models of the adoption and development of architecture over time. Fluidity and flexibility at one social scale may well be off-set by (perceived) durability at another, for example in the way the extremely impermanent structures of the Alpine foreland may have gone hand in hand with greater continuity in land tenure or in the way communities endured in spite of the suggested flexibility in household composition. These reflections inevitably pull the house and domestic architecture away from a simple replication of routines and

into much wider discourses on notions of corporate solidarity, values and ultimately worldviews.

## Cosmology and Worldview

In terms of cosmology and worldview, two different strands of argument have been developed in relation to architecture. On the one hand, there is the search for universal consequences of houses and the act of building for the way people see their place in the world, while on the other hand there have been countless more contextual studies of specific cosmologies embedded within particular architectural sequences.

The first strand is perhaps best exemplified by Hodder's (1990) landmark work on the house as a bulwark of domesticity—*domus*—pitched against the wild outside—*agrios*. More recently, Watkins (2004), drawing on earlier work by Wilson (1988), argues that over the long term, the human mind became increasingly able to cope with systems of symbolic representation, and that extending these meanings to buildings was one important further step. Architecture became a 'means of embodying abstract concepts, beliefs and ideas about [people] and their world in externalised, permanent forms' (Watkins 2004, p. 97). It could store and transmit a community's history and quickly became an arena in which other forms of meaning and symbolism could be more effectively orchestrated and conceptualised. In short, architecture developed as a coping mechanism for life in larger groups, with the upshot that individuals increasingly expressed their ideas in forms which reached a wider audience and did not require co-presence.

In a similar vein, Helms (2004) argues that sedentism is implicated in a wider shift in how people perceive their relations with 'others' beyond the immediate home group, which includes animals, affines and other human strangers, and the dead. While hunter-gatherers are most concerned with regulating relations with animals, in sedentary societies the 'household', i.e. the group of people brought together more durably through a physical structure, increasingly subsumes individuals into new corporate identities. Consequently, the emphasis in relations with 'others' shifts to regulating contacts with other corporate groups and therefore for instance to the control of exotic goods and materials (see also Helms 1988). Agriculture, too, has a role to play, in that it introduces a heightened sense of the importance of time, and by extension history (Helms 2004; see also Bradley 2004). With agro-pastoralists, therefore, the dead become a focus for symbolic elaboration and are granted new roles as 'ancestors' for whom, amongst other possible strategies, mortuary monuments may be built (Helms 2004, p. 124).

These arguments work at a relatively high level of generality, and do not make reference to differences in the elaboration of architecture across time, or between groups with similar economies, to name but two. They can also be criticised for ignoring the embodied experience of their inhabitants. Certainly, in Watkins' (2004, p. 104) approach, we are often confronted with minds communicating their ideas to other minds, rather than with whole organisms alive in a material world, and this sits

uneasily with more recent perspectives that foreground the constantly transforming meshwork of people—who cannot be readily separated into a 'mind' and a 'body'—and the wider world (see the section "Materials").

In addition, many of the more general arguments are often made with reference to the first emergence of architecture and sedentism among previously mobile groups in the Near East. However, as Bradley (2004) has pointed out, once architecture expands beyond these core regions via a range of possible processes, its roles and meanings are also likely to change substantially. This calls for a more contextual approach, the route also taken by many of our contributors. Perhaps surprisingly, however, this focus on the small scale has not led to as extreme a diversity of interpretations and suggested worldviews as may be expected. Instead, two themes emerge repeatedly: the house as body/organism, and the symbolic elaboration of the flexibility and impermanence of buildings.

The connection between house and body in the Neolithic has been the focus of several recent studies (see e.g. Hofmann 2012; Whittle 2012). In this volume, the point is most explicitly made by Naumov, who uses clay house models with anthropomorphic components to argue for a more general equivalence between house and body. He also draws attention to the association of burials and the domestic arena, with most of the Neolithic interments so far recorded in Macedonia located between or within houses. This juxtaposition of actual human bodies and houses is another recurrent theme from the Near East (see chapter by Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen) to the Ukraine (presented by Burdo et al.) and the Paris Basin (discussed by Bickle), but is not universally present.

