

**Papazoi Elli**, University of Graz, *Waiting for the catastrophe... The interaction between man and nature in Akrotiri on the island of Thera.*

### **Abstract**

The prehistoric settlement of Akrotiri at Thera developed itself in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC and was the cosmopolitan centre at the heart of the Aegean. The settlement was destroyed after a huge earthquake in the late Cycladic I (around 1550 BC) period. Although this catastrophe did not break the spirit of its inhabitants and they soon started to rebuild their houses with an architecture that witnesses an unprecedented technological level. Multi-level residences, public toilets and marvelous frescoes inside private buildings show us how developed and wealthy the society was compared to other cultural centres of Eastern Mediterranean. The later eruption of the volcano of Thera completely destroyed the city of Akrotiri and preserved it for centuries. Therefore the island is also known as the 'Pompeii of the Aegean', but in comparison to its famous counterpart from the Italian peninsula, not a single buried corpse could be found inside the collapsed buildings and city streets. Together with the limited number of small finds, Akrotiri appears to be thoroughly 'evacuated' and cleared before the catastrophe. Changes in the architectural structure of the buildings in the final years before the eruption can be interpreted as some kind of early warning mechanism and maybe helped the islanders to elude imminent danger. Therefore all archaeological observations on Thera can not only help us reconstruct the daily life of its former inhabitants but also reveal a glimpse into the interaction between single individuals and the might of their surrounding natural environment.