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Chapter VIII: Relationships with Asia minor

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Citation

Wijnen, M. H. J. M. N. (1981). Chapter VIII: Relationships with Asia minor. In *Analecta Praehistorica Leidensia XIV : The early Neolithic I settlement at Sesklo: An early farming community in Thessaly, Greece* (Vol. 14, pp. 92-98). Leiden University Press. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28021>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

RELATIONSHIPS WITH ASIA MINOR

VIII. 1. *Introduction*

In the last two chapters we have seen that settlements with an agricultural economy appear over the whole of Greece during the same period. The subsistence pattern involves animals and crops which are not endemic. There are several theories which try to explain this sudden appearance.

The diffusionist hypothesis was first formulated by V.G. Childe during the 1920's (Childe 1925) and is still widely supported (Murray 1970 p. 30; Tringham 1971 p. 68; Mellaart 1975 p. 244, 261), although no longer *communis opinio*. It supposes that the entire Neolithic culture, including domestic animals and food plants and the knowledge of pottery manufacture, was introduced to Greece and the Balkans by immigrants from the Near East -e.g. Anatolia, Syria or Lebanon. The settlers are believed to have arrived in Greece with a fully developed farming economy during the late seventh or early sixth millennium B.C. Since the new settlements have produced some material - e.g. transverse arrowheads - which is not typical of the Near East, the possibility of an admixture with indigenous people has also been considered (Mellaart 1975 pp. 261-62).

Two important factors have inspired many to defend this theory:

1. In Greece there is only a scanty record of human occupation from earlier periods.
2. The wild progenitors of most Neolithic Greek crops seem to be present in the Near East, around the so called Fertile Crescent. Therefore domestication of these species should have taken place in that area. The same applies to sheep.

Another theory is the Kulturtrift theory of Schachermeyr (1955 p. 52 ff.), which postulates a continuous movement from Asia Minor (Mesopotamia and Cilicia) throughout the entire Early and Middle Neolithic.

More recently, the idea of indigenous development, postulating that the knowledge of animal and plant husbandry was transmitted through contacts with people from the Near East, has received some support (Theocharis 1973a, p. 24).

In the following chapter, we will investigate to what extent this theoretical tangle can be unravelled, using such facts as are available. We will consider the following points:

1. What do we know of Pre-Neolithic and Pre-Pottery inhabitation in Greece, especially of Mesolithic occupation?
2. To what extent may the domestication of plants and animals have taken place in Greece?
3. Would migration from Asia have been the only way to introduce an agricultural economy?
4. Is there any evidence of such a migration available?

VIII. 2. *Pre-Neolithic and Pre-Pottery occupation*

The record of human occupation in Greece during the periods preceding the Neolithic is very scanty. This is largely due to the fact that research has been very limited - interest being largely focussed on the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, as far as prehistory is concerned. Surveys of Palaeolithic sites have been undertaken in Epirus (Higgs et al. 1964 pp. 199-245; 1966 pp. 1-29), in the plain of Larisa (Milojčić, Boessneck, Jung and Schneider 1965) and in restricted parts of the Peloponnese (Lambert 1974 pp. 723-758). Sites have been discovered in caves or - especially in the case of the Middle Palaeolithic - in open air locations in the "Red Beds".

Methodical excavation has as yet been carried out only at three possible Mesolithic sites: at Franchthi Cave (Jacobsen 1969, pp. 343-381; 1973 pp. 45-89, 253-283) and the open air sites of Vивиis (Theocharis

1967 p. 40) and Sidari (Sordinas 1969 pp. 401-424). The presence of a Mesolithic stage has been proved only at Sidari and at Franchthi Cave. Viiis does not have a definite Mesolithic stratum, although there are many microlithic implements, alien to both the Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic. At Franchthi Cave the Mesolithic debris was very thick indeed, measuring over four metres. It could be divided into two phases, of which the second was characterised by the use of obsidian. It yielded a good sequence of dates, the earliest being 9477 ± 134 and the latest 8717 ± 110 BP for the Lower Mesolithic, the earliest 9152 ± 97 and the latest 7897 ± 88 BP for the Upper Mesolithic. The Sidari Mesolithic stratum provided a date of 7770 ± 340 BP.

