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Conclusion: building a fireplace to build a world

In this volume we have gathered together studies focusing on the archaeology of fireplaces in territories along the northern coast of the Mediterranean during the first millennium BC. In keeping with the framework of our original workshop, we chose only to consider examples of indoor and fixed fireplaces in the current volume.

The different contributions presented here allow for a comprehensive overview of the materiality and setting of fireplaces found in domestic, fortified, cultic or funerary contexts. While the chronological timeframe varies from one area to another, all studies fall between the 10th and 1st century BC. Within those parameters, however, the material presented from the Aegean region falls between the end of the Bronze Age and the 6th century BC, while, in the Western Mediterranean, no remains are earlier than the 8th century BC, and, in Thrace, the earliest material dates to the 6th century BC.

The nature of archaeological data available also shapes the nature of the debate. In the Aegean, the fireplaces studied were selected either because they were found in unusual architectural structures, or because their excavation yielded unusual finds pertaining to votive deposits or zoological remains. In the other regional zones discussed, the structure of the fireplaces, rather than their content, was considered. Indeed, the papers concerning Thrace and the Western Mediterranean provide analyses of constructed fireplaces made of decorated clay as this type of fireplace appears much more frequently in settlements of these regions than in the Aegean region.

In each case, the authors describe the hearth structures in terms of their manufacture and decoration, tracing their operational life, use and wear until they are finally abandoned or destroyed. Consequently, this book provides a compilation of the existing structures and their associated literature. The fireplaces analyzed either constitute a lens deposit, are neatly laid over a clay foundation, or are framed with rubble or cut stone; fireplaces in pits feature less frequently in the study. It was observed that clay fireplaces were sometimes decorated using techniques more commonly seen in pottery manufacture, and further future studies of such clay production in household contexts is clearly needed.

While technical aspects are not ignored (namely, how to build and maintain a fireplace), however, artisan skills (such as baking) were not a key focus of the current work, as, in keeping with the themes of our original workshop, ovens were not central to the research. This decision was taken from the outset of the project, as we wanted to focus on the study of fireplaces which were specifically related to ritual practices and we wished to shed light on the social meaning of these particular fireplaces. In every

chapter, questions about the meaning of practices associated with these fireplaces, and as a consequence, about the nature of the buildings which contained them, arise.

When addressing these questions, the Aegean region is exceptional in that the archaeological remains can be supplemented by evidence from the written sources, as demonstrated, for example, in the chapters written by Gunnel Ekroth and Karine Rivière. These authors show how primary sources can be used to bolster interpretations. Ekroth demonstrates that while the main sacrificial act of Greek religion, *thysia*, did take place outside temples, fireplaces inside cult places could also be part of other rituals connected with eating food. Ekroth challenges the idea of a chronological evolution from indoor ritual practices centred on fireplaces to outdoor ritual practices on altars. On the contrary, from the end of the Bronze Age, both practices coexisted. This contemporaneity is attested in the Hyria sanctuary on Naxos, and on the site of Monte Polizzo in West Sicily.

Eva Simantoni-Bournia's chapter on Naxian material proves that meals were shared and cult activities practiced for over a century around an indoor fireplace which was renovated several times. This occurred inside the cult building, but rituals might also have been performed near the outdoor altar, although we have less information about this structure. Simantoni-Bournia's study underlines that this commensality probably played a significant role in forging Naxian identity between the end of the Geometric and the beginning of the Archaic periods.

Rivière is also interested in the cultural and social implications of fireplaces. In her chapter, she distinguishes the various ways these structures could be used (*i.e.* in meal preparation, eating or making an offering) through her study of published faunal remains. Rivière has traced a progressive differentiation between these fireplaces from the 10th century BC onwards. The indoor fireplaces used for commensality are not constructed as carefully nor are they as monumental as the fireplaces used for sacrifices of the *thysia* type. Furthermore, from her comparative study of the testimonies of Homer and Hesiod, Rivière interprets this distinction as material expression of the conflicting relationship between Greek societies and the divine, where societies sought balance between intimacy and remoteness.

The work of Jérémy Lamaze, in presenting a historiography of the material record, allows us to better appreciate the various interpretations which have been put forward for buildings containing fireplaces in the Aegean world. Consequently, his paper provides key information for a critique of the hypotheses formulated in the present book. The contributions, in their totality, provide a qualified overview of the practices taking place within buildings containing fireplaces in the Aegean world, proving that these buildings were probably not as exclusively specialized as they were in the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

