

THE SPREAD OF ARMING TO THE ADRIATIC: NEW INSIGHTS FROM DALMATIA

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During the early Holocene the climate and vegetation in the Adriatic Basin were noticeably different from the present day. Sea levels were well below their Holocene maximum and many present-day islands were still attached to the mainland. These conditions influenced not only human adaptations during the Mesolithic but also the inception of farming. Mesolithic sites were sparsely distributed throughout the Adriatic hinterlands. Any coastal sites will have been lost to rising sea levels. There seems to have been a hiatus between Mesolithic occupation of the region and the appearance of farming. The impetus for the spread of farming to the central Mediterranean had much to do with demographic imperatives internal to the system but also coincided with the climatic fluctuations associated with the 8,200 CalBP event, suggesting that environmental change was a significant factor.

Early Neolithic sites that document the arrival of farming have been found on numerous islands in the Adriatic and on the mainland from southeast Italy around to Albania and northern Greece. The first farmers were highly selective in their choice of places in which to settle. They preferred locations near the coast with ample arable land to cultivate, often valleys with rich agricultural soils and open plains suitable for cultivation. They eschewed the rugged hill country for settlement, preferring to use it for grazing.

The Early Farming in Dalmatia Project has illuminated these choices and has provided evidence for the nature of the farming economy and the impact of its arrival. Through excavation of two key sites, Pokrovnik (EN and MN) and Danilo (MN), we have learned that the agricultural economy that was established in Dalmatia at the beginning of the Neolithic was a mixed farming system that included the full range of domestic crops and animals familiar from their origins in western Asia. This new way of life would have had a profound impact on the landscape. Its arrival was sudden: it was brought in by migrating farmers from regions to the southeast who traveled along the coasts and spread rapidly through most of the Adriatic region.