It seems highly improbable that these geographically remote sites would have been the only Mesolithic sites in the whole of Greece.

Pre-Pottery Neolithic is, at many places in the Near East, considered to be the incipient stage of the Neolithic period. In Greece the record is scanty, being restricted to five sites in Thessaly and to three sites elsewhere in the country. It has often been doubted whether the non-pottery bearing strata of the Thessalian magoulas really belonged to a Pre-Pottery phase, as the trenches were rather small. The fact that the Pre-Pottery pits at Argissa contained some small pottery fragments has rather enhanced these doubts. However, Knossos, Kythnos and Franchthi Cave have all yielded a stratum which is void of ceramic vessels and which stretches over a larger extent than at the Thessalian sites. Vessels in an alternative raw material have not been discovered at any of the sites, unlike in Cyprus and the Levant where stone vases were used. Wood and reeds may have been used to construct vessels and these are very perishable materials.

Evidence that the use of clay was already known – e.g. clay figurines and ill-fired sling bullets – have been discovered at some of the sites. This does not necessarily mean that they had also acquired the knowledge of pottery manufacture (Schmandt-Besserat 1974, pp. 11-18; 1977a pp. 28-43 and 1977c pp. 133-150).

The earliest date of the Pre-Pottery phase is 8130 ± 100 and the latest date 7755 ± 97 BP (see table of

dates); most of these dates slightly precede those for Early Neolithic I.

It cannot be excluded that a Pre-Pottery Neolithic existed in Greece, even if different from that of the Near East and of shorter duration. Comparing the dates of the initial stage of the pottery bearing Neolithic in Greece to those of the Near East, we notice that they run almost in parallel (see table 28). In the context of the migration theory, this would mean that people moved from Asia Minor to Greece when the technique of pottery manufacture was not yet, or only barely, known in the areas of origin.

VIII. 2. 2. *Domestication of plants and animals*

The theory that the domestication of crops and livestock took place in Asia Minor is generally taken for granted. As far as crops are concerned this is based on what is known of the possible distribution of the wild ancestors of these domesticates and on the fact that nowhere else has evidence of domestication been recovered. The distribution of the wild progenitors – based on the present day pattern – is as follows (Zohary 1969 pp. 47-66 figs 1, 2 and 3):

- The wild ancestor of einkorn (*Triticum boeoticum*) has a relatively wide distribution: Western Asia and the Southern Balkans including Greece.
- Wild emmer (*Triticum dicocoides*) has a more restricted area: Palestine, Southern Syria, Southern Turkey and Northern Iraq.
- The distribution centre of the wild ancestor of barley (*Hordeum spontaneum*) lies in the Fertile Crescent Belt – starting in Cyrenaica (North Africa) and Palestine, stretching to Southern Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan and Southwestern Iran, it occurs further (North)West – in the Aegean region – and further East. Supposedly it spread to the latter regions as a weed – a consequence of agricultural activity. The same might be true for the peripheral zones in the distribution area of wild einkorn.

Domestication of einkorn is assumed to have taken place in Southwestern Turkey; that of emmer in the Upper Jordan watershed. Barley domestication could have started at less humid sites in the Fertile Crescent Belt.

Recent excavation has added some new data.

Hordeum spontaneum has been discovered in a Late Pleistocene context at Franchthi Cave (Hansen and Renfrew 1978), apparently contradicting the above mentioned theory that it spread only to the peripheral location of the Aegean as a weed. Dennell (1978 p. 159) thinks it unlikely that the distribution of wild emmer and barley has remained unchanged since the Late Pleistocene. Although there is no proof, we may not entirely exclude the possibility that the domestication of some crops was an independent, indigenous achievement. To reach a more conclusive understanding of this matter we need considerably more data from Early Neolithic settlements, in which the use of adequate sampling methods, as well as locational and environmental studies, are an absolute necessity.

The theory that the domestication of caprovines took place in Asia Minor is based on the fact that no site outside this area shows evidence of local domestication. The earliest appearance of domestic goat has been noticed at Asiab, Kermanshah, Iran (Bökönyi 1977 p. 9), dated between 10.000 and 9650 BP.

