

## Introduction

This current research explores the topic of social inequality in Neolithic Greece, (c. 6800 to 3200 BCE). While the Neolithic period in modern-day Greece is generally characterized by a more egalitarian social organization compared to later civilizations, evidence suggests that social distinctions and inequalities may have existed. Through selected cases from Thessaly and Macedonia (**Fig.1**), this study examines the available archaeological evidence related to potential social differentiation, through architectural expressions, material culture and burial practices.

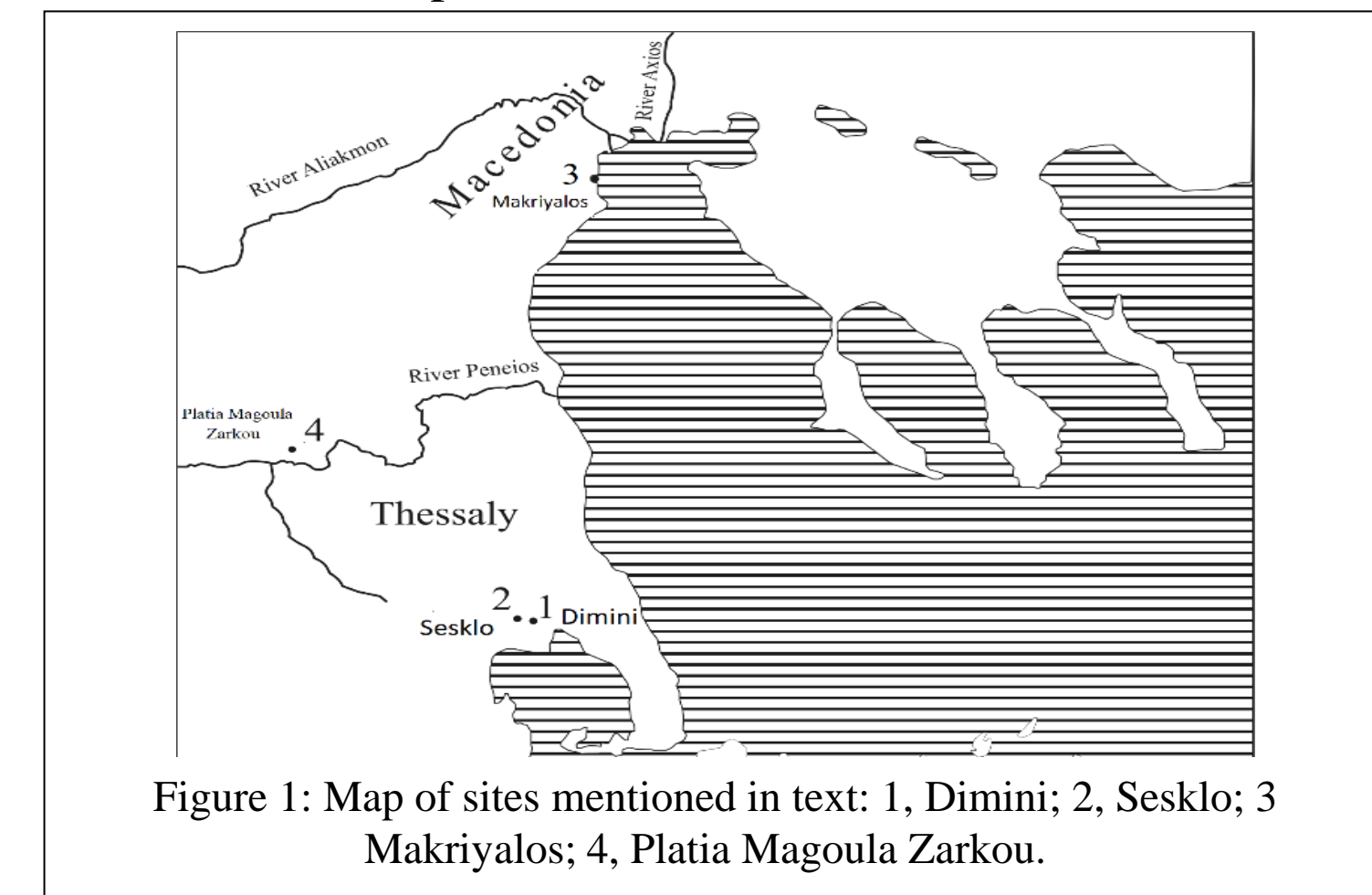


Figure 1: Map of sites mentioned in text: 1, Dimini; 2, Sesklo; 3, Makriyalos; 4, Platia Magoula Zarkou.

