

Research on the Upper Palaeolithic in Greece: 2001-2005

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In the period between 2001 and 2005 a small number of excavation and survey projects provided the Greek Palaeolithic record with much needed data on the Early and the Final Upper Palaeolithic. At the same time the surveys provided information on areas hitherto devoid of or poor in evidence of human activity during the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic. The new information will allow the scientific community to re-address capital issues of the early Greek prehistory. The principal sites and areas mentioned in the text are shown in figure 1.

Excavations

Peloponnese

Klisoura gorge caves

The excavations in caves 1, 4 and 7 in Klisoura gorge provide new evidence on two crucial issues of Palaeolithic research in Greece, those of the Early Upper Palaeolithic and the late/final Upper Palaeolithic.

The excavations in Cave 1 (Koumouzelis *et al.* 2001) yielded a sequence of Middle Palaeolithic layers overlain by an early Upper Palaeolithic industry, which in turn is succeeded by Aurignacian layers. The latter are considered by the excavators to be "... the first well-dated sequence of Aurignacian occupation in Greece" (Karkanias *et al.* 2004). The Aurignacian layers present a number of clay-lined structures that indicate intentional use of clay for their preparation between 32-34 kyr (*ibid.*).

On the other hand excavations in caves 4 and 7 served to minimize the chronostratigraphic gap of cave 1 and provided much needed information for the period between the Epi-Gravettian end the Mesolithic in the Argolid (Koumouzelis *et al.* 2004).

Lakonias cave

The site, situated on the eastern coast of the Mani peninsula, has yielded a long sequence of Middle Palaeolithic and

Initial Upper Palaeolithic layers dated radiometrically between ca 100 and 40 kyr (Panagopoulou *et al.* 2004). Of special interest is the direct association of a Neanderthal tooth with an Initial Upper Palaeolithic assemblage dated between 44 and 38 kyr. The technology of the Initial Upper Palaeolithic assemblage seems to be an *in situ* development from the underlying Middle Palaeolithic industries (Panagopoulou *et al.* 2004:339-346). The site is of particular importance in evaluating the Middle-to-Upper Palaeolithic transition in Greece.

The evidence from the Klisoura gorge cave 1, combined with the data from Kephalaria cave and Lakonis cave, supports the formation of a coherent picture on the Upper Palaeolithic in eastern Peloponnese (Koumouzelis *et al.* 2001).

Thessaly

Theopetra cave

A new dating program was initiated in order to establish a solid chronological framework for the Middle, Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic sequence of the site.

Epirus

District of Thesprotia

Concentrations of large numbers of palaeolithic artefacts were recovered in the course of rescue excavations along the axis of construction of a major developmental project (that of *Egnatia Odos* running from Igoumenitsa to Thessaloniki and Turkey). The artefacts are assigned mostly to the Middle Palaeolithic; a considerable number exhibit Early Upper Palaeolithic traits (Palli 2004). The study and publication of the assemblages is pending.

Surveys

Epirus, District of Preveza

In the period between 1992 and 1996 a survey of the Preveza region was undertaken in the course of a joint project between

the Boston University (via the American School of Classical Studies at Athens) on one hand and the IB' Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the 8th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities on the other. The project results were published in 2003 (Wiseman & Zachos 2003). The project focussed on tracing human activity from prehistoric to historical times through cultural remains and landscape alteration. In the course of the project a number of locations with remains of palaeolithic activity (exclusively stone artefacts) were recorded and a number of known sites such as Kokkinopilos were revisited (Runnels & van Andel 2003). The Palaeolithic is represented by a number of Early and Middle Palaeolithic findspots, an early Upper Palaeolithic site (Runnels *et al.* 2003) and a number of Mesolithic findspots (Runnels and van Andel 2003).

Western Macedonia, District of Grevena

The project was initiated in 2002 in order to test the validity of the theory that mountains in early prehistory served as passages and communication channels and not as barriers, despite the lack of finds at altitudes over 600 m. so far (Efstratiou *et al.* 2003). The surveyed area is located in western Macedonia (District of Grevena) at an altitude of 1600-1800 m. Twenty seven locations (all open air) of concentrations of lithic artifacts were recorded during the first research seasons. The project was continued in 2004; eight (8) more locations with Middle Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic finds were recorded, whilst the surveys were supplemented by trial-trenches in two locations.

The preliminary results support the hypothesis that high altitude areas served as "... passages between mountainous areas and that Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer groups were constantly moving to different directions through mountaintops and not river routes, as usually thought" (Efstratiou *et al.* 2004:628).

Western Peloponnese, District of Elis

Surveys between 1997 and 1998 increased the number of findspots with Palaeolithic artefacts in the area known from the 1960's as a result of research conducted by the French Archaeological School. The new locations provided artefacts of aurignacian and gravettian character (Matzanas 2004).

Congress and Theses Publications

The proceedings of an International Conference on Zooarchaeology held at Athens in 1999 were published in 2003 in the BSA Studies Series (Kotjabopoulou *et al.* 2003). The proceedings cover aspects of methodology and application of zooarchaeological studies involving material from various cultural periods and a number of excavations in Greece.

The year 2003 also witnessed the publication of the latest so far thesis on Upper Palaeolithic technology, based upon the assemblages from Kastritsa cave, Klithi rockshelter and Franchthi cave (Elefanti 2003). The book explores the concept of specialisation in subsistence strategies as traced through the study of lithic technology.

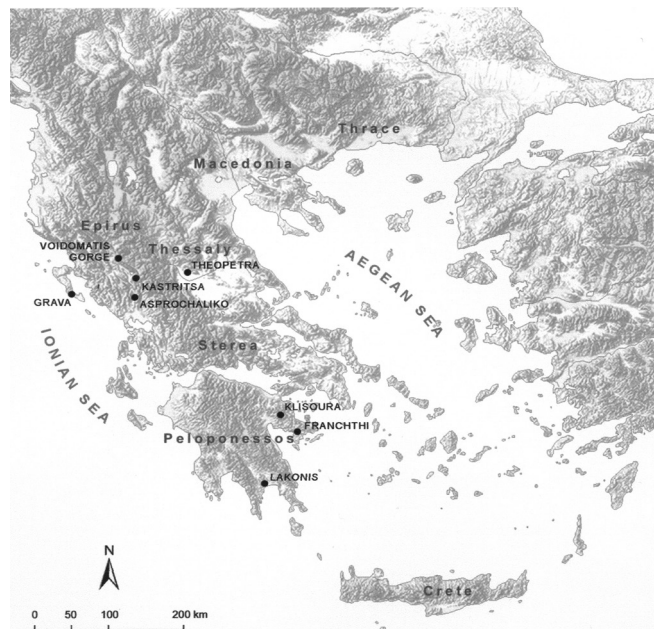


Figure 1. Map of Greece showing the main sites mentioned in the text.

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