

Euboea during the Neolithic period: A review of the evidence

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Περίληψη

Η Εύβοια αποτελεί μια ειδική περίπτωση της Νεολιθικής περιόδου στην Ελλάδα λόγω της γεωγραφικής της θέσης και των αρχαιολογικών καταγραφών που αφορούν σε ολόκληρη τη Νεολιθική περίοδο. Μια αναθεώρηση των καταγραφών σχετικά με τη Νεολιθική περίοδο στην Εύβοια συμβάλλει στη συζήτηση για τη Νεολιθική περίοδο στην Ελλάδα με δύο τρόπους: αποκαλύπτει τις διασυνδέσεις της ηπειρωτικής χώρας με τα νησιά του Αιγαίου και της νότιας με τη βόρεια ηπειρωτική χώρα. Σε αυτό το άρθρο εξετάζονται οι μεθοδολογικοί περιορισμοί της ‘περιφερειακής μελέτης’ και ο διαχωρισμός του ‘Αιγαίου’ με την ‘ηπειρωτική χώρα’ κατά τη Νεολιθική περίοδο. Εντοπίζοντας το χωρικό και χρονικό πλαίσιο της Εύβοιας, είναι επίσης εφικτή μια περιεκτική αναφορά της προϊστορίας της δεδομένων των νέων ανακαλύψεων που έχουν γίνει στο νησί και στην περιφέρειά του.

Introduction

Recently, research on the Greek Neolithic has gained momentum, with specialists isolating socio-cultural regions—such as Thessaly, the Cyclades and southern Greece, and Crete being considered ‘isolated’—or engaging in large-scale syntheses.¹ Central Greece is overlooked both in terms of the areas to its north and to its south. Moreover, this regional segmentation has established an even more important distinction—that is, the ‘continental’ and the ‘coastal/ insular’ Neolithic.

The main goal of this paper is to incorporate the Neolithic record of Euboea into this framework and also to demonstrate that the aforementioned methodological framework should always be considered tentatively: Euboea is perhaps the most characteristic counter-example, as it belonged both to the Boeotian, hence continental, and the insular Neolithic. Thus, in the following text, our central question concerns the diachronic variation between these two aspects, evidenced in elements such as pottery but also site distribution. Additionally, the long-established ‘eastern explanation’, i.e. the influence of the south-east Mediterranean on the Aegean is re-evaluated,² as Euboea was a major stepping stone *from* but also *towards* these areas.

As Euboea’s topography is circumscribed, at first sight the designation of a ‘local’ element is clear: the societies which settled on the island and their material culture are considered local. Unsurprisingly, the Neolithic of Euboea demonstrates the amalgamation of cultural elements of both the mainland and the islands, since local societies were equally involved in the continental and insular social networks

1. For example Halstead 2011, 132 and Robb 2013; but see also Bintliff 2012.

2. Bintliff 2012, 49-50; Özdoğan 2005, 13-16; Perlès 2005.

that developed. Therefore, Euboea emerges as a characteristic nodal point in the establishment of interregional networks, as it both delineated and connected regional social networks.

History of research

The volume of research dedicated to the prehistory of Euboea is relatively restricted. However, the prehistoric sequence on Euboea is (surprisingly) complete; this is especially surprising considering the fragmentary knowledge of Greek prehistory.³ Despite its literally *central* position, though, it is usually included in studies of the Aegean islands or central Greece only as a marginal outcrop of the mainland.

G. Papavasileiou⁴ was the first archaeologist to report prehistoric finds at the outset of the 20th century. It was at the time of D. Theocharis, after several decades, when research targeted the Stone Age specifically.⁵ Archaeologists of the British School conducted the first survey, producing the first evidence for the Middle Palaeolithic on the island in the 1960s.⁶ In the 1980s a general volume about the Euboean Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (EBA) was published.⁷ In the 1990s, the excavation at the Tharrounia Cave produced the longest stratigraphic sequence for prehistoric Euboea, along with ¹⁴C dates, thus far.⁸ In the area of the Karystia, the systematic exploration which was begun by D. Keller⁹ under the aegis of the Canadian Institute in Greece, producing a considerable volume of finds.¹⁰ Finally, the recent excavations at the Ayia Triada Cave, in collaboration with the Ephoreia of Palaeoanthropology-Speleology, have revealed a new, significant stratigraphic sequence.¹¹