The link between house and body can also be more subtly made, as in those contributions which see the house more or less explicitly as a biographical project and therefore comparable, or even explicitly linked, to the human life course (as argued by Bickle and Smyth). Such interpretations are based on evidence such as the deliberate decommissioning of houses, which in Ireland is frequently achieved by burning. This also applies to the seemingly purposeful deposition of artefacts in postholes or foundation trenches, particularly prominent in southern Scandinavia and, again, in Ireland (see, respectively, chapters by Larsson and Brink and by Smyth). Just as human bodies are composites of substances and materials, built up over a lifetime through practices of acquisition and consumption, the house draws in people, materials and substances long before and beyond its construction.

These studies partly support Helms' (2004) point of the house as essentially sheltering a corporate or collective body of some kind, an idea also stressed in the 'house society' models addressed by Waterson (but see e.g. also Borić 2008). However, as discussed above, many of our contributors also argue for an important degree of flexibility in household composition. With the practices and routines of day to day life, rather than the physical properties of the structures, binding households together, 'mundane' installations can come to be thought about in new ways. For example, in both the Alpine foreland and the Lower Rhine area, the only component of the house to be relatively monumental is the fireplace, the symbolic centre of social life in the building where fragile relations are upheld through, for example, the preparation and consumption of food. This illustrates Bradley's (2005) point

that it is not only difficult, but also downright unproductive to try and separate routine and more formal or symbolically charged areas of life. Throughout our case studies, specialised 'cult' buildings remain rare or non-existent, and instead it is the material nodes important in everyday life—the hearths, storage bins and settlement pits—which also see more ritualised engagement (see also the papers by Naumov, Burdo et al., Souvatzi in this volume). Where specialised funerary architecture exists, most notably in the northern and western parts of Europe, burial around houses also declines, but artefacts are still deposited relatively frequently. Perhaps the shift can be incorporated into Hodder's argument of the changing role of the house from grounding specific human groups to a much more taken-for-granted place which accommodated more far-flung and varied social relations.

In any case, what is clear is that understanding the symbolic role of buildings and their place in people's worldview must of necessity go beyond the house itself to investigate the wider narratives in which structures were implicated. Only from this perspective can we reveal, for example, that a certain style of house may chime with a much more general aesthetic sense concerned with geometric order (as in Burdo et al.'s interpretation of Tripillia houses), or that items such as storage installations or grinding implements could change their 'private' or 'public' character repeatedly throughout a sequence (as here discussed by Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen). Where there appears to be a reduced investment in house-building, as for example argued by Last for the Cerny culture of early fourth millennium France and by Smyth for mid-fourth millennium Ireland, wider analyses incorporating related architectural forms such as funerary monuments are essential in highlighting, as Last puts it, alternative strategies for accommodating differences. As our contributors ably show, within the framework of broader shared attitudes the house will be differently experienced, perceived and elaborated depending on the wider contexts and trajectories in which it finds itself. It is here that the roots of change lie.

## Tradition and Change

A volume such as this lends itself to themes of transmission—how did the idea of houses spread between adjacent areas, and how can we interpret the further changes and transformations within each sequence? However, in many contributions this theme remains relatively muted. Perhaps this is a sign of a certain 'transition fatigue' (Sheridan 2012, p. 391) setting in—after all, the debate of acculturation versus demographic transition between Meso- and Neolithic has been raging on for some time (see Robb and Miracle 2007). On the other hand, narratives of the transition are being reinvigorated by new genetic data, still controversially discussed (see e.g. Haak et al. 2010; Zvelebil and Pettitt 2008), as well as by a more explicit focus on understanding and modeling Neolithic demographic processes (e.g. Vander Linden 2011a, 2011b; Ford et al. 2012; Bocquet-Appel 2009, 2011; Bocquet-Appel et al. 2012; *World Archaeology* special issue 1998(2)). Increasingly, we are experiencing a mismatch between preferred scales of analysis; processes operating at the large

and continental scale are juxtaposed with detailed contextual studies of specific regions or sites. New methods, such as Bayesian approaches to radiocarbon dating, have the potential to change this situation, as they allow the creation of very detailed site narratives which can then be integrated into an almost event-based prehistory at the regional and supra-regional level (Whittle 2011; Whittle et al. 2011). However, so far these studies are geographically limited, and the analytical gap remains hard to bridge for many areas.