Houses at Sesklo B are built in tight clusters, with many common walls and considerably less open space in their immediate vicinity. (Kotsakis 1999). The duality of the organization is further stressed by the existence of the so-called 'fortifications' on the southwest part of the acropolis, physically demarcating the limits of the two areas. However, it seems to have symbolically stressed the spatial distinction between the two sectors, rather than having a defensive role.

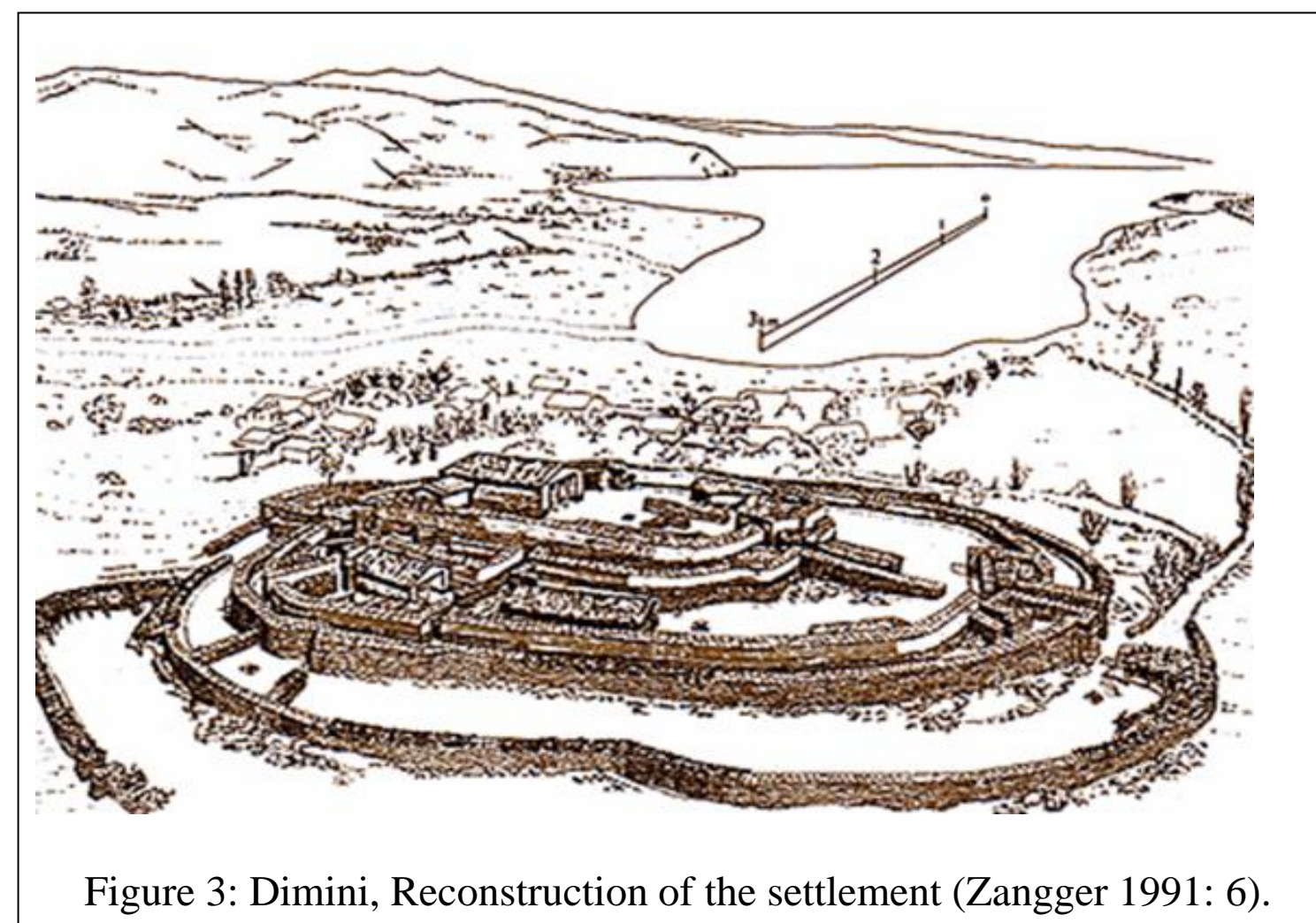


Figure 3: Dimini, Reconstruction of the settlement (Zangger 1991: 6).

