

Complexity of the processes of Neolithization: Tradition and modernity of the Aegean world at the dawn of the Holocene period (11–9 kyr)

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Abstract

This paper explores the complexity and the plurality of the Neolithization process in the Aegean area (including the Balkans). In view of recent multidisciplinary research, the Neolithization of that area can no longer be viewed as a simple colonization originating from the Near East and Anatolia. It has become increasingly apparent that the *Childean Ex oriente lux* concept is based on insufficient evidence. The autochthonous model of a localized Aegean or rather Balkan-focused process, and implying that the Neolithic has its roots in a diversified Mesolithic substratum, is increasingly gaining ground. The transition to the Neolithic in Southeast Europe is first and foremost a shift from the primeval Paleolithic and Mesolithic traditions (scavenging and hunting) to modernity (stock rearing and farming).

The rise of the Aegean Sea level at the beginning of the Holocene considerably complicated any survey of Mesolithic and earliest Neolithic sites. Despite the views held by the diffusionists, the Aegean area was densely populated by the end of the Paleolithic and during the Epipaleolithic/Mesolithic period (10 000–9000 BP). This is the result of the richness of the resources for hunter gathering and incipient agriculture. The apparent paucity of Mesolithic and early Neolithic sites (9000–8000 BP) in Greece is largely due to the insufficient exploration. The difficulty of prospecting for small-size microlithic industries necessitates great experience and expertise.

Numerous Mesolithic and initial Neolithic dwelling sites (both sedentary settlements and short or seasonal encampments) existed: along the coasts, in the interior and also in the highlands. One may reasonably suggest that various manifestations of environmental changes were at the base of the complex mosaic character of the Neolithization process in the Aegean World, and in the Balkans.

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“The origin of the word “barbarous” probably refers to the confusion of inarticulated bird songs as opposed to the meaningful value of human language; and the word “savage”, which means “of the forest”, also evokes a type of animal life, as opposed to human culture. In both cases, one refuses to admit the very fact of cultural diversity, and prefers to reject as outside of culture, back into nature, all that does not conform to

the norm regulating our life.” Claude Lévi-Strauss (1973), *Anthropologie structurale* 2, p. 383

1. Introduction

In this paper, I reflect upon the Neolithization processes throughout Southeast Europe and, on the interrogative genesis of the Neolithic. This is related essentially to the unsuspected complexity of the post-Pleistocene human adaptation presented in Kozłowski's European Neolithic Atlas (Sfériades, 1993a), then at the first and second

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Ljubljana Neolithic Seminars (Sfériadès, 1993b, 1994–1995), and finally at the 2002 Thessaloniki EAA Meeting and the session ‘Aegean-Marmara-Black Sea and the present state of the research of the Early Neolithic’ (Sfériadès, 2005).

In this last paper, I reflected on the complexity of the Neolithization processes (plural) in Southeast Europe, having in mind Edgar Morin when he says “They wish a key idea. This is exactly the thing we should not wish” (Morin, 1994) and also the late Dragoslav Srejovic who wrote just before his death that it seems that it is the faith in the generosity of the earth and not southern migrations which has incited the autochthonous communities of the Danubian Basin to develop food production and to set up the Neolithic agricultural culture (Srejovic, 1997). This is also the case for the Aegean area.

The key idea, largely accepted as self-evident but here criticized, is that agro-pastoral (Neolithic) farming originated in the Levant and Anatolia some 10,000 years ago and then was introduced in Europe (Zvelebil, 2000). It is the *Ex Oriente lux* postulate, introduced and illustrated by Gordon Childe nearly a century ago (Childe, 1925), and developed until now, in different ways, by Neo-diffusionist schools (i.e., Lichardus and Lichardus-Itten, 1985; Renfrew, 1987; Cauvin, 1994; van Andel and Runnels, 1995), despite a lack of serious archaeological data.

According to Nikolai Merpert,

Toward the end of the Mesolithic, the territory of the former USSR was already quite densely settled. This applies particularly to the European part of the country where numerous and varied Mesolithic remains are now known from the Caucasus in the South to the Rybachii peninsula and the basin of the Pechora in the North, from the Dniester and the Neman in the West to the Urals in the East. The internal development of the Mesolithic population and its descendants was, naturally, an important factor in the formation of the earliest Neolithic culture (Merpert, 1994, p. 557).