Although the wild ancestor of goat was present in Greece during the Palaeolithic – as attested by the bone sample from Franchthi Cave, which is dominated by wild *Equus* and wild *Capra* during that phase – it had disappeared before the Mesolithic period (Payne 1973 p. 59). Payne assumes that this happened when open dry conditions gave way to more wooded ones, a change taking place around 10.000 – 10.500 BP. This would be in agreement with the results from pollen analysis elsewhere in Greece (Bottema 1978 p. 19). No remains at all of the wild ancestor of sheep have been discovered in Greece (Dennell 1978 p. 158).

The case is different with both pig and dog. Their wild progenitors are present on the Greek mainland during the Mesolithic period. Dog certainly and pig probably were domesticated in Southwest Asia before they first appeared in Southeast Europe, but the domestication of these animals in Greece independently of the developments in the Near East cannot be excluded (Bökönyi 1977 p. 10). There is, however, no positive evidence.

The data available indicate that the domestication of cattle has taken place at Argissa as early as 8300

BP – during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic (Boessneck 1962; Bökönyi 1977 p. 15). The non-pottery bearing levels at Sesklo contained bone fragments of domesticated cattle too. The earliest occurrence reported in the Near East is at Catal Hüyük, in stratum VI, dating around 7750 BP, though it may have been present in stratum XII too – somewhere around 8100 BP (Perkins 1969 pp. 177-179). This indicates that the domestication of cattle was indigenous on the Greek mainland.

VIII. 2. 3. *Possible contacts between Southwest Asia and Southeast Europe (fig. 23)*

Next we will see in what manner domestic caprovines and crops could have been introduced into the subsistence pattern of the inhabitants of Greece.

In the case of colonisation, the migrants would have taken with them the knowledge of plant and animal husbandry and, possibly, the technique of manufacturing pottery vessels. If there were no migrants, this knowledge must still have come to Greece in some way, together with seeds to sow and (young) animals.

The colonisation theory postulates that fairly large groups migrated from somewhere in the Near East due to an overpopulation in the donor region. Mellaart gives evidence (1975 p. 261) for Anatolia rather than Syria or the Lebanon. It is possible that we are not dealing with the emigration of a large group directly from Anatolia to Greece, but rather with the gradual migration westwards of small groups in a series of short steps until they eventually reached Greece. In this way they would lose all contact with the mother site.

There are two routes leading from Asia Minor to the Greek mainland – the first goes by land, the second by sea. The first one involves either going all the way round the Black Sea or crossing the Dardanelles, before reaching Thrace. From Thrace it leads into Macedonia and from there on to Thessaly, Boeotia etc. The dense wood cover of Thrace will, however, not have been an encouragement. So far we have no evidence for the use of this route. The earliest settlements in Thrace date to 6450 BP, already well into the Middle Neolithic (Theocharis 1971 b).

The second route would probably involve 'island-hopping' – going by boat from island to island until a site, suitable for founding a settlement was discovered. The few island sites recovered to date may be remains of such a migratory movement (e.g. Knossos, Kythnos).

We know that already in the Mesolithic the occupants of Franchthi Cave were seafaring people, not afraid to cover large distances over water. Obsidian appeared here for the first time during the Lower Mesolithic (Jacobsen 1973 p. 77). Analysis showed that it originates from the island of Melos. Almost half of the bone sample recovered from the Upper Mesolithic stratum consisted of large fish vertebrae. Some of these have been identified as being bones of tuna fish – a deep sea and migratory species (Bintliff 1977 p. 241).

With this in mind, we think John Bintliff's theory that the 'transmerance' of fishermen was very significant in the spread of Neolithic culture and domestic crops and livestock across the Aegean is very attractive (Bintliff 1977 pp. 120, 241). It is very likely that seafaring brought people from the Eastern Aegean coast in contact with those from the Western Aegean shores. That new developments, knowledge of techniques and goods were exchanged in both directions seems plausible. Though we do not have any proof, we can certainly not exclude the possibility that the knowledge of plant and animal husbandry was spread in this way. Therefore the change from Mesolithic to Neolithic society in Greece was not necessarily introduced by migrants from the Near East – another kind of diffusionism, in the form of transmerance by seafaring people may have played an important role in this process.

