

7. UPPER PALAEOLITHIC RESEARCH IN GREECE (1990-1996)

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INTRODUCTION

Palaeolithic research in Greece has recently expanded through surveys across large geographical areas, through excavations, and through subsequent publications. The Upper Palaeolithic (UPL) remains the best documented period, its study supported by a number of excavations, while the Middle Palaeolithic (MPL) is represented mostly by surface finds and fewer excavated sites. At the same time, there is an increase in the number of possible Lower Palaeolithic finds.

The main issues are still the investigation of the early UPL, while the new information brings to light sequences ranging from the UPL to the Mesolithic (ML) / Neolithic (NL) that will gradually broaden our perspective on the development of the food-producing stage.

The information presented here is the combined result of projects undertaken by international archaeological Schools and the Greek Archaeological Service.

SITES (fig. 1)

Lefkas

Salvage work on the island brought to light concentrations of stone artefacts in various locations, most belonging to the MPL period (DOUSOGLI, in prep.). However, the presence of UPL artefacts in these assemblages cannot be ruled out.

Preveza Region

The surveys of Boston University resulted in the location of traces of Palaeolithic activity on the Koumasaki promontory near Alonaki, which include UPL artefacts (NIKOPOLIS Newsletter n°4, 1994/95 : 6-7, WISEMAN 1995 : 19, 20). At Spilaio, near Preveza, an Aurignacian site rich in stone artefacts is reported to have been discovered; the finds are still under study (RUNNELS 1995: 714).

Aetolia and Akarnania

Papakonstantinou reports the location of Upper Palaeolithic finds in the wider Agrinio area (PAPAKONSTANTINOY 1991: 23-26).

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Thessaly

A survey of the *Larissa area* on the *Peneios river* terraces revealed numerous MPL findspots, some of which include both Middle and Upper Palaeolithic artefacts (RUNNELS 1994 : 55). The absence of later UPL and ML finds in the surveyed area (*ibid*) is of interest, especially in the light of the excavated sequences in Theopetra cave, western Thessaly.

Theopetra cave

Theopetra Cave is a large cave, 3km south-east of Kalambaka, situated on the mount of Theopetra which dominates the valley of the small Lithaios river. Systematic excavations were begun in 1987 by the Palaeoanthropology-Speleology Ephorate under the direction of Ms. A. Kyparissi. The ongoing excavations have revealed a stratigraphic sequence over 5 m. deep, which ranges from the Pleistocene to the Holocene and includes MPL, UPL, ML, NL and later occupation horizons.

The UPL industries come from deposits of uneven horizontal distribution and whose thickness does not exceed 2 m. The available radiometric dates bracket the sequence between c. 37000 - 10000 B.P. (KYPARISSI, in prep.; for discussion on the dates see FAKORELLIS *et al.*, in prep.). Preliminary examination of the industries indicates systematic blade/bladelet production and in situ exploitation of locally available pebbles and nodules (mostly of flint and radiolarite). Backed bladelet types dominate the tool assemblages, which also include truncations, retouched blades and end-scrapers (ADAM *et al.*, in prep.).

The partially preserved skeleton of an adult individual (STRAVOPODI *et al.*, in prep.) has been recovered from the UPL deposits and has been dated to c. 16000 B.P. (KYPARISSI *op.cit*).

Thrace

A number of debitage products on light red patinated flint were located by the Neolithic settlement of Makri during salvage excavations. The artefacts were found 2m below surface in a limestone matrix within a pit lined with small flat stones and alongside animal bones. The sample displays clear bladelet production characteristics and is possibly of Late UPL date. (EFSTRATIOU 1995 : 650).

Northwestern Peloponnese.

Eleohori : two open-air sites were located some 700m NE of the village Eleohori by the feet of Movri Mountain, 7km from the sea.

The sites (Eleohori 1 and 2) are at a distance of 200m from each other and according to Darlas originally formed a single unit which was separated subsequently by erosion. A section cut by a nearby stream reveals a stratigraphy with four distinguishable layers. The finds in both cases come from the upper layer (layer 4) (DARLAS 1991 : 137).