As a consequence, sticking exclusively to writing narratives at the smaller social scales bears the danger of letting demographic modelers or geneticists, who often receive much wider cross-disciplinary and public attention, drive the agenda of Neolithic studies at the larger scale. Partly, the reason may also be that proponents of detailed, contextual narratives—often broadly framed in a 'post-processual' tradition—have tended to argue in favour of local adoption of Neolithic things and practices by indigenous groups, while downplaying the significance of climate or population pressure as drivers of social change (but see Sheridan, for a counter-example). These are aspects being challenged by new research at the broader geographical scale. The mismatch is thus not only one of analytical starting points, but also of basic outlooks. The challenge for the future will be to harmonise new data, however uncomfortable, with the fine-grained narratives many still want to write, and conversely to show how the latter have an impact on processes at wider chronological and spatial scales.

In this volume, various authors explicitly discuss the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition for their areas, but in line with wider trends this is not the main focus of analysis in most cases. However, two examples deserve to be drawn out here, as they show the range of roles houses may play in the establishment of Neolithic practices. In her chapter, Bánffy characterises western Hungary as a mosaic both in ecological and in cultural terms. While a broadly sedentary, Neolithic lifestyle had existed further south for some time, there was a protracted period of experimentation and mutual adaptation before architecture and a productive economy moved further north and west. Local foragers were key agents in this process and may have contributed the subsequent focus on a northerly orientation of structures. However, it was cultural streams from further south that were responsible for introducing the idea of more substantial architecture and of the appropriate materials to erect such dwellings. The outcome—the massive longhouses of the central European Neolithic—was unlike either Mesolithic or south-east European Neolithic precedents.

Across the islands of Ireland and Britain, genuinely new things and practices also appear, but in contrast to the Carpathian Basin scenario, these seem increasingly unlikely to have arisen out of a mixing of indigenous and incoming traditions. As Sheridan outlines, houses appear rapidly across the landscape, with the earlier 'large houses' in Scotland and parts of England serving as the communal residences of pioneering groups of early farmers, providing the shelter and security needed in the first testing decades of life in an unfamiliar terrain. Along with reinforcing community bonds between occupants, these buildings would have projected a powerful image outwards to, we presume, a pre-existing Mesolithic population, a clear statement of presence and intent.

The Mesolithic-Neolithic transition set aside, questions of the relative import of tradition and change, conservatism and innovation are important in understanding the further trajectories of Neolithic architecture in each region and more generally. Here, too, models inspired by genetics have been at the forefront of debate, most notably Shennan's (2002) argument that cultural traits ('memes'), while transmitted in more varied ways, essentially behave like genes and are selected according to their reproductive success, broadly defined. These ideas have been criticised for effectively pushing to the side the messy details of the actual transmission processes (Hodder 2011), which remain isolated in an inaccessible analytical black box (see e.g. Shennan 2002, p. 48). As a result, transmission is limited to passing on neatly bounded blocks of information from one mind to another. Change can only be driven by passive replication errors, or by outside factors such as climate or migration scenarios. This is especially the case for items which require a long apprenticeship to make and/or which are experienced at a young age in a setting where behaviours are learnt from elders (see Shennan 2002, p. 37–46, 79–98)—characteristics which do apply to architecture.

In a recent contribution, Bentley et al. (2011) pay much more explicit attention to transmission processes and explore the role of social learning—involving imitation and copying—in the diffusion of innovations. They note that copying certain items and practices creates a sense of group membership and outline a range of imitation strategies, from simply following the majority to emulating people with authority, individuals defined as successful, or those that have actually come up with an improved alternative (Bentley et al. 2011, p. 21, 31). They also force us to think more clearly about who the agents of change are. Archaeologists have perhaps grown too familiar with models of smooth, bell-shaped curves of changes brought in by a few innovators, followed by more general acceptance and finally gradual fading. However, depending on the social standing of the various people involved and any competing options, this is only one possible trajectory, and fast and unpredictable 'cascades' of change can also occur (Bentley et al. 2011, p. 115–127; see Barrett 2011, p. 85 for the importance of such 'thresholds' for the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition).