We can argue for a similar situation in Southeast Europe, although Mesolithic sites remain, until now, comparatively poorly documented in the Balkans, including Romania and Hungary. Until recently only around 20 Mesolithic settlements in the Aegean area were known. The scarcity of sites was not an insurmountable paradox; what is important is that such sites exist, and that we can find them in different landscapes in the territory of Greece, in the mainlands or on the islands, near the coast or far inland up to the mountains.

Generally rejected, or, at best considered as secondary, two contrary but convincing reasons can explain “the paradox”: first, a deep imbalance of the archaeological research, and second, the effects of some catastrophic or large geological phenomena. This imbalance and these geological effects support a more reliable model that has “le mérite du bon sens”, and where the dialectical dynamic

of the Mesolithization–Neolithization process plays an essential role.

2. Imbalance of the archaeological research

The apparent paucity of Mesolithic and very Early or Initial Neolithic settlements in the Aegean area, particularly in the Balkans and Western Anatolia, is due in great part to insufficient exploration (Sfériadès, 1993a, b, 2003, 2005). A lack of surveys and excavations must be attributed until recently to “the quite general absence of real interest for this period of big and decisive changes from our colleagues who, with few exceptions, have fallen for what we shall call the ‘oriental mirage’ (Sfériadès, 1993b)”. Another explanation is that prospecting for and identification of Mesolithic sites need great experience and expertise (poor dwelling remains, microlithic industries, etc.). So, when the Mesolithician Robert Kertész focused his field survey in the Szolnok area (north of the Great Hungarian Plain), an impressive cluster of open-air sites was immediately brought to light (Kertész, 1991, 1996). This was also the case with the discovery of the Slovenian wetland and mountains sites (Budja, 1993) or of the coastal Turkish Thrace and Marmara area, also near the Bulgarian Black Sea shores by Mehmet Özdoğan and the lithician Ivan Gatsov (Gatsov, 1984; Gatsov and Özdoğan, 1994).

As Ruth Tringham said 5 years ago, Mesolithic indigenous forager presence was much greater than its archaeological visibility in the great valleys of Southeast Europe indicates the problem is that we archaeologists cannot see it, although it may be ‘standing right in front of us’ (Tringham, 2000, p. 54). But the now clear proofs of what I advanced, together with Tringham and Zvelebil, and, for my part, that Greece was highly densely settled during the Mesolithic period (and before) is given by the researches of the Greek–Italian team of archaeologists (conducted by N. Efstratiou, V. Elefandi, and P. Biagi, Universities of Thessaloniki and Venice) who over the last 3 years have discovered more than 25 Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic sites or settlements (e.g., lakes of Valia Calda) on the peaks of Mount Smolikas (2632 m), on of the Pindus mountain range which separates Epirus from Thessaly (Efstratiou, personal communication). As Nikos Efstratiou points, the chronological order of these sites reveals that these few and constantly moving Paleolithic and Mesolithic groups roved the Pindus range until 8000 BC following prey such as deer, boar, and hare. There is also evidence of Neolithic hunters who, as early as 7000 BC, began leaving their permanent villages, their livestock and fields on the plains and headed into the mountains occasionally to hunt and gather berries and seeds.

In 2003, a survey in the Argolis (Peloponnesus), south of Nauplion, conducted by Curtis Runnels and Eleni Panagopoulou put in evidence a dozen of new Mesolithic sites (Runnel, 2004). The same year, I noted the presence of microliths on the shore of Ancient Epidauris. On the

Cycladic island of Kythnos, Adamantios Sampson found circular dwellings and graves at Maroulas (Sampson et al., 2002). Again recently, the Thesprotia Expedition (geological survey and prehistoric periods), a regional Interdisciplinary Survey in Northern Greece conducted by Björn Forsén from the Finnish Institute at Athens, discovered two Mesolithic sites located in the Kokytos inland valley (with cores, arrowheads, trapezes, end scrapers, percoirs, and bladelets).