The earliest background

Although our focus is the Neolithic period, the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic provide necessary background. The earliest finds on Euboea are conventionally dated to the Middle Palaeolithic and have been recovered from surveys in Agia Anna and Rovies.¹² Comparable finds were reported in the area of Nea Artaki, where roughly 3800 artefacts were collected from a possible quarrying site, and Makrikapa.¹³

Mesolithic finds on Skyros were reported as early as the 1950s by D. Theocharis;¹⁴ however, at the time the knowledge of the insular pre-Neolithic periods was in its infancy. Over the last two decades, sites such as the Cyclops Cave¹⁵ in the Sporades, Maroulas on Kythnos,¹⁶ Stelida¹⁷ and Roos on Naxos,¹⁸ and Kerame on Ikaria¹⁹ have helped us to document the presence of populations moving across

3. For an account of the parameters, see for example Andreou et al. 1996, 538; Cullen 2001, 7-16.

4. Papavasileiou 1908; 1910.

5. Theocharis 1959, 322-325.

6. Sackett et al. 1967.

7. Sampson 1981.

8. Sampson 1993a.

9. Keller 1985.

10. Cullen et al. 2013; Talalay et al. 2005.

11. Mavridis and Tankosić 2009.

12. Sackett et al. 1967, 48.

13. Sampson 1981, 26; Sarantea-Micha 1996, 43-47.

14. Theocharis 1959.

15. Sampson 2008a.

16. Sampson et al. 2010.

17. Carter et al. 2014.

18. Sampson 2010, 85-86.

19. Sampson 2014; Sampson et al. 2013.

the central Aegean during the period between the 10th and 8th millennia. On the mainland, stratified Mesolithic deposits were discovered at proximal sites such as the Sarakenos Cave in eastern Kopais²⁰ but also at distant ones such as the Cave of Theopetra²¹ (Thessaly). It is also of importance that several Early Neolithic sites on Euboea produced earlier lithic types.²²

The development of seafaring

Considering the configuration of the Greek Peninsula, i.e. the significantly mountainous hinterland, extensive coastline and numerous islands, the development of seafaring was a key element of interregional mobility. Due to its position, Euboea played a crucial role in the development of seafaring in the central Aegean. A considerable volume of literature is devoted to the sea routes which connected the north-east Aegean with the south (Melos) via the Euboean Gulf.²³ This protected channel provided the necessary safety for primitive vessels which relied on sea currents, as the sailboat had not yet been invented. It would have been impossible to navigate via Cape Kafireas (Kavo Doro), a route historically avoided, without this channel.²⁴ Instead, the protected route via the Euboean Gulf was preferred diachronically, even during periods when boatbuilding reached an advanced level.²⁵

More specifically, the occurrence of Melian Obsidian on north Aegean islands such as Youra suggests the systematic navigation from north to south across the Aegean Sea as early as the Mesolithic.²⁶ Even though this route was time-consuming and demanded particular navigation skills, Melian obsidian at Youra would more likely have been procured through the Euboean Gulf.²⁷ Another west-to-east itinerary connected central Greece with the north Cycladic islands (Andros, Tinos, Mykonos), Ikaria, Samos and the Anatolian coast via Euboea—a hypothesis supported by the recently excavated Mesolithic site of Kerame on Ikaria.²⁸ These islands functioned as stepping stones, meaning that voyages were not exposed for long to the open sea, and would have been facilitated by the prevailing sea currents.

Nonetheless, during the Mesolithic, when the sea level was considerably lower, the area of Euripus was dry land, which would have been crossed terrestrially. The absence of Mesolithic coastal sites on Euboea is to an extent attributable to the sea level, which rose rapidly until c.3000 BC, following the global trend of the Early to Middle Holocene.²⁹ In areas to the north and south of Euboea, recent research has demonstrated an alteration of emerged and submerged beaches, suggesting differential movement which was probably caused by tectonic effects.³⁰ It should be noted though that no systematic survey for the Mesolithic has yet been conducted on the coast or in the hinterland.

By the Early Bronze Age, the passage of the Euboean Gulf was being intensely used, especially for trade between Troy, Euboea and the Cyclades. The flourishing of Manika in this period³¹ is attributed chiefly to the fact that it controlled this vital passage.

