Palaeolithic archaeology and submerged landscapes in Greece: The current state of the art

Nena Galanidou¹, Alexandra Zavitsanou², Peny Tsakanikou³, and Dimitris Sakellariou⁺²

¹University of Crete (UOC) – Gallos University Campus, GR-74100 Rethymnon, Crete, Grèce
²Hellenic Centre for Marine Research (HCMR) – Street Address 46,7 km Athens Sounio ave. P.O. Box 712, P.C. 19013 Anavyssos Attiki, Grèce
³University of Southampton [Southampton] – University Road Southampton SO17 1BJ, Royaume-Uni

Résumé

During the 20th century Palaeolithic research in the NE Mediterranean operated on a mainland-focused epistemological paradigm that saw the NE Mediterranean Sea as a barrier, peripheral to the Palaeolithic world and hence not worthy of systematic exploration. As a result, Greece remained marginal to human origins research despite its position at the crossroads between Africa, Asia and Europe. During the last twenty years the new sites discovered on the islands of the Aegean and the Ionian Seas lend credence to the view that islandscapes, coastal zones and submerged seascapes ought to become part and parcel of Palaeolithic research in a country with 17,000 km of coastline – a quarter of the total Mediterranean coastline – the greater part of this figure being represented by islands. Unless island, coastal and underwater geographies are incorporated into the palaeogeographic reconstructions many of the shortcomings in Greek Palaeolithic narrative are bound to remain. In this paper we focus on underwater investigations conducted in the Aegean and the Ionian shelf and reconstructions of their submerged landscapes in order to present the state of affairs on the subject. We bring together in a coherent narrative marine geophysical and archaeological perspectives and results from interdisciplinary work conducted in the field and the lab. The palaeogeographical evolution of the shallow coastal and shelf areas of Greece is determined by a complex interplay between active tectonics and eustatic sea-level change. Long-term and episodic vertical tectonic movements involving both subsidence and uplift have played a major role in shaping the most promising areas for underwater archaeological survey. They have also determined the variable presence of land bridges between islands and their adjacent mainlands and the distance of sea crossings between them. We will examine these issues in parallel with the terrestrial archaeological record.

Mots-Clés: Palaeolithic, submerged landscapes, Aegean, Greece, palaeogeography, Lower Palaeolithic, Middle Palaeolithic, Middle Pleistocene