3. Effects of geological phenomena

We have also to take into consideration the eustatic changes of sea level at the end of the Pleistocene (before the Preboreal, 10,000 BP) and during the beginning of the Holocene that modified the shorelines from the North-western part of Mediterranean and the Ligurian coasts to the Black Sea shores. Related alluvial deposits are often very deep, thus mask the latest Mesolithic stages and the earliest Neolithic ones such as areas like Macedonia and Thrace (referring to the studies of Erol, Bintliff, Geddes, Mills, Kayan et al., Özdoğan, Biagi, and others). Recently, the same consequences were put in evidence in Thessaly.

This was also the opinion of John Chapman when he said that there are two reasons why the current known distributions of Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic sites are biased and therefore limited for our investigations: (1) the sea-level changes after the melting of the glaciers has flooded crucial sites in the Early Neolithic coastal lowlands (Van Andel, 1989); and (2) post-Neolithic sedimentation of main valleys has masked many key early sites located in the main valleys (Chapman, 1994).

Tjeerd van Andel and Judith Shackleton in their detailed study concluded that the Late Palaeolithic geography is thus characterized by extensive coastal lowlands, especially in the NE and NW, by a large Cycladic land or peninsula, by the enlargement of the Greek mainland, and by a much narrower Aegean Sea. By 9000 BP, on the other hand, the amount of coastal lowland was only slightly greater than it is to day, and the Cycladic land had fragmented (van Andel and Shackleton, 1982).

The rise of sea level of 130 m since 15,000 BP, of 50 m during the Mesolithic period (12,000–9000 BP) and of 40 m during the Neolithic/Eneolithic (9000–5500 BP) explains why a great number of Mesolithic and Neolithic settlements of the Aegean area are now embedded under more or less deep sediments (i.e., the Early Neolithic site of Korinos in Macedonia or the Late Neolithic site of Galene in Thessaly, respectively, under 8 and 0.80 m of alluvial deposits) (Kotsakis, 2001; Vlachos, 2003). Kotsakis (2001) has concluded that many coastal or inland riverside sites of the Mesolithic or, more importantly, many short-term Early Neolithic sites remain buried under alluvium. In the case of the Northern Sporades, systematic underwater research along the seashore of Youra resulted in the location of several underwater caves around the depth of 20–30 m below sea level, which would have been dry and

probably occupied during the Mesolithic. No evidence of human occupation was traced though, only due to the difficulties posed by underwater investigations (Sampson, 2006).

Two other also important geological phenomena can be added: neotectonic destruction, as at the Mesolithic site of Sidari (Corfu), and natural eolian and/or rain fall erosion which perhaps particularly affected the islands (i.e., Naxos: Mesolithic site of Stelida) (Sfériadès, 1983), including Crete and the Dodecanese.

4. State of research and new hypothesis

At the current state of research, more than 30 Mesolithic sites are known in Greece, essentially inhabited caves (i.e., Franchthi, Theopetra, Zaimis, Ulbrich, Klisoura, Cave of Cyclop). Despite the views held by the diffusionists, the Aegean World was populated, densely or sufficiently densely, by the end of the Paleolithic and during the Epipaleolithic/Mesolithic, during the Pleistocene/Holocene transition, and the beginning of the Holocene. During these times, numerous Mesolithic and Early Neolithic sites (sedentary settlements and/or (in greater number) seasonal (or 'one day', bivouac) encampments) existed along the coasts or inland, everywhere on the continent up to the mountains and on the islands (i.e., Melos (obsidian sources), Northern Sporades, Kythnos and Naxos (Cyclades), Dodecanese islands).

The model proposed here, for the Aegean area and the Balkans, has, I think, the advantage of the 'bon sens', due to the richness of the environment and the great variety of ecosystems, biotopes and ecological niches (in flux), when more or less dense forests progressively replaced the Late Pleistocene steppe vegetation. The Neolithization processes are here, in this southeast part of Europe, autochthonous in nature. Independent Neolithization processes developed with their roots in a firmly established Mesolithic culture, with an inherited Epipaleolithic/Mesolithic background without a real break from Late Paleolithic time.