Dimini, which flourished during the Late Neolithic, has a fortification system of 6 or 7 concentric circuit walls, with some of them as close as 1m., while the original number of walls is unknown (Fig.3). Spatial contexts between the walls can be divided into Houses (used as domestic buildings where a range of activities was carried out) Structures (non-domestic buildings, work areas, and open spaces), and Buildings (bearing characteristics from both Houses and Structures). The architectural remains at Dimini do not provide explicit indications of social inequality or a hierarchical social structure. Any status-related notion of 'authority' or control at Dimini would have been fluid rather than institutionalized and connected with parameters like gender, age, experience, kin affiliation and genealogy. Inequalities were apparently informal and ephemeral, roles and status complementary, and power forms and relations heterarchical and shifting (Souvatzi 2008).

## Burials

The cemetery of **Platia Magoula Zarkou** was used only at the beginning of Late Neolithic I and contained only cremations of children and adults (**Fig. 4**). The cemetery was organized outside the boundaries of the settlement and was possibly delimited by a kind of enclosure, as a wall built with stone construction was found, which was contemporaneous with the cemetery and probably separated it from the settlement/residential area (Gallis 1982). Moreover, a possible crematorium, in the cemetery part and on the same level as the cremation burials, which had significant traces of burning, burnt human bones, scattered coals, and potsherds, with the addition of some red non-finished bricks, was identified (Gallis 1996). The custom of cremation seems to have been applied to all ages (infants, children, and adults), and gender does not seem to have been of importance (Andreou et al. 1996).

The general homogeneity of mortuary practices implies either the absence of intra-group differentiation and social ranking or, that mortuary ritual was not used or intended to visibly differentiate groups within the social structure (Fowler 2004).



Fig. 4: Urn Late Neolithic Cremation, Platia Magoula Zarkou (Gallis 1996: 342).



Fig. 5: Adult individual burial inside the Ditch A, Makriyalos I (Pappa 2008: 22).

On the other hand, **Makriyalos** is an extensive settlement where primary and secondary burials were found, and it consists of two phases. Makriyalos I (pre-Diminian LN) and Makriyalos II (end of LN) were extended to the southern and northern slopes of the hill respectively. In addition, Makriyalos I contained a system of trenches. In Phase I of the extensive settlement, within the embankments of Ditch A, 19 articulated skeletons from primary and secondary burials were found, which had been dumped directly into the trench, where they were left without special care (**Fig. 5**). In addition, there were scattered bones of 38 individuals, while smaller amounts of human remains were found scattered in the residential embankments. Disarticulated human bones were also found in Trench B, along with scattered ones in the residential embankments, a total of 13 individuals. In Phase II of the settlement, at least 6 individuals, adults and children, were scattered in the residential embankments. Again, there was careless disposal, as there is the example of an entire human skeleton that was thrown into a deep pit. In total, 11 individuals are represented by the dislocated bones. The set of disarticulated bones found in the residential embankments does not appear to be a remnant of disturbance, and no preference is observed for any particular part of the human skeleton from the set of individual bones. All parts are represented, although women are more likely to be disarticulated, while 38% is corresponding to infants and children (Triantaphyllou 2008).

## Material Culture

At **Sesklo**, differences seem to apply also to the distribution of painted pottery even though clay sources were local. Of the total amount of painted pottery at Sesklo A, 72.5% was made of a technologically more advantageous calcareous clay, whereas 75% of the painted pottery from Sesklo B was made of reddish noncalcareous clay (**Fig. 6**). This pattern suggests social differences had an economic dimension, as well as an ideological asymmetry with longevity and continuity, although not necessarily a formally stratified society with an 'elite' controlling production (Kotsakis 1999). Calcareous clays do seem to be more used more at Sesklo A than at Sesklo B, although statements cannot be made out of the small number of samples.

Thus, we might have for the first time in Neolithic Greece, some more visible evidence for differential access to a specific raw material, that can be seen spatially and with potentially important implications for the social structure at the site.