The problem which still has to be solved is why this change became necessary. We think that David L. Clarke's model described and discussed in 'Mesolithic Europe' pp. 26-34 (Clarke 1978) provides us with a, for the moment, satisfactory answer. He stresses cultural adaptations to the changing environment – an expanding evergreen ecology and diminishing herds of large herbivores.

VIII. 2. 4. *Western Anatolia and the western coast of Turkey*

Whether the knowledge of plant and animal husbandry was brought into Greece by migrants or whether it was transferred by contacts with seafaring people, one assumes that Western Anatolia and the Western coast of Turkey would be involved.

If for some reason people from the Central Anatolian plateau decided to move Westward they would probably follow the river valleys of Gediz, Büyük Menderes and their tributaries¹. One would expect that seafaring people had contacts with the inhabitants of the neighbouring coasts – i.e. of the Western shore of Turkey.

Unfortunately little is yet known of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods of these regions. David French (1965, p. 15-25) has conducted a survey, covering the lower stretches of the above mentioned rivers, in which he discovered eight mounds. All except two were built up on an alluvial plain.

French assumes that most sherds are contemporary with Hacilar IX-VI, belonging to the Late Neolithic of Anatolia, dating around the second half of the sixth millennium B.C. No traces of earlier occupation of the river valleys have yet been discovered, although one would have expected them, since the valleys seem suited to the needs of early agricultural settlement. Of inhabitation of the coastal area we do not have any proof either.

VIII. 2. 5. *The artefactual data*

Assuming that Greece had been colonised by migrants from the Near East, one would expect some stylistic similarities in architecture, ground and chipped stone tools, bone implements and other objects from the newly founded settlements with those from the donor regions. If – as often stipulated – they brought the knowledge of pottery manufacture, there should also be some similarity in this aspect of material culture.

Of Pre-Pottery architecture in Greece we know nothing but for the pits and associated postholes. The exception is Knossos, where the dwellings were constructed in mudbrick on a stone foundation.