Until now, the Mesolithic was neglected, and the Neolithic (present general definition) was perceived essentially as what is called a 'package', including a sedentary way of life, first permanent villages, sophisticated building technology (wattle-and-daub, mud bricks, stone walls (foundations and basements), buttresses), new skills such as polished stone production and pottery. Also included are ear plugs (really for what?), coffee-bean eyes for the figurines, incurved bone hooks and seals ... and, of course most importantly, domesticated plants and animals. This is the quite exhaustive 'package' coming from the Near East via Anatolia, and, for a romantic view, along the coast (Nikolov, 1987). Meanwhile, in the lower levels of Soroki in Moldavia, domesticated *Bos*, *Sus* and *Canis* were found, but in the absence of any pottery (Markevich, 1974) (Fig. 1).

Dergachev and Dolukhanov (2006) noted that each of the two sites include three clear-cut archaeological levels.

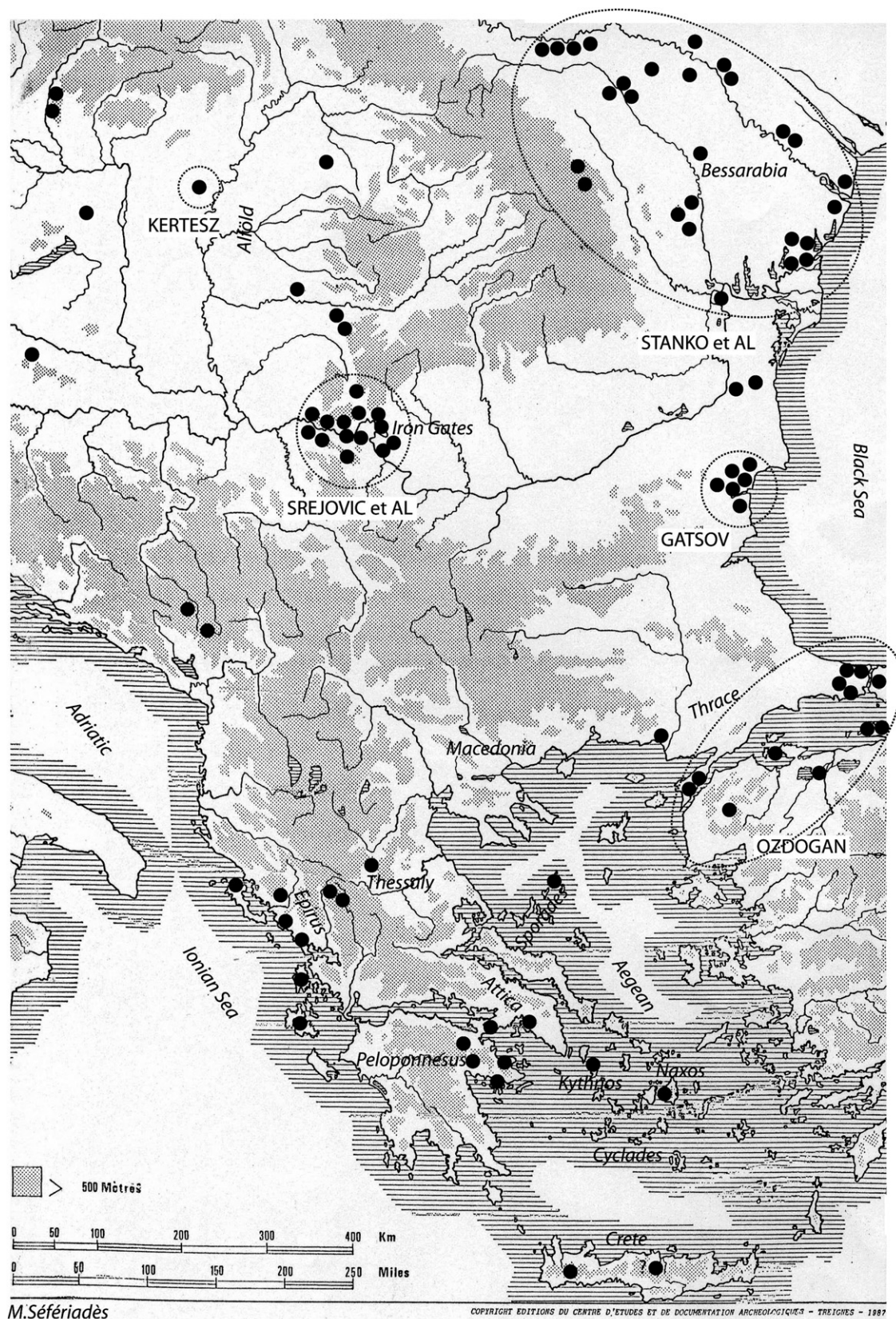


Fig. 1. Balkan Epipaleolithic/Mesolithic sites.

The lower level (2) of the Soroki I site and two lower levels (3 and 2) of the Soroki II site are characterized by the absence of pottery, but they contain the remains of domestic animals (*Bos taurus* L., *Sus scrofa domestica* L., *Canis familiaris* L.), with the clear dominance of wild species. Two upper levels (1a and 1b) of the Soroki I site and the upper level (1) of the Soroki II site include the pottery, while containing the remains of same animals. On this basis, these sites are viewed as reflecting the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic. An alternative view advanced by Pavel Dolukhanov is that these were basically hunter-gathering communities which were involved in an exchange network with the farming groups (Dergachev and Dolukhanov, 2006). The same situation is apparent in Thessaly or Crete as with the so-called aceramic layers whereas the peoples of the long Jomon chronological sequence in Japan, hunter–fisher and forager, developed remarkable pottery and sculptures in clay, only comparable perhaps with Vinca–Pločnik or Cucuteni (Eneolithic period) (Jomon, 1998).