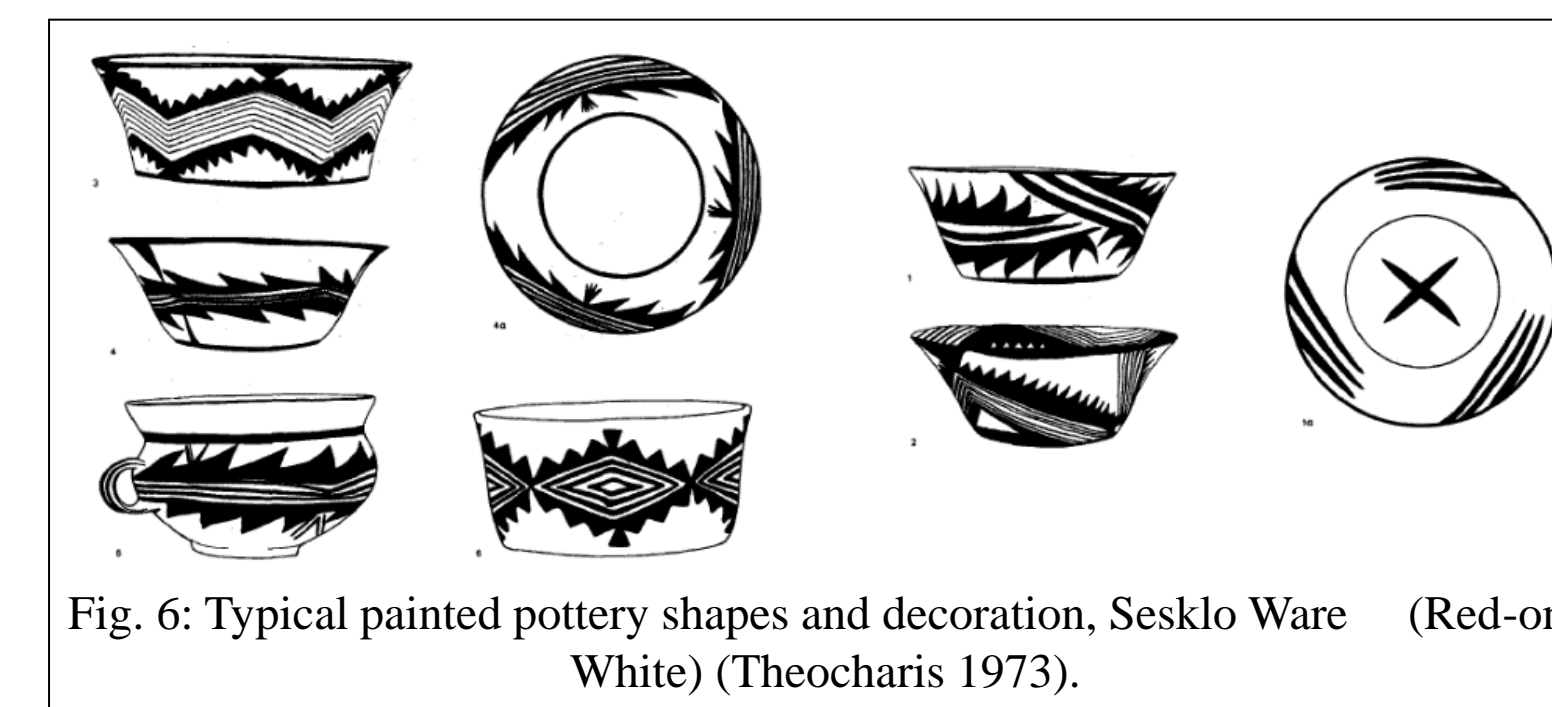


Fig. 6: Typical painted pottery shapes and decoration, Sesklo Ware (Red-on-White) (Theocharis 1973).

**Makriyalos Pierias:** Remains of communal consumption of food are found in the large shallow pit 'Pi' (also in pit 'Xi') (**Fig. 7**). On the available evidence, pit 'Pi' has been interpreted as a single consumption event (or several events over a short period of time), where consumption involved a large number of people. Serving vessels are highly standardized in terms of technology and style and all decorative forms are present. The communality of pit 'Pi' is further underlined by cooking vessels, which do not differ either in size or in shape and technology from those found in 'domestic' contexts. Technological and stylistic homogeneity implies that the serving of food in this communal context bore a strong sense of equality between households or groups. None of the pottery had anything special – in terms of shape, size, or decoration – that would separate it from the rest of that group. Therefore, ceramic evidence offers no suggestion of a social hierarchy (Urem-Kotsou and Kostas Kotsakis 2007).

