

THE LATE CAMPSITE OF 'OURIAKOS' ON THE ISLAND OF LEMNOS: HUMAN GROUPS ON THE MOVE AT THE PLEISTOCENE/HOLOCENE BOUNDARY IN THE NORTHERN AEGEAN

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The pre-neolithic campsite of 'Ouriakos' is situated at the southeast coast of Lemnos, an island in northern Aegean. It came to light inadvertently in the summer of 2006. Bulldozing done in order to create a parking area for those going to the adjacent beach, exposed the occupation layers of the early site over an area of some size (one exceeds 1,500 square meters). The first official visit was made to the site in 2007, and this, in turn, led to the systematic collection of material on the site's rich surface (some of the grid 1 x 1 meter squares have yielded as many as one hundred pieces of chipped stone as well as fragments of shell) and to the excavations that followed in the years from 2008 through 2011.

The remarkable number of lithics recovered at Ouriakos – already well over 15, 000 pieces - come from good local sources of raw material as well as the exploitation of pebbles collected from nearby beaches. The most characteristic tools at the site are lunates and end-scrapers, which are attributed on typological ground to the time at the end of the Pleistocene called the final Epigravettian . The first radiocarbon dates will be run soon, and it is expected that the dates will fall in and around the 11th millennium cal BC in line with the typological attribution. In short, the dominant presence of 'lunate' microlithic assemblage should go back to what is called the Younger Dryas in terms of the earth's climate history. At this early stage of the investigation, it is not to be ruled out that there may well be some lithic material at the site dating to a slightly younger age (that is, the earliest phase of the Mesolithic in the Aegean). As the excavation and the study of the lithic assemblages are currently in progress all these issues are open further definition and refinement.

The contribution of the material recovered at the Ouriakos campsite to the larger picture of the northern Aegean basin at the time of the Pleistocene/Holocene boundary is important. It points to a good coastal location, defined by a stream passing on one side of the site, which gives its name to the locality, which was repeatedly visited by groups of hunters and foragers over a span of time that may have lasted for a millennium (12.000 and 10.000 cal BC).

There are many interesting questions to be asked: were those who camped at the site mainly interested in hunting or did they practice land and sea foraging as well? Had they reached what is called Lemnos today by walking over stretches of dry land from Anatolia (at a time of lower sea-level) before it became an island? Or they were crossing in some places narrow sealanes at a time the area was already gradually becoming an island due to the progressive rise in sea level? Will it be possible for the archaeologist to record the fascinating and complex processes of environmental, cultural and social change archaeologically in either direct or indirect ways? And is it possible that, by the end of the Palaeolithic in this part of the Mediterranean basin, two different ways of life may be present at more or less the same time: one looking back with an eye to hunting and the other looking forward with an eye toward coastal foraging?