Ceramic figurines come from the Gravettian sites of Dolni Vestonice and Pavlov in Moravia (as old as 29,000–26,000 BP) (Valoch, 1986–1987; Verlaine, 1990). Wares of poor quality come from some of the earliest Neolithic sites of Greece (Neolithic layers of Sidari upon the Mesolithic deposits). New technologies such as polishing stone, textiles and cordage are well attested at the second Gravettian site. Also at the Theopetra cave, “Primitive monochrome and undecorated pottery probably belonging to a pre-Neolithic phase, come out from the underlying Mesolithic deposit” (Kyparissi-Apostolika, 2000; Facorellis et al., 2001). Pottery seems to be a Paleolithic European invention but without implications for the processes of Neolithization (wood recipient, basketry) (see also Philibert, 1998).

What seems from the diffusionists point of view only pure speculation must now be considered as a highly probable hypothesis. The wild ancestors of emmer, einkorn, barley and leguminous plants are well at home in the Balkans since the Middle/Late Paleolithic and Mesolithic times. This is also the case for the wild species of *Bos*, *Sus*, *Capra* and, of course, *Canis familiaris*. The case of *Ovis* remains under discussion.

In fact, the so-called ‘Neolithic package’ is well at home in Southeast Europe, in the Balkans area during the Mesolithic times (10,000–7000 cal BC). As Teilhard de Chardin said, “Embryos do not fossilize”. That is why the preceding period, with early evidence of the Neolithization process appears as a dark age, masking an extraordinary dynamic resulting in irreversible changes. The reasons of this apparently unexpected passage from a very long gathering, scavenging and hunting tradition to modernity remain unclear. It seems that it is essentially a particularly coercive input related to climate change at the beginning of the Holocene that provoked and/or accelerated this dynamic and its consequences.

With the important climate change at the dawn and during the beginning of the Holocene, landscapes were now in a state of flux. On the coastal areas and also along the river valleys of the interior, Mesolithic peoples had to solve in a new way the apparent sempiternal nomadism/sedentary opposition, in a complicated way according also to the multiple fluctuations of the sea.

A change of the environment related to this climate change was the herald of domestication, the strong element of the Neolithization process. Neolithization developed in different complex ways, but was well controlled by our sophisticated and complex ancestors.