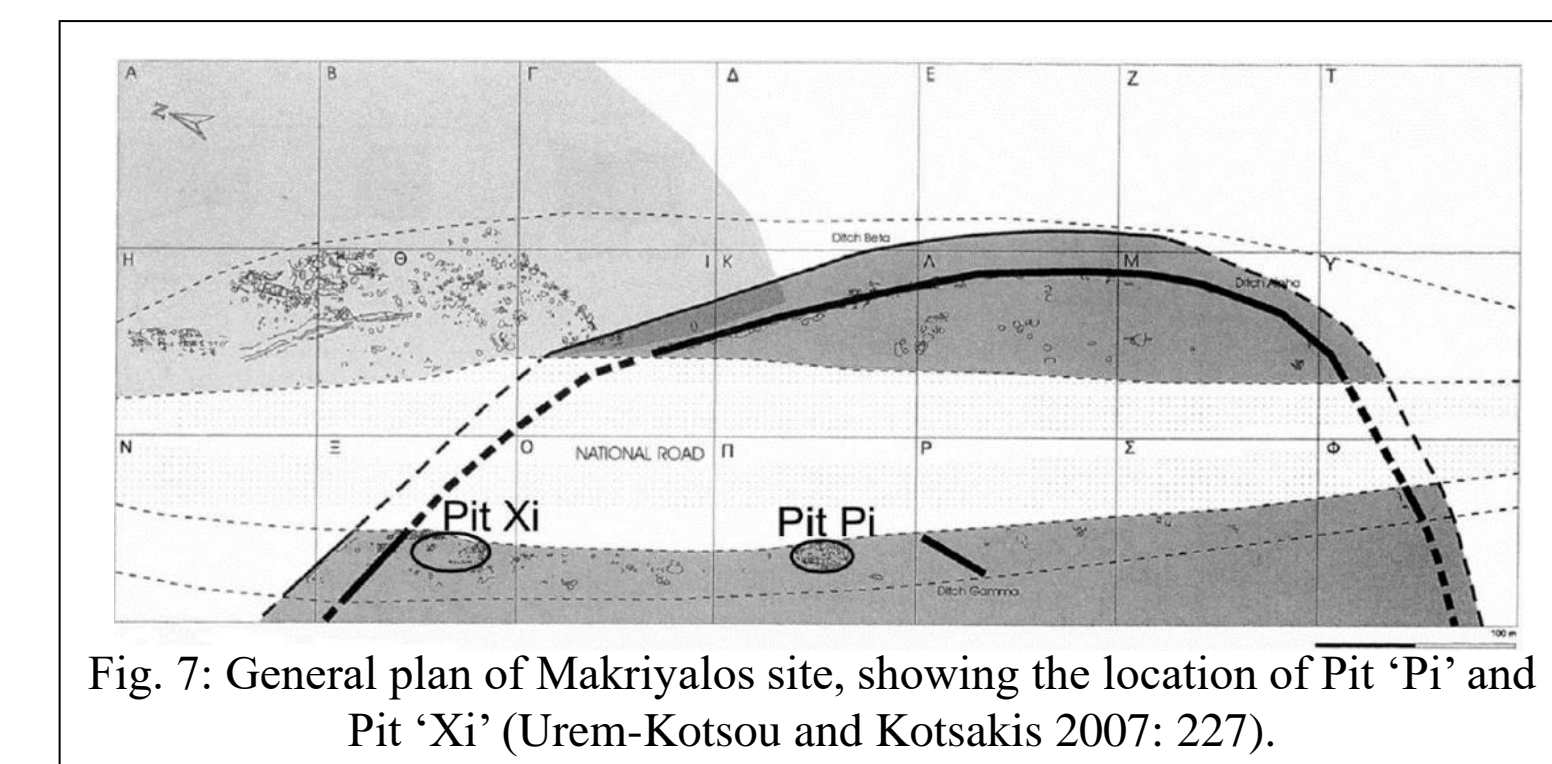


Fig. 7: General plan of Makriyalos site, showing the location of Pit 'Pi' and Pit 'Xi' (Urem-Kotsou and Kotsakis 2007: 227).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, it has to be considered that, every time we try to relate archaeological observations with social interaction in prehistory, we are dealing with forms that are fluid, dynamic, and temporal, and therefore in a constant state of change. Moreover, it is essential to take into consideration the limitations of the available evidence, which the different interpretations of social organization and inequality in prehistoric societies heavily rely on. The relatively egalitarian nature of Neolithic Greek societies, suggests that social distinctions and inequalities were not as pronounced as in later periods, like the more explicit expressions of social inequality that would emerge in the subsequent Bronze Age.