Eleohori 1 yielded 235 patinated artefacts made of flint; their small size is attributed to the small original size of the local raw material (ibid:139) and include both Middle and Upper Palaeolithic characteristics.

Eleohori 2 yielded over 1300 patinated artefacts manufactured mostly of flint, with quartz, quartzite and other materials. The raw materials were collected in the form of river pebbles. The industries are considered by Darlas to be "archaic atypical Aurignacian" (ibid : 156). The presence of MPL traits leads the author to interpret the finds as representing a transitional stage from the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic (DARLAS in prep.). No dates exist for these finds and their stratigraphic and cultural context have not yet been tested by excavations.

Eastern Peloponnese.

Klissoura Gorge. A joint research project was initiated in 1993 in the Argolid, by the Palaeoanthropology-Speleology Ephorate and the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. The survey located 36 caves, a third of which retained prehistoric deposits providing evidence for use in the late Pleistocene - Early Holocene. In some cases later periods are also represented (KOUMOUZELIS *et al.*, in press). Following the surveys, test excavations were undertaken in three caves. Geological surveys conducted alongside the excavations investigated the provenance of raw materials used in the industries and demonstrated that most were local (ibid).

The earliest UPL evidence comes from Cave 1, where the lowest levels yielded a flake industry with rare retouched tools dominated by carinated and nosed scrapers, with a few bladelets and cores and a considerable presence of splintered pieces. Two bone points complete this industry, which has been dated between 20000 and 16000 B.P. and exhibits, according to the excavators (ibid), clear Aurignacian features comparable to those from lithic Phase I at Franchthi Cave as discussed by Perlès (PERLÈS 1987 : 89-96). Recently Epigravettian cultural remains were located on the terrace of Cave 1, filling the gap in the sequence, while the Aurignacian sequence was followed up to a depth of 1,60m. (KOZLOWSKI, pers. com.).

Cave 4 (layers 4-7) yielded industries attributed to the Late Glacial and characterised by blade/bladelet technology, backed bladelet types, end-scrapers, burins, the use of the microburin technique; the industries are comparable to Franchthi Lithic Phase IV (PERLÈS 1987 : 115-29).

Cave 7 also yielded Late Upper Palaeolithic industries dated to c. 10000 B.P. similar to those from Cave 4 but for the absence of the microburin technique. (KOUMOUZELIS *et al. op.cit.*).

Epirus

Boila: Rockshelter at the mouth of the lower Vikos gorge, formed in the Eocene limestone at an altitude of some 550m. Situated on the left bank of Voidomatis river and at some 11m above the present river channel, it faces north and measures 17 m in width and some 5m in depth with a present floor area of c. 80m².

Excavations were initiated in 1993 by the Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology-Speleology under the direction of Ms. E. Kotjabopoulou.

The basis of the stratigraphy is a culturally sterile river terrace (horizon I) overlain by a fine-grained unit (horizon II, dated to 13810±130 B.P.) rich in cultural remains, and followed directly by scree deposits (horizons IIIa and IIIb); the lower one (horizon IIIa) is dated to 12480±120 B.P. and has very little cultural material while the upper (horizon IIIb) is dated between 11173± 453 B.P. and 10190±90 B.P. and is very rich in cultural material and anthropogenic features (KOTJABOPOULOU *et al.* in press). In the area beyond the present dripline a very fine, compacted, sediment lies directly on top of the scree deposit; this deposit (horizon IV), regrettably undated, extremely rich in stone artefacts and preserving no organic material, has not yet been encountered in any other part of the shelter. Its stratigraphic position suggests that it may be later than c-11000 B.P.

The industries are assigned to the Late Upper Palaeolithic, while the possibility of even later phases cannot at the moment be ruled out.

The dominant raw material is flint pebbles collected at the gravels of the nearby Voidomatis river and knapped *in situ*. Other utilized materials include various flint types, radiolarite, and chert, not usually encountered at the immediate vicinity of the site.

Cores are small, showing clearly that the desired debitage product were bladelets which were subsequently modified into backed types. An interesting combination of "armatures" and microburins was recovered from the fine-grained compacted deposit (horizon IV) beyond the present dripline. End-scrapers, burins and notches complete the tool inventory, albeit in smaller numbers. A small number of geometric microliths have also been collected from the top layers of the stratigraphy.