5. Tradition and modernity

The Mount Smolikas Project shows that some of the prehistoric sites were discovered in passes still used by herders and livestock farmers. Nikolaos Efstratiou (personal communication) noted that one of the most attractive things about these excavations in the Pindus is the fact that we can see the practices of the people who live here go back thousands of years.

The Mesolithic traditions, partly preserved during the Neolithic and after, remain present today. The only ones who fill well at home in all the peninsula are finally these Wallachian shepherds (slavic or saracatsane of greek language), all taking refuge in stock breeding and its seasonal movings during the Balkanic invasions. Thus, the more permanent culture of the peninsula corresponds to the more mobile and the less seizable (Péchoux and Sivignon, 1971, 51).

Mesolithic peoples of Greece were hunters of red deer and boars (respectively, 70% and 30% at Franchthi), hares and wild goats, and of a great variety of bird species. Bones of wild goats were found in the Mesolithic contexts of the Cave of Cyclop and of the Theopetra cave. They represent perhaps the first step of the domestication of this animal. In Crvene Stijena (Montenegro), animal bones including aurochs, wild pig, and wild goat were recovered from under the first pottery bearing levels. Wild goat was at home in the Balkans and, together with the aurochs and the wild pig, was domesticated there. *Capra aegagrus* (wild goat) has been identified in an Early Neolithic context through two clay figurines: the first from Donja Branjevina (Voivodina), the second from Sofia-Slatina. Reliefs from the Körös Culture pottery and bones in the Late Neolithic Tisza Culture are also known (Sfériadès, 2005, referring to Makkay, 1990). The question of independent domestication of this animal in the Aegean area remains open, as do those concerning the pig and also the aurochs despite the questionable genetic evidence for a derived Near-Eastern origin for European cattle (Troy et al., 2001).

The model here proposed highlights the importance of fishing, including shellfish such as *Spondylus* (oyster) and evidently mussels and whelks, which is often underestimated. Until recently the quantity of species in the Aegean area was astonishing: sea, lake, and river fishes

were the basis of the diet (during the Mesolithic period and after). Octopus, which is very easy to catch and which is particularly prized up to today, does not leave archaeological traces. Shells were selected by species and preserved in different huge pits at the Neolithic maritime settlement of Hoca Cesme in Turkish Thrace (excavated by Mehmet Özdoğan).

The large quantities of fish bones, as for example tunnies, do not imply necessarily that Mesolithic (and Neolithic) peoples of the Aegean area fished in deep water far from the shore (which is the basic diffusionist argument (advanced stage of navigation) for the introduction of the Mesolithic and the succeeding Neolithic from Anatolia via the islands). For example, in the Gulf of Argolis in summer, it is very easy to catch a large quantity of food fishes such as tunnies a few meters from the shore, using a simple hook and a white gull feather, or simply with the hands inside inlets.

The number of bone hooks coming from the Mesolithic levels of Youra is relatively impressive, including curved hooks and bi-pointed straight hooks. The second type is well represented during the Early Neolithic (i.e., the Körös Culture: Makkay, 1990). These bi-pointed pieces of bone (also found in Northern Greece in the Early Bronze Age: Poliochni in Lemnos) could be one of the elements of composite hooks (sturgeon hooks) used in Finland and as far as Eastern Siberia (Rohan-Csermak, 1963).

Little is known of the Mesolithic dwellings of the Aegean area: only traces of a stone paved floor and fire places (Youra) and circular stone basements (Maroulas). Mesolithic open-air dwellings are essentially itinerant light wood constructions, which, with their floors, cannot be recovered unless they are embedded into rapidly formed alluvial deposits, as for example the well known Magdalenian settlement of Pincevent (Leroi-Gourhan and Brézillon, 1966). At the Mesolithic campsites of Jasztelek (Alföld), the groundplan of a round sunken hut from Jasztelek I (postholes, entrance, hearth and ashy patch, storage) and its reconstruction (recalling the Late Palaeolithic times) (Kertész, 1996) were known in Northern Greece before the Early Neolithic adoption of the wattle and daub building techniques. Reference to the recent types of Saracatsane's houses of Northern Greece (Kavadias, 1965) is also relevant. These semi-nomadic and nomadic (endogamic) shepherds from the Pindos, Epirus, Thessaly, Macedonia and Thrace, an actual isolate group, are considered by Aris Poulianos and other anthropologists as a pre-Neolithic people or a local middle Palaeolithic survival.