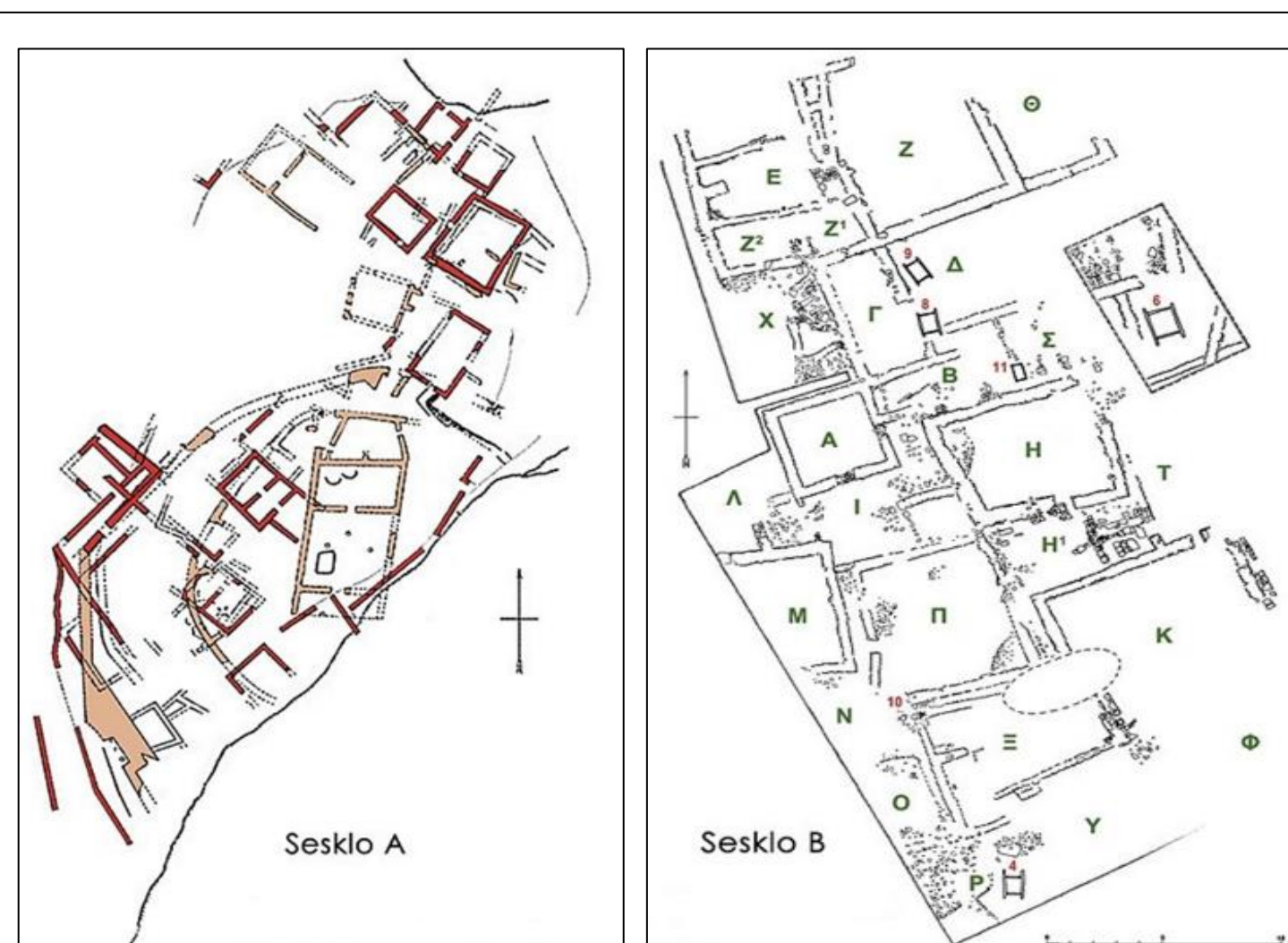


Figure 2: Sesklo A (Acropolis) and B (Polis) (Theocharis 1993: fig. 43).