20. Sampson et al. 2009.

21. Kyparissi-Apostolika 2000, 39-42.

22. Sampson 1981, 26.

23. Agouridis 1997; Broodbank 1999, 26, fig. 1.4; Kambouroglou et al. 1988.

24. For a different view, see Agouridis 1997, 8.

25. Papageorgiou 2008, fig. 4.

26. See also Cullen et al. 2011, 41.

27. Papageorgiou 2008, 213.

28. Sampson et al. 2013; for a different view, see Perlès et al. 2011.

29. Ghilardi et al. 2014.

30. Evelpidou et al. 2012, 18; Kambouroglou et al. 1988.

31. Sampson 1985.

The Neolithic period (Fig. 2)

During the Neolithic, Euboea participated in the socio-cultural traditions³² of central Greece, namely the region south of the Spercheios River.³³ The connection between Euboea and the mainland is clearly evident when long stratigraphic sequences are correlated: the stratigraphy of the Skoteini Cave for instance, the longest sequence for Euboea, presents a notable analogy with the neighbouring Sarakenos Cave (east Kopais, Boeotia), a fact substantiated by the available ¹⁴C dates.³⁴ Furthermore, excavations in neighbouring continental sites such as Halai³⁵ make up a fuller site-distribution pattern: before Halai and Sarakenos, the closest Boeotian parallels for Euboea were Elateia,³⁶ Chaeronea³⁷ and Eutresis,³⁸ in western Boeotia.

However, central Greece has been defined only with concern to its northern border, with the underlying implication that the continental coast forms its natural border to the east. The discovery of the aforementioned sites at the eastern fringes of continental Greece and on/very close to the Aegean coast challenges the distinction between sites classed as ‘mainland’ or ‘coastal’. The site at Pazaraki³⁹ is also included in the coastal Boeotian sites. Therefore, in the following text, a primary objective is the integration of Euboea but also of the islands to its east in the broader region of the central Greek Neolithic, which should include both the continental and the insular areas. It thus becomes evident that the intervention of the narrow sea between Euboea and the mainland posed no barriers. Our conventional segmentation of the different regions of Greece has led to the alienation of areas positioned on the margins of any given ‘distinct region’, as in the case of Euboea. Still, it is now becoming evident that Euboea more likely functioned as an in-between area which enjoyed the privileges of both Boeotia and the central Aegean islands.

Early (6300-5800) and Middle Neolithic (5800-5300)

On Euboea, the Early and Middle Neolithic are relatively underexplored periods. Early Neolithic sites are heavily disturbed, with pottery of poor quality.⁴⁰ Decoration with plastic, mastoid pellets falls within the traditions of the Early/Middle Neolithic of central and southern Greece, and has been noted at numerous sites in Boeotia (e.g. Elateia,⁴¹ Orchomenos⁴² and Chaeronea),⁴³ but also in the Peloponnese,⁴⁴ for example at Corinth⁴⁵ and Nemea.⁴⁶ The earliest evidence is located at the Politika Cave, the deepest stratum in the Skoteini Cave and the open-air site at Pisonas.⁴⁷

32. *Sensu* Skibo 2013, 6-9.

33. Alram-Stern 2005, 183.

34. Sampson 1993a, 33-34; Sampson et al. 2009.

35. O’Neill et al. 1999, 273-274.

36. Weinberg 1962.

37. Sotiriadis 1908; Tzavella-Evjen 2012.

38. Caskey and Caskey 1960.

39. Sampson 2008b, 362; Theocharis 1959.

40. Sampson 1981, 50.

41. Weinberg 1962, 171.

42. Kunze 1931, 13-17.

43. Tzavella-Evjen 2012, 63, tables 13-14.

44. For a different view, see Alram-Stern 2005, 191. Alram-Stern argues that links with the Peloponnese are not so close, though variegated and plastic (mastoid) decoration is also found.

45. Weinberg 1937, 496.

46. Caskey and Blegen 1975, 261-262.

47. Sampson 1981, 51-55; sites have been located in the areas of Pisonas, Chalkida.

A regular transition between the Early and Middle Neolithic is observed in Boeotia,⁴⁸ on Euboea, however, the available stratigraphic evidence is meagre.⁴⁹ The most important sites of the Middle Neolithic were excavated at Glypha, Liani Ammos and Theologos.⁵⁰ It is worth mentioning that these are located not only on the coast but also in the uplands. In the absence of ¹⁴C dates, we rely on conventional dating with the red-on-white 'Chaeronea' ware heralding the Middle Neolithic. Limited examples of this ware have been reported on Euboea,⁵¹ emphasizing the links with central Greece but also with the north Aegean: the Cyclops Cave at Youra,⁵² Agios Petros,⁵³ and Skyros.⁵⁴