Mesolithic burials in the Aegean area are simple inhumations in a contracted position (Franchthi cave, Youra, Maroulas). The Macedonian Nea Nikomedeia Early Neolithic graves recall exactly the Franchthi cave Mesolithic ones. At the Theopetra cave, DNA analysis was carried out on skeletal remains from the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic deposits, and showed biological relation and continuity of the population (Facorellis et al., 2001). Marek Zvelebil (2000) concluded, concerning

Central and South-Eastern Europe, that a limited gene flow between the initial farmers and the indigenous hunter gatherers, and in some regions such as the Danubian basin, the farmers themselves could be expected to originate mostly in the same region as the foragers, if one accepts that it was the local foragers who adopted farming. Dimitrios Vlachos (2003) noted the contradictions of the mitochondrial DNA analysis. A number of analyses described a quarter of the genetic variation of Europe as a gradual distribution of populations from the Middle East to the North-Western Europe through migration, the already well-known 'wave of advance' model (Barbujani and Chikhi, 2000). However, this explanation only considers 9–10% of the mitochondrial sequences (Richards et al., 1996). Richards et al. (1996) argue "for a more diversified and complex view of the population history of Europe during this period and in their study they did not identify geographical patterns in their sample, and suggested a largely Paleolithic or Mesolithic origin for the European gene pool".

With the dynamic economical systems and social organizations in flux in the Mesolithic, complex systems of exchange on more or less long distances, appear for the first time: Melian obsidian (already attested in the Late Paleolithic), Saronic andesite, and *Spondylus gaederopus* shell which, with the Neolithic, reaches the British Channel (a route through central North and West Europe 2500 km long) (Séfériadès, 2000). Such complex systems of exchange (including new ideas and inventions, social and religious behaviors and, perishable items which have not survived, are at the origin of the spread of agriculture through all the Aegean World and farther north. A decisive impact related to the discussed arrival of Eastern and Southeastern populations must be considered (Dennell, 1984; Barker, 1985), first of all because these lie, for this early period, on an until now Anatolian terra incognita.

The paucity of an archaeological range of data considerably restrains our knowledge of the Mesolithic societies of the Aegean World, their economic and complex behavior related to a large range of interactions (nature-culture) due to multiple environmental situations and their effects: the model here proposed for the semi-sedentary and nomadic Mesolithic people includes evidence of several original societies, differing from one another in the geographical setting, the climatic conditions and the varied evolutionary actions related to environmental changes and the eco-system potentialities. Thus we can state:

- (1) *Coastal (maritime) fishers–hunters and gatherers*: Living on the coast or nearby (Argolis, Northern Sporades, Cyclades, area of Preveza on the Ionian Sea). Fishing (very diversified) is the dominant subsistence activity, involving perhaps, a decisive stage of seafaring. They hunt, both great herbivores (the last steppe landscapes before, with the climatic influx, more or less deep forests), then smaller ones (deer, boar, hare, birds.) including wild goats (Franchthi cave, Youra). An interlocking of the domestication process

of that animal remains possible. They hunt also seals (Youra). This economy and way of life recalls, in many aspects, what we know of the Inuit or the aboriginal peoples of the North America Pacific coast.

- (2) *Interior hunters–fishers and gatherers*: Living inland (a) in plains, terraces and piedmonts: i.e., Northwest Thessaly (semi-nomadic settlements): Theopetra cave; (b) on more or less high mountains (seasonal encampments): Mount Smolikas. More accentuated hunting is indicated, as is also a possible beginning of goat domestication and of local swine. They have access to the wild ancestors of einkorn, barley and lentil (*Triticum boeoticum*, *Hordeum spontaneum*, *Lens nigricans*: Theopetra cave), and on the coastal zone they began domestication (Franchthi cave). It is doubtful that the rise of the sea level and the related reduction of the coastal or inland plains with the “limited area of grazing for animals had dramatic consequences on the Aegean Mesolithic populations” (Merkyte, 2003), because they had essentially a nomadic life.
- (3) Individual (or groups of) explorers and peddlers, miners and trappers, itinerant craftsmen, seafaring men and shamans who controlled, as far they could, the huge exterior Eurasian space.