The stone industries exhibit both horizontal and vertical differentiation that may partly be explained by different activities and partly by diachronic differentiation in site use.

The faunal assemblages are of poor preservation. Caprines dominate the faunal collections with chamois as the most common species, while deer is also present. Suids, lagomorphs, microfauna and pisces complete the faunal assemblages. (KOTJABOPOULOU *et al.*, *op.cit.*). A contrast to the very specialised fauna from Klithi (BAILEY *et al.*, 1990 : 158) is apparent. Boila had access to a more diversified territory and hence to a wider range of prey.

SYNTHESIS

The major issues related to the Upper Palaeolithic in Greece and currently being researched are the transition from the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic, the earliest UPL, and the relation of the Late UPL to the ML; the latter period is now represented by an increasing number of finds and excavations.

The principal excavated sites indicate either a stratigraphic hiatus (Asprochaliko) or possess very thin layers on which to rely (Kephalari). The earlier UPL industries from the former site (layer 10) dated to c. 26000 B.P. (Bailey *et al.*, 1983 : 22) are characterised by a predominance of backed bladelet types, while the technology is that of a flake dominated assemblage with single platform cores, and follow a sterile layer overlying Mousterian industries with non-laminar technology and tools on small flakes produced by the distinct 'Asprochaliko Technique' (HUXTABLE *et al.*, 1992; BAILEY *et al.*, 1992).

The ongoing excavations at Theopetra cave revealed a sequence ranging from the MPL to the NL. The stratigraphic correlations are still under investigation, but the Mousterian industries exhibit a strong laminar character, while the UPL ones do not exhibit early traits (ADAM *et al.*, *op.cit.*).

Aurignacian finds have recently been reported from Epirus, the Peloponnese and elsewhere, but most are still in the process of being studied. It looks as though the earlier picture from Franchthi cave will be reinforced, and the continuing research will show whether there is a regional or temporal variation in Greece during the earlier UPL.

The Late UPL is well documented: the results of the ongoing projects at Boila and Klisoursa gorge indicate that this period is well recorded in Greece and supplement the existing record from Epirus (ADAM, 1989) and the Peloponnese (PERLÈS, 1987).

Epirus is one of the best researched areas; a number of studies have focused on the impact of tectonics on landscape formation and modification with reference to human presence in the area (KING *et al.*, 1993; BAILEY *et al.*, 1993). Paleobotanical research has demonstrated that the dominant Late Glacial vegetation was steppe dominated by grasses with limited tree cover (BOTTEMA, 1994; WILLIS, 1992), while the picture that emerges from recent pollen data indicates a more diversified pattern than previously anticipated. The region of western Balkans acted as a refuge area for both trees and animal species. The local glacial phenomena of the Pindus mountains constitute one of the most southerly glaciations in Europe and clearly affected human activity. Palaeoenvironmental factors seem to have affected human activity and are considered responsible for the observed scarcity of occupation in Epirus at the LGM and the more intensified exploitation of the hinterland after 16000 B.P. (Klithi, Megalakkos, Boila). On the other hand, the analysis of the economic parameters points towards regional differences in faunal exploitation and on diachronic change of dominant species (BAILEY *et al.*, 1990).

The main Epirus research project of Cambridge University in the Voidomatis area is currently in the publishing stage. The results of the recent excavations at Klithi and Megalakkos; the geological, palaeoenvironmental, palaeogeographical and dating works in Epirus, as well as their impact on the already existing information from this area, will contribute to a better understanding of human presence in Epirus (BAILEY *in press*).

Another major synthetic work summarizes the diachronic evidence of human presence in the Argolid, Peloponnese, southern Greece (JAMESON *et al*, 1994).

The First International Congress on the Palaeolithic in Greece and Adjacent Areas (I.CO.PA.G.) demonstrated the number and variety of research projects on this period. All the latest research in Greece was presented there (BAILEY 1995). The proceedings of the Congress are in preparation, to be published by the British School at Athens.