Bentley et al.'s sociological approach has much to offer for archaeological case studies,[2] although the authors perhaps place undue stress on classifying processes of change into categories which in reality may be less easy to disentangle, and on insisting that some choices are truly 'neutral'. It is here that, in turn, detailed and closely argued archaeological case studies can make a wider impact by investigating over the longer term the different circumstances in which rates of change accelerate and decelerate, and the kinds of materials and practices which are implicated. The important point is to see the reproduction of social life as a dynamic process, constantly in tune with wider transformations and therefore essentially a property of emergent networks of people, animals, plants, things and so on (Barrett 2011, p. 84; see also Sherratt 2004).

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[2] In spite of their own insistence (Bentley et al. 2011, p. 64) that 'traditional' societies are aptly named because in their case, drift and crisis do remain the sole possible drivers of change.

In this volume, Burdo et al. argue that the rate of change in their study area is slow because the house was very strongly tied in with wider aesthetic values. In contrast, for Bickle it is changing ideas of how to reproduce community in altering social contexts which eventually causes the realignment of *Linearbandkeramik* longhouses towards the shorter-lived and externally more uniform examples in their Paris Basin successor cultures. Once again, the different ways in which the house formed part of people's broader concerns influenced the kinds of change that could be envisaged (see also Hofmann in press). Narratives of transmission are only complete if general models are counter-balanced by a focus on the mutual entanglement of people and their—partly constructed—worlds (see e.g. Marchand 2010). It is these micro-histories which will allow us to outline how and why some changes gain pace and can transform into much bigger trends.

In either case, we must become more comfortable and flexible again in the kind of social and chronological scales we are willing to address (a point also eloquently made by Sherratt 1995). In such an endeavour, this book can only form a starting point. The broader geographical distinctions in the character of Neolithic houses, their relative elaboration, aggregation and permanence, have long been clear. By offering our readers an up-to-date compendium, alongside a provocative set of more reflective papers, we hope we can play some small part in helping to put more comparative approaches back on the agenda. This will necessarily involve drawing in much wider themes of contact and demographic growth, population history and worldviews, material culture innovation and burial, and many other topics besides. The house is only the beginning of the story.

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# Chapter 2
# Houses and Households: a Near Eastern Perspective

**A. Nigel Goring-Morris and Anna Belfer-Cohen**

## Introduction

The Near East is the geographic region where the processes of 'Neolithisation' first crystallised (c. 11,500 cal BP onward), prior to its dispersion as a 'package' to Europe and other parts of the Old World. We shall provide a brief overview and a discussion of the architectural developments pertaining to Neolithic phenomena in the region (also known as the 'Fertile Crescent'). In particular, the focus will be on the Levant, i.e. those areas south of the Taurus/Zagros mountains through to the Red Sea in the south, and from the Mediterranean coast eastwards to the Syro-Arabian desert (Fig. 2.1).

The Levant's geographic orientation is one stretching from north to south, interspersed on its west-east axis by topographic features deriving from the configuration of the Syro-African Rift valley. Four main ecological provinces can be observed—in the south, the 'Mediterranean province' (including the Damascus basin), bordered on the south and east by the 'Arid province'; and, to the north, the 'Middle Euphrates' and the 'Upper Tigris' provinces. We prefer herewith to grossly subdivide the area into northern and southern cultural provinces, with a line between the Damascus basin and Beirut separating the two (for a detailed discussion, see Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2011a). Accordingly, the northern Levant extends from this line up to the Taurus/Zagros mountain ranges, while the southern Levant (including the 'Levantine corridor' along the Rift Valley) extends to the Sinai peninsula. The mosaic arrangement in the southern Levant displays greater ecological variability (the desert regions included) over smaller distances than in the northern