These areas comprised a sphere of socio-cultural interaction in central Greece, partly overlapping with Thessaly: contrary to what geography implies, the distant northern Sporades were related not only to Thessaly but also Boeotia.⁵⁵ Although a route off the Thessalian coast to the Sporades has been suggested,⁵⁶ the fact that pottery traditions around the Sporades, Skyros and the north Euboean Gulf⁵⁷ are also connected to Boeotia⁵⁸ suggests that Euboea was a key area. The north-east Aegean should also be added to this broad sphere, if we consider for example the connections of Chios with the Greek mainland.⁵⁹

Euboea evidently played a crucial role, as it is more likely the sea contributed to than hindered the formation and consolidation of networks. In this light, it is no coincidence that sites of the 6th and 5th millennia are located in central and northern Euboea, directly opposite the mainland coast.

Late Neolithic I (LN Ia: 5300-4800, LN Ib: 4800-4300)

The affinity of Euboea with central Greece continued during the late 6th/5th millennium. In contrast, links with the north Aegean collapsed, and LN Ia sites are almost non-existent on the Sporades,⁶⁰ Skyros or in northern Euboea. The transition between the Middle and Late Neolithic is stratigraphically documented at Skoteini Cave.⁶¹ New sites have been found in the area of Psachna, of which the site of Varka represents the best example.⁶² In Boeotia, this transition is evident at Halai and Sarakenos Cave.⁶³ ¹⁴C dates cluster around 5300-5600 BC, shedding light on a critical phase, which was scarcely investigated⁶⁴ in old excavations. Euboean caves were also more extensively used during this phase, judging by the Agia Triada Cave (the Karystia) and Skoteini Cave (Tharrounia).

Matt-painted pottery is treated as the primary indicator for the Late Neolithic I in central Greece.⁶⁵ Black and grey polished wares as well as the patterned Urfirnis belong to a conceivably earlier, Middle

48. See for example Weinberg 1962, 174 for Elateia; Fakorellis and Coleman 2012, 2-4 for Halai.

49. Sampson 2006, 145.

50. Sampson 1996-1998.

51. Sampson 1981, 76-77.

52. Quinn et al. 2010; Sampson 2008a.

53. Efstratiou 1985.

54. Theocharis 1959.

55. Efstratiou 1985, 62-63; Katsarou-Tzeveleki 2006, 132.

56. Broodbank 1999, 29, fig. 1.6.

57. Sealey 2001.

58. Coleman et al. 1992, 288; Liritzis et al. 1991, 311-312.

59. Hood 1982, 715-716, 725.

60. But see Mavridis 2008 for Youra.

61. Sampson 1993a, 43.

62. Sampson 1977.

63. Sampson 2008b, 50-51.

64. Fakorellis and Coleman 2012, 2.

65. Phelps 2004, 65.

Neolithic-Late Neolithic transitional stage.⁶⁶ This development is observed on Euboea, e.g. at Varka⁶⁷ and Agia Kalliopi,⁶⁸ in Boeotia at the Sarakenos Cave,⁶⁹ Elateia,⁷⁰ Halai⁷¹ and Eutresis,⁷² but also in the Peloponnese at Aria (Argolid)⁷³ and Kouphovouno⁷⁴ (Lakonia).⁷⁵

The sites of Agia Kalliopi and Varka provide substantial stratigraphies and, more importantly, they comprise a rare group of open-air sites for the Late Neolithic Ia. On the other hand, the Skoteini Cave indicates the expansion of settlement and herding and the systematic exploitation of natural resources at higher altitudes.⁷⁶ All things considered, in this phase affinities across central and southern Greece are all the more evident, reaching at least the north-eastern Peloponnese.⁷⁷ The expansion of settlement on Euboea followed the developments on the mainland: central Euboea apparently constituted the easternmost limit of the mainland affinity, since matt-painted pottery is markedly scarce in southern Euboea or the islands to the east of Euboea.

On the other hand, the distinctive ‘Nea Makri’ incised pottery (with white in-fill), which is rare in Boeotian sites, was found in considerable quantities in the deepest stratum at the Skoteini Cave.⁷⁸ Examples of this ware are rare in Boeotian sites, suggesting that Euboea was linked with eastern Attica through an alternative coastal route. This was based on the networks between coastal sites along the east coast of Attica and west Euboea. Therefore, the existence of distinct, partly overlapping networks is evident: one encompassed the south Euboean Gulf and east Attica, while another one encompassed the area of Psachna and the north Euboean Gulf, stretching to Lokris (Halai).