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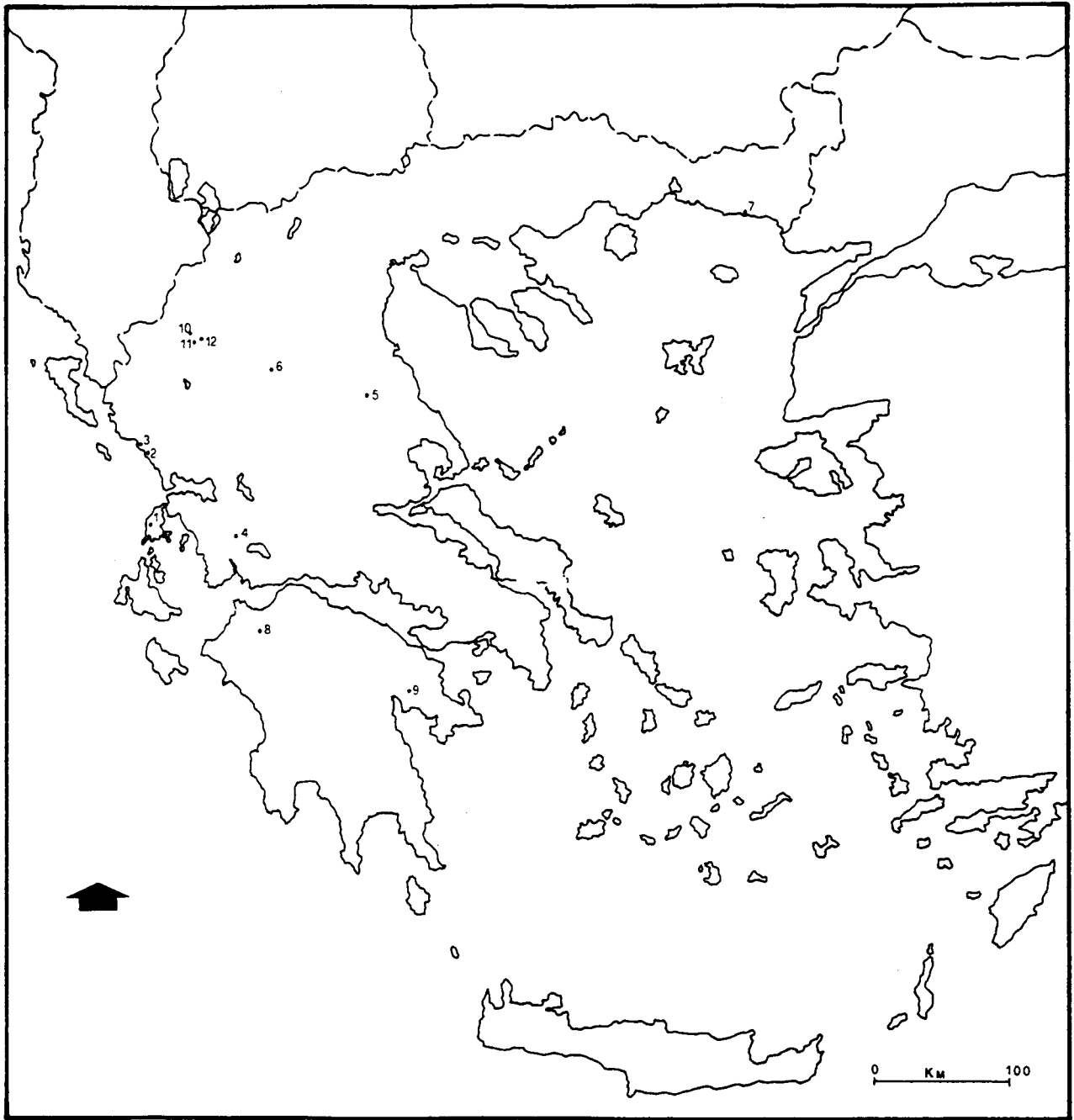


Figure 1. Major sites mentioned in the text.

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| 1. Lefkas island | 2. Alonaki | 3. Spilaio | 4. Agrinio |
| 5. Larissa area | 6. Theopetra cave | 7. Makri | 8. Eleohori |
| 9. Klisoura | 10. Boila | 11. Klithi | 12. Megalakkos |