The chapter I wrote lies at the tipping point between both types of cultural contexts studied in the present book, *i.e.* between ancient Greek cities and other settlements where no written source can help with the analysis. The comparative study of the fireplaces considered as cultic in Thracian settlements with fireplaces either

inside temples of the Greek colonies of the northern Aegean (mainly in Thasos and Samothrace or inside the houses of Olynthus), demonstrated that we cannot define a building as cultic simply because it contains a fireplace. This statement is corroborated by the picture put forward by Zornitsa Krasteva. Her study, presenting some unpublished findings, shows that laid fireplaces made of decorated clay appear in all kinds of structures. They are found in Thrace, from the 4th century until the 1st century BC, inside a house, in a public building, in a fortified tower and in a funerary monument. Their associated decoration does not demonstrate any regional specificity, but rather recycles techniques or motifs which can be found on local ceramics at this time. We meet the same type of fireplaces in the Western Mediterranean, with an identical *floruit* between the 4th century and the 1st century BC in Southern Gaul and the Iberian Peninsula. There too, carefully laid fireplaces constructed of decorated clay appear in various contexts, including domestic, funerary and cultic, at least in cases where identification is possible. A few of these are of impressive size, exceeding the usual measurement of 1m diameter or 1m² which we might call monumental. Among these monumental fireplaces, is the laid fireplace format with decorated clay, as seen in the “throne room” of the royal quarter of Seuthopolis in Thrace. This example is almost 3m wide, having the same diameter as that of the lenticular fireplace within a wide circular building of the 8th century BC at Monte Polizello in Western Sicily. Other fireplaces stand out because of their shape, such as the “ingot” or “cowhide” variety of the Iberian Peninsula, dating from the 8th century to the 3rd century BC. While we do not associate any specific symbolic meaning with the decoration of these fireplaces, we can infer from the care and attention given to their finish that these structures held particular importance for the people who gathered around them.

Birgit Öhlinger’s study in Western Sicily is striking for the diversity of contexts presented, including domestic, funerary and cult places; we already mentioned the case of Monte Polizzo, where an indoor fireplace coexisted with an outdoor altar in the beginning of the 6th century BC. But her study also provides two examples from the Archaic period (Monte Iato and Monte Polizello) showing a clear transition from a room for indoor feasting around the hearth, to a cult place with an outdoor altar. In both cases, feasting did continue to take place, along with new ritual practices attested by offerings of valuable votives. The Archaic period is also the moment when new delimited places for shared meals, *i.e.* banqueting rooms, appear elsewhere, in Monte Iato and Sabucina.

Further west, and in Thrace, we do not have the opportunity to trace such a close connection between fireplaces and altars. We should not be surprised if the activities associated with the fireplaces (including the preparation and consumption of food, heat and lighting) were accompanied by ritual practices, but this has not, as yet, been clearly documented in the archaeological record. We have no reason to view the buildings containing these more elaborate fireplaces as temples or sanctuaries, because the evidence otherwise points to domestic space.

The work of Birgit Öhlinger in Sicily, Claire-Anne de Chazelles in Southern Gaul, and Maria Carme Belarte in the Iberian Peninsula, prove that most of the buildings with indoor fireplaces are both domestic spaces (and part of the structural habitat) and meeting places (usually involving some food and drink) and probably played a significant role for the wider community, beyond the family unit. Fireplaces presented by Birgit Öhlinger, Claire-Anne De Chazelles, Maria Carme Belarte and Zornitsa Krasteva are also noteworthy in that clay fire dogs (sometimes partly decorated in the shape of a horse's or ram's head) were sometimes discovered in and around them. These decorated fire dogs contribute to our understanding of the particular role of the fireplaces within these rooms while also being representative of the marked prestige of the related house.

While our wider study of indoor fireplaces indicated that practices associated with these features could be very similar from one region to the other, especially when dealing with commensality rituals; however, we also observed clear regional differences, such as the type of fireplace used and the architectural context in which such ritual took place. We must also admit that the wider range of possible practices around the fireplaces remains unknown, especially in Thrace and the Iberian Peninsula where no written source can help us to even imagine them. In these cases, it was useful to approach the archaeological material using comparative diachronic and inter-regional studies, without necessarily tracing direct corridors of influence between these contexts. This wider synthesis allowed us to highlight strong trends in societies of the northern Mediterranean in the first millennium BC.

In the Aegean world and Archaic Western Sicily, there seems to be a delicate balance between restrictive indoor fireside activity (dining and symposia) and outdoor fireside activity, usually altar offerings, open to many. It is certain, however, that in practicing both collective activities, social groups reinforced their identity and social structure. Our studies observed widespread processes of both differentiation and specialization in fireplaces, which in turn highlighted the flexibility of the Early Iron Age structures. In the other regions studied, we did not notice, at least archaeologically, a close relationship between inside and outside space, but rather between rooms with fireplaces of different sizes or degrees of decoration.

Also, in every context we highlighted the usefulness of archaeozoological analysis, which provides very specific data about the different uses of the fireplaces and the products consumed over and around them, as for example in Monte Iato, where seafood is eaten in the banqueting rooms, and meat in the outdoor feasts.

From one end of the Mediterranean to the other, studies of the hearth centre on how society is structured in terms of hierarchy and social cohesion. Pivotal to understanding these bonds and divisions is the question of who can access the fireplaces, and consequently, how food is shared. On this basis, we can say that building a fireplace is a fundamental foundation stone in building the world to which it belongs.