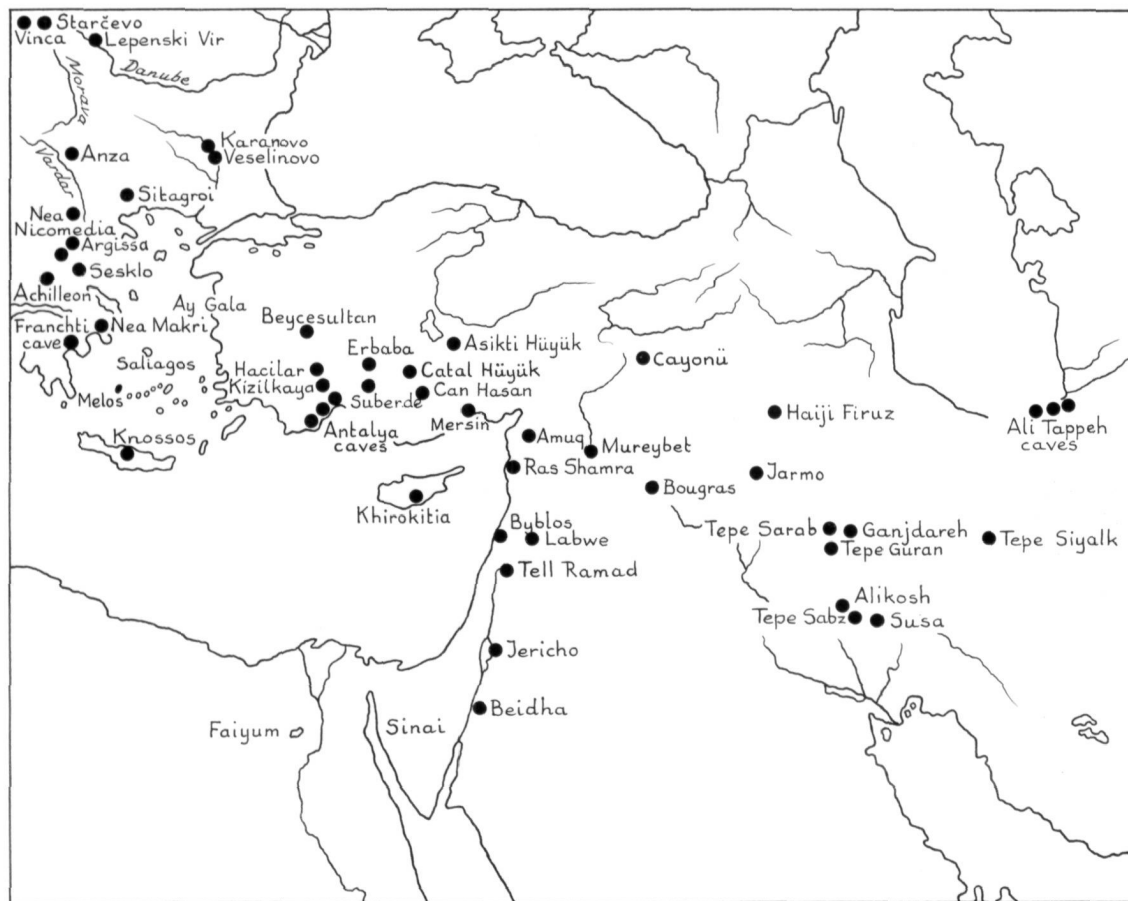


Fig. 23 Map of the Near East; some of the important Early Neolithic sites (free after Mellaart).

Early Neolithic architecture shows constructions erected in wattle and daub on a stone foundation wall or in a wooden framework, according to the material available. During the Middle Neolithic houses were built of mudbrick on stone foundation walls.

The architecture in the supposed donor region – Anatolia – was already fully developed between 7500 and 6800 BC, involving techniques like mudbrick making, bonding and even the use of terrazzo floors (Schmandt-Besserat 1977c, pp. 136–37). At Aceramic Hacilar (Mellaart 1970) clay platforms

have been discovered in which saddle querns and mortars were embedded, constructions as yet unheard of at contemporaneous Greek sites.

The chipped stone industry of Early Neolithic Greece is a flake/blade industry, in which deliberately retouched blades are almost absent. The Aceramic and ceramic settlements in Anatolia have a far more complicated array of implements, including spearheads, scrapers, notched blades and other deliberately retouched blades and flakes (Mellaart 1975, p. 94 ff). At Catal Hüyük chipped stone tools even include faceted spearheads and flint daggers

(Mellaart 1975, figs. 48-49).

Most of the bone and the ground stone implements are represented on the Anatolian sites too, but the latter have a more extensive repertoire.

Earstuds are represented in both areas, but the shapes are slightly different. Greek Early Neolithic figurines bear no resemblance to the Anatolian ones.

Research into stylistic similarities has been restricted to Anatolia. Looking at more remote areas – Cilicia, Syria, the Levant and the Zagros – the differences are even larger.

Even accepting the fact that small groups of migrants – having lost all contact with the mother site – may have moved into Greece, we find it difficult to believe that they would not have retained a single aspect of their original material culture, especially where the manufacture of chipped stone tools is concerned.

It has often been stated that the technique of pottery manufacturing was introduced from the Near East, which in our opinion would presuppose a second wave of immigrants or continuous contacts. Searching for possible resemblances between the pottery of these two areas we have to conclude that it is not very likely that it was introduced by migrants. During the period when ceramic vessels were first manufactured in the Greek region, around 7700-7400 BP (see chronological table), pottery was still a rare phenomenon in Anatolia itself. It was in full use at five sites: Beldibi, Belbasi, Okuzin, Karain and Carkin – which are all situated on or near the Southsouthwestern coast of Turkey. It has been documented in quantity at two open air sites: Mersin and Erbaba (Schmandt-Besserat 1977c, p. 145). At the other sites – Tarsus, Catal Hüyük, Baradiz, Kizilkaya and Suberde – it is rare. In some cases – Can Hasan, Cayönü Tepesi – it is totally absent.

