

## THE AEGEAN MESOLITHIC: ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMY, AND SEAFARING

Adamantios Sampson

Professor Emeritus, Department of Mediterranean Studies, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece.

The re-establishment of the environment during the early Holocen is one of the most principal aims of the research, in order to interpret the behavioural patterns of the prehistoric people who crossed the Aegean during the final Paleolithic and Mesolithic period. The multitude of questions which arise from the archaeological record would find much simpler answers if one had to hand the area's environmental situation as it was 11,000 years ago. It is very likely the microenvironments that were created at the beginning of the Holocen very probably took dramatic dimensions much more serious than these in central and western Europe. The hunters and foragers that lived in regions of the Aegean had to face the all contrarities of new environment, deprived of the usual alimentary sources that probably existed still in the mainland.

The Aegean Mesolithic may also be viewed as a period with sharp regional differentiation and economic complexity as well as a period of experimentation, regarding food procurence. Elements of proto- neolithization, appearing in the Aegean during the Mesolithic, may indicate, on the one hand, the possible local existence of domestication cases, resulting of economic social habitats and land use particularities as well as the existence of a focus of neolithization, comparable to the Cypriote one. On the other hand, they presume the possibility of direct or indirect contacts between local populations and Eastern groups as well as sea routes or ideas on their diffusion during Pre Pottery Neolithic.

The similarities of the Mesolithic tools from the Cyclops Cave with them of the southeast Anatolia (the area of Antalya) and the common stone industry of Ikaria and Kythnos, as well as the transportation of the obsidian from Melos and Yali to different parts of the Aegean lead to the assumption that sea routes existed at least since the 9<sup>th</sup> mill. BC.. Smaller sea routes could existed among the islands of the central and southern Aegean serving for the distribution of Melos and Yali obsidian to the Mesolithic centers. A new Mesolithic site in Naxos is lying in the course of the voyage from Ikaria to Melos. Another one was responsible for the transport of Melian obsidian to the Dodecanese (Chalki island).

A sea route is supposed to be in use in the Upper Mesolithic connecting Melos to Crete. Obsidian artifacts from Melos resembling the Aegean Mesolithic counterparts is present in Knossos aceramic levels from 7000 BC. Another sea route could exist connecting the southern Peloponnese to Crete via the Kythera and Antikythera islands.

Presupposition for the cultural diffusion from the East to the Aegean islands are the Pre-pottery Neolithic sea routes in the eastern Mediterranean, especially between Anatolia, the Levantine coast and Cyprus. It is very likely that this marine communication and the contacts were not unilateral but reciprocal and became also from both directions that is to say from the east to the west and vice versa.