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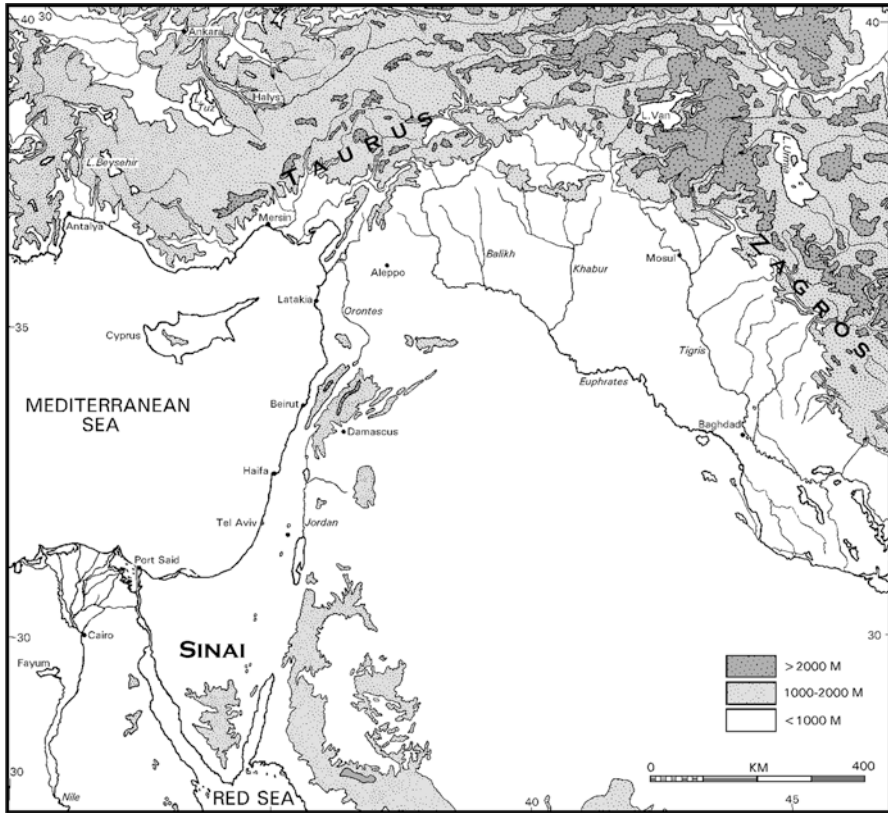e-mail: belferac@mscc.huji.ac.il

**Fig. 2.1** Map of the Near East

Levant. Furthermore, two of the great rivers of the 'Fertile Crescent', the Euphrates and Tigris (and to some extent the Orontes), are dominant features of the northern Levant, creating linear corridors that bisect the broader landscape to create a patchwork of homogenous, yet distinct sub-regions. Thus we should note the contrasts between the northern Levant and the southern Levant. Interestingly, recent research demonstrates that the island of Cyprus should be included within the framework of early Levantine 'Neolithisation' processes (Guilaine and Le Brun 2003; Peltenberg and Wasse 2004; Vigne 2011; Vigne et al. 2012). However, it is important to stress that central Anatolia represents a quite different trajectory, in that developments there reflect the initial dispersion (as opposed to origins) of the Neolithic 'package' westwards (e.g. Özdoğan and Basgelen 1999; Düring 2011).

There is a general consensus that numerous elements incorporated in 'Neolithisation' processes in the Near East were present during the late Epipalaeolithic Natufian complex, c. 15,000–11,500 cal BP (Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris in press). There is initial evidence for durable architectural elements already in semi-sedentary hamlets from the early Natufian, as part of a continuum from the Natu-

fian to the Neolithic. These elements incorporate semi-subterranean round structures of varying sizes, custom-built graves, and an assortment of installations, e.g. stone-lined hearths and pavements (for detailed description, see Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2003, 2008). Especially notable during the early phase of the Natufian is the presence of large-scale structures, ranging in size from 50–150 m$^2$, that were clearly larger than the residential structures of earlier Epipalaeolithic huts, e.g. Ohalo II (Nadel 2006). Given the coeval presence of several such large structures in some sites, we believe that these early Natufian structures were the domiciles of social units larger than the nuclear family. Other structures, of similar shape, were very small in size, e.g. 2–4 m$^2$, and their functions clearly focused on different, special activities.

We shall not delve here into the discourse of when a structure becomes a house or, to paraphrase Watkins (1990), when a 'house' becomes 'home'; yet, it is quite clear from the internal spatial patterning of both mundane and symbolic artefact categories within these structures that we are facing an amalgamation of profane and symbolic activities of particular social units, each distinct from its immediate neighbouring structure (e.g. Valla 1989, 2008). Suffice it to say that such issues ('house' as 'home', public/communal/corporate vs. private domains) merit further in-depth discussion.