We have not been able to study the pottery of this region ourselves. For the description we have to rely on evidence given by the respective excavators and the article on the use of clay by D. Schmandt-Besserat (1977c, p. 145). Summing up we come to the following description:

The paste is mineral tempered, except for Suberde III, where it has a heavy vegetable temper. Beldibi and Belbasi (coastal caves) have a distinctive shell and chalk temper. Colours vary from red and orange

(dark red and buff fired) to grey and black (dark and light non-oxidised), with at Catal Hüyük a majority of light grey and buff shades (light uncertain buffish and light non-oxidised). The usual surface finish is burnishing, polishing or at least smoothing (rare) with the exception of Suberde, where the surface is left rather rough. Wall thickness is usually around 5 mm. The hardness is variable, but the majority are very hard. Oxidation is mostly incomplete and black cores are a usual feature. The vessel shapes consist mostly of small bowls and jars with simple straight rims; one or two oval shaped vessels occur at Catal Hüyük. Nail-incised decoration is frequently found at Mersin and Tarsus. Pierced lugs are present on small jars. Catal Hüyük has – rarely – primitive painted motifs. The Beldibi pottery frequently has handles.

On the whole there are many similarities between this rare Anatolian pottery and Greek Early Neolithic pottery, but these similarities seem to exist between all early pottery from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near Eastern regions. The repertoire of shapes is not very different, but the vessels seem to be deeper than their Thessalian counterparts (Mellaart 1975, fig. 52; Singh 1974 fig. 38 no 11-23; Mellaart 1961 fig. 2). Shallow, slightly open bowls do not apparently occur. The ring base was almost unknown, whereas flat and plano-convex bases were very common indeed. Altogether the appearance of the vessels is different.

The very rare pottery from levels XII and XI at Catal Hüyük closely resembles in shape the very coarse ware of Early Neolithic I from Sesklo, but the paste is quite different, having a partly vegetable temper (Mellaart 1966, p. 170 fig. 4). As discussed already in Chapter III. 4, this pottery is contemporaneous with the better made ware and not a predecessor of the Thessalian material.

A direct influence by migrants seems improbable, so we are left with the possibility that either an indigenous development took place or that there was some exchange of ideas. Fishermen may have seen pottery vessels in the coastal areas, in which case we might say that 'introduction on hearsay evidence' has taken place.

On the whole we would say that the artefactual data argue in favour of a largely independent deve-

lopment of the Greek Neolithic settlements.

V III. 3. *Final Remarks*

Summarising our re-evaluation we may conclude the following:

1. We may have to alter the general idea of a sparse inhabitation of the Greek mainland by Epi-Palaeolithic hunter/gatherers. It is highly improbable that Franchthi Cave was the only area with Mesolithic inhabitation in Greece.
2. Domestic crops and livestock were at least partly introduced from the Near East. Domestication of cattle is almost certainly an indigenous achievement.
3. Migration from the Near East is not the only way in which the knowledge of plant and animal husbandry could have been transferred to Greece. Transmerance of fishermen may have played a hitherto largely underrated role in the spread of Neolithic culture.

For the moment we have no proof that either a land or sea route was used by possible migrants from the Near East. There is no artefactual evidence which clearly relates Greek and Near Eastern settlements.

The diffusionist hypothesis still retains its original value, in as far as it involves contact between the two regions-possibly even including migration of

small groups or individuals. Colonisation, in the present meaning of the word – i.e. the migratory of large groups – seems excluded.

The Kulturtrift theory is very rigid, postulating only unilateral influence, in the form of migratory groups. It is however by no means impossible that there was bilateral influence. Such movements are not restricted to the Early and Middle Neolithic, but continue to exist thereafter.

Much more research will be necessary – not least scientific analysis – to solve the questions of possible relations between the Anatolian plateau, the coast of Turkey and the Western Anatolian region. The same applies to more remote areas like Cilicia, Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan, the Levant and even the Zagros region. For the moment, however, we support the theory of indigenous development, with room still left for contacts with the Near East by which the knowledge of plant and animal husbandry was transmitted.

NOTE

1. Better known respectively as Hermos and Maiandros. The following has to be kept in mind (Eisma 1978, p. 67): "..... during the rise in sea level the sea entered the valleys to a point far deeper inland – further East – than the present coastline. By contrast, even during historical times the coastline has been seen to move Westward over a considerable distance due to stream-deposition and this process undoubtedly began much earlier."