

Abstract

The PhD thesis entitled: *“THE PILE-FIELD AND THE WOODEN STRUCTURES OF THE NEOLITHIC LAKESIDE SETTLEMENT ANARGHIRI IXb, WESTERN MACEDONIA, GREECE”* is structured in three distinctive parts.

In the first part (General Introduction) the general aim and objectives of the study are set, and the basic methodological choices followed for the implementation the research are presented. A short review to early interpretations and modern research trends regarding structural wood in central European wetlands is made for the specification of the general framework of the study. In the same direction, an attempt is made for the contextualization of the study with a reference to the history and current state of research of Southern Balkans' wetlands and the relatively scarce archaeological information regarding structural wood,

In this introductory part, the schematized description of Anarghiri IXb settlement's general profile, constitute one preliminary presentation of the Neolithic lakeside habitation as one of the newly investigated settlements during the realization of the Rescue Excavations Project of Florina Ephorate of Antiquities in Amindeon Basin. According to the available 79 ¹⁴C dates, the earliest building activities of Late Neolithic I in 55th-54th centuries BC and their intensification at least on the periphery of the settlement in the succeeding 53rd-49th centuries BC could be correlated with the excavational context of a habitation influenced by the presence of water. The form and preservation of the building remains, as well as of the movable finds discovered in the upper excavational layers constitute indications for the gradual development of the settlement into a dryland habitation in the next 48th-44th centuries BC until Final Neolithic, while the existence of a Late Neolithic II habitation's phase remains questionable.

In the second part of the study (Analysis) the documentation of all the available data regarding the Anarghiri IXb pile-field is presented, with a subsequent systematization of the information about the structural wood discovered in the lowest layers on the peripheral zone of the Late Neolithic I habitation. The basic physical and technical attributes, combined with specific observations regarding their stratigraphic and horizontal distribution, permitted the categorization and analytical presentation of a total of 3643 elements documented as structural wood in the excavational record. Vertical posts constitute the abundant elements of Anarghiri IXb pile-field, bearing variable metric characteristics, with the almost exclusive exploitation of

rather young oak trees (80% of samples) and the relatively limited presence of conifers (20% of samples). Their irregular spatial and stratigraphic distribution is similar to typical wetlands' pile-fields, posing certain restrictions to the recognition of specific features' layouts. As second distinguishable category of wooden elements of Anarghiri IXb assemblage, those found horizontally deposited within the lowest layers are recorded. Their stratigraphic and spatial distribution, as well as their physical and technical characteristics usually did not facilitate their correlation to specific features.

The most prominent outcome of the pile-field's analytical approach is the recognition, description and dating of some accessing and enclosing wooden structures that for now constitute exceptional findings for southern Balkan prehistoric research. Accordingly, the Late Neolithic I Trackway 2 (early 53rd-late 51st centuries BC) and Trackway 3 (50th-49th centuries BC) most probably constituted the main crossings that joined the habitation with the opposite dryland covering a distance of 80-120m, most probably as ground-level features comprising a walking surface of horizontal elements retained and supported by vertical posts. Furthermore, two similar, still partially investigated double posts' row alignments were characterized with specific reservations as Trackway 3(?) and Trackway 3b(?). The dating of Trackway 1 in the Early Bronze Age (mid-26th to mid-25th centuries BC) possibly explains its obvious structural differences compared to the earliest features, namely the elaborately processed vertical posts arranged to form a bridge-like crossing. In addition, the slightly earliest remains of the fragmentary double posts' row characterized as Trackway 4(?) (mid-29th to early-26th centuries BC) are cautiously integrated in the general discussion regarding Anarghiri IXb accessing structures.

The spatial organization of at least the northern and southeastern margins of the Late Neolithic I habitation was seemingly determined by the presence of the Fence 2, 4, 5 possibly complemented by the ambiguous double posts' row alignment characterized as Fence 1. The general structural characteristics, as well as the arrangement of these features dated between 53rd-49th centuries BC led to the supposition that they were parts of the settlement's delimitation system. The possibility of general rearrangements of the habitation's space during Late Neolithic II/Final Neolithic could be supported by the shifting of the enclosing system towards the central area of the settlement indicated by the location of Fence 3 and 8(?), while

Fence 6(?) and 7(?) constitute fragmentarily investigated alignments that cannot easily be integrated into the discussion regarding spatial organization.

In the third part of the study (Synthesis), some general interpretative notions regarding Anarghiri IXb pile-field and peripheral wooden structures are presented with references to the chronological framework, the form and their spatial arrangement. It is proposed that these structures constituted a complex system built to demarcate the settlement's limits and to provide access to its inhabitants to the broader region of Chimaditis wetland. The comparative discussion of these structures with cross-references to similar settings discovered in European wetlands led the candidate to the examination of various notions regarding alternative functions of this system. Among them, the old but still debated defensive role and the conventional ideas about the supportive function of the structures to the so-called practical needs (protection from water and wind, control of access) are discussed. Moreover, approaches that attribute to these features' functions such as the symbolic demarcation of the communal space or the passage from the world of water to this of the land could also be incorporated into the general interpretative discussion.

Based on the aforementioned data, propositions as well as on working hypotheses regarding aspects of Anarghiri IXb peripheral zone's spatial organization, the study provides some preliminary information for the integration of Anarghiri IXb into the chronological and cultural framework of Late Neolithic period of the cross-border area and the neighboring regions of western and central Macedonia. The rarity of investigated prehistoric wetlands in southern Balkans and the sparsity of information regarding their spatial organization do not permit any specific comparative remarks of Anarghiri IXb with other sites except from the possible contemporaneity with some of them. Nevertheless, the form and arrangement of the habitation's enclosing structures bear evidence for its inclusion into the gradually growing group of Late Neolithic settlements of the broader region whose residential space was delimited by similar works approached with various interpretative propositions.