In evaluating local developments, it can be stated that Near Eastern 'Neolithisation' processes:

1. were of longer duration than formerly assumed;
2. varied significantly throughout the 'greater' Levantine region;
3. were more complex in nature than previously supposed; and
4. were un-orchestrated, in the sense of being unintended developments with no ultimate 'goal'.

The prevailing subdivision of the Near Eastern Neolithic was first proposed by Kenyon (1957) following her investigations at Jericho. Hence the Levantine Neolithic is presented in a four phase terminological framework: Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA: c. 11,500–10,500 cal BP), Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB: c. 10,500–8400 cal BP), Pottery Neolithic A (PNA: c. 8400–7500 cal BP), and Pottery Neolithic B (PNB: c. 7500–6500 cal BP). It should be noted that the PPNA shares greater commonalities with the Natufian than with the PPNB, while the PNA (in the south) could be more comfortably accommodated within the PPNB world. We shall only briefly relate to Pottery Neolithic developments in the north, as with time the differences between the north and south grew to incorporate distinctive local characteristics, e.g. the half-circular *tholoi* structures restricted to eastern Syria and northern Iraq (Akkermans and Schwarz 2003; Huot 1994). It seems that certain cultural traits (if not the scale of settlements and specific architectural traditions) of the northern PNA presage the unique developments of the later, Sumerian, city-states. Since many scholars have argued that the PNB corresponds more closely to the chronologically following Chalcolithic period (e.g. Garfinkel 2009), we shall not discuss it here.

Contrary to the Neolithic 'package' diffusing later into Europe, pottery as an integral part of the material cultural assemblage appears only with the PNA, some 3000 years after the earliest recognized Neolithic stage, the PPNA (Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2010); equally, plant and animal domestication was long-term and un-orchestrated (Zeder 2011). Spanning more than 5000 years, the different Neolithic phases display considerable diachronic and synchronic variability throughout the Levant. This reflects diverse starting conditions in the different phytogeographical regions, palaeoenvironmental changes (e.g. the supposed climatic effects of the Younger Dryas and the '8200 year' event), socio-cultural trajectories and interactions, as well as unforeseen circumstances (for detailed discussion see Belfer-Cohen and Goring-Morris 2011b; Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2011). Demonstrable domestication of plants and animals is first recognized during the PPNB, though in an uneven manner in time and space (Vigne 2008; Zeder 2009). Accordingly, we find combinations of farmers and herders, farmers and hunters, fishers and farmers, hunter-gatherers and pastoralists, all sharing, to a degree, certain material culture traits—hence the notion of a pan-Levantine PPNB *koine* or 'interaction sphere' (Bar-Yosef and Belfer-Cohen 1989). It is of interest to note that the PPNB can be considered as the 'floruit' of the Near Eastern Neolithic, since the following Pottery Neolithic displays marked regional variability, smaller settlements, and fewer cross-regional characteristics (Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2010; in press).

It is within this framework that we shall summarise the architectural evidence for 'house/household' and 'home' during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in the Levant. We present the data with a running commentary, returning to certain issues in the following discussion.

## Architectural Developments during the Neolithic

### Pre-Pottery Neolithic A

Settlement patterns during the PPNA in the southern Levant are mostly restricted to the lowlands, whether in the Rift valley (usually at intervals of 20–25km) on alluvial fans or along the western flanks of the central hills. There was almost no occupation of the arid margins in either the east or the south at this time. A hierarchy of site sizes is documented, with the largest reaching up to c. 6 acres (about ten times the size of Natufian hamlets—Goring-Morris et al. 2009).

PPNA domiciles appear to consist of dispersed, short-lived, single storey circular or oval semi-subterranean structures, much in the architectural tradition of the preceding Natufian (Fig. 2.2). Their sizes and accompanying furniture mostly indicate the accommodation of nuclear families (Goring-Morris and Belfer-Cohen 2008; Simmons 2007). Construction was of wattle and daub or, somewhat later, of mud brick on stone foundations with wooden posts and beams to support flat roofing and *pisé* floors, sometimes with interior partitions (Bar-Yosef and Gopher

**Fig. 2.2** *Top* Plan of part of Natufian hamlet at Ain Mallaha (Eynan), *Centre* Plan of hamlet at PPNA Nahal Oren, *Bottom* Typical PPNA residential structures (Gilgal, Hatoula, Netiv Hagdud)