6. Preliminary conclusions

Runnel (2004) assertion that “The rarity of Mesolithic sites is not the accident of archaeological fieldwork. Systematic surveys in the Peloponnese, the islands, and central and northern Greece in the last decade have produced no Mesolithic sites” is out of date. Sampson (2006) noted that, “A new era has begun for Greek archaeology, the era for the discovery of Mesolithic culture”. That is why it may be confidently asserted that the current international multidisciplinary project will greatly contribute to the solution of this and other major problems faced by the scholars in the Aegean area and the Balkans at large.

van Andel and Runnels (1988) and Runnels’ (1995, 2004) opinion that the Mesolithic inhabitants of Greece may not have been indigenous, but were immigrants from Anatolia or points farther east is rejected. This assertion, based only on the stratigraphical hiatus of the coastal Franchthi cave, is contradicted by the long uninterrupted stratigraphical sequence of the inland Theopetra cave (Kyparissi-Apostolika, 2000, 2005). The stratigraphical sequence of Franchthi remains unclear and constantly discussed (i.e., recently: William Farrand in Galinou and Perlès, 2003). Meanwhile, it is hard to believe that only the study of the chipped lithic industry of that site should decide the origin of the Greek Mesolithic and Neolithic. This problematic assumption is also contradicted by Runnels (2004) himself, when he says that “The Greek Mesolithic has been something of an archaeological misfit”, and when he concludes that “We are still at a very early stage in the study of the Greek Mesolithic” (Runnels, 2004).

It is not clear that “The loss of coastal plain land during the post-glacial rise of sea level drastically changed the resource base in many areas” (van Andel and Shackleton, 1982). The conclusions of Valentin Dergachev and Pavel Dolukhanov (2006) for the North Pontic area can be applied on the Aegean one, when they say that there is no evidence of any catastrophic floods that might have caused large-scale migrations of early farming populations. Reference to Lévi-Strauss (1958) at the beginning of this article is an allusion to the concept of ethnocentricity which in fact is clearly apparent through all the conclusions of the *Ex Oriente lux* postulate supporters: (1) poor barbarian (Mesolithic) peoples reduced to a “peau de chagrin”, (2) the waves of advance of Near-Eastern conquerors, introducing civilization, in the same way as the Europeans in America 8000 years later.

I am aware that, with the ideas advanced here, I shall be marginalized as ‘autochthonous’ or under the pejorative word of ‘indegenist’. But having always in mind that (as Leroi-Gourhan repeated constantly, e.g., Leroi-Gourhan and Brézillon, 1968), “to explain prematurely because of the ease with which an appealing hypothesis is admitted as a proved fact, leads to creating screens which mask a reality that may have been overlooked for a long time by the first searchers”, it is clear, in my opinion, that as more archaeological results come from the Balkans an independent dynamic Mesolithization–Neolithization will come to be seen as characteristic of the South-Eastern part of Europe.

“It is difficult to consider the Mesolithic as a coherent cultural set, a specific entity. Palaeolithic traditions and innovating elements express themselves in varying degrees inside the post-Palaeolithic (or Mesolithic) cultures. At the question what is the Mesolithic? We shall answer that it means Neolithization which finds its origin in the Late Palaeolithic cultures, perhaps before, and its completion with the true Neolithic. In fact, Mesolithic and Neolithization are terms which recover a same reality: a period of progress characterized by a diversification of the natural resources exploitation” (Philibert, 1988, p. 121).

This general definition of the concept of Mesolithic for Europe reflects exactly what happens in the Aegean World at the dawn of the Holocene period. At the same time I hope in the near future, we shall be able to definitively test Marek Zvelebil’s concept of availability in Central/Northern Europe and the Balkans, but probably with some local amendments for the particular conditions in the South-Eastern part of Europe.

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