In the later part of the Late Neolithic I (LN Ib), a striking contrast is manifest: the scarceness of polychrome wares in central Euboea (‘Gonia/Klenia-type’ wares)⁷⁹ *vis-à-vis* Boeotia (the Sarakenos Cave,⁸⁰ Corycean Cave⁸¹ and Elateia)⁸² contrasts with the omnipresence of the matt-painted ware. A chronological difference is not substantiated: this LN Ib-early LN Iia phase is well represented, in the Skoteini Cave for instance.⁸³ Instead, the contrast between the distribution of LN Ib Polychrome pottery *vis-à-vis* matt-painted pottery may have been related to the centres of production/circulation, which for some reason did not reach the areas closer to the Aegean, contrary to other contemporary networks. Generally, examples of polychrome wares of either Peloponnesian or Thessalian origin/inspiration are absent from Euboea. Therefore, in this phase links with the mainland probably made room for those coming from the Aegean and/or vice versa, as contact between the mainland and the Aegean was fading or being channelled through other areas.

Meanwhile, intense contact with the Aegean is documented by the discovery of painted light-on-dark pottery, a ware relatively scarce on the mainland. Southern Euboea is settled for the first time in

66. Douzougli 1998, 59.

67. Sampson 1977.

68. Sampson 1981, 80, 100.

69. Sampson et al. 2009, 24.

70. Weinberg 1962, 180, 196.

71. O’Neill et al. 1999, 273-274.

72. Caskey and Caskey 1960, 159-161.

73. Douzougli 1998, 61-64.

74. Mee et al. 2014, 90-91.

75. For a different view, see Vitelli 1993, 218.

76. Sampson 1993a, 95-101.

77. Vitelli 1995, 2.

78. Sampson 1993a, 94.

79. Blegen 1930, 69; Phelps 2004, 96.

80. Sampson 2008b, 190.

81. Touchais 1981, 150-154.

82. Weinberg 1962, 198.

83. Sampson 1993a, 83.

the late Neolithic,⁸⁴ an event paralleled to the foundation of sites in the Cyclades and occupation of coastal promontories especially in the southern Aegean.⁸⁵ The discovery of Saliagos ware in the deepest strata at the Agia Triada Cave⁸⁶ indicates the Cycladic element of the first societies of southern Euboea, societies which evidently participated in the extensive networks across the Aegean.⁸⁷

The orientation towards the Aegean was explicable for the Karystia, due to the rough terrain obstructing connections with central Euboea; however, it was not isolated from the rest of Euboea. The rare examples of light-on-dark pottery at Sarakenos and Eutresis had found their way probably via Euboea. This hypothesis is further supported by the increase of Melian obsidian, as southern Euboea participated in its procurement from the Cyclades.⁸⁸

The settlement of Ftelia on Mykonos is also dated to the Late Neolithic Ia.⁸⁹ In this case, several features in material culture and subsistence support the view that this northern Cycladic settlement stood quite apart from Saliagos in terms of several aspects of material culture⁹⁰ and economy. On the contrary, it was not worlds apart from Euboea, judging by several similarities in pottery shapes,⁹¹ clay figurines,⁹² but also in the specialized, 'mainland-type' economy based on ovicaprids.⁹³ The limited matt-painted pottery found at Ftelia suggests that contact with the mainland did take place, at least with the northern Cyclades⁹⁴—a dozen matt-painted fragments have been reported from Saliagos and Akrotiri.⁹⁵ This contact, instead of being direct, may have been channelled *via* Euboea,⁹⁶ which at this point had 'a foot in both camps'.

Late Neolithic IIa (4300-3800)

In the Late Neolithic IIa new trends spread across the Aegean islands and the southern mainland, signalled, amongst other things, by the appearance of red burnished and pattern burnished pottery.⁹⁷ Characteristic are the new shapes, such as bowls with rolled rims, and new types of lugs and handles, which were usually arranged vertically. The new features appear gradually while the painted wares⁹⁸ died away. The increase of pithoids with cordon decoration and smaller coarse vessels continued, with the addition of plastic and incised decoration.⁹⁹

It is becoming evident that the conventionally described 'Kephala Culture' influenced not only the western Cyclades and Attica but southern Greece as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Judging by the recent excavations in Boeotia, this seems to be also the case for central Greece.¹⁰¹ In this context, Euboea provided a major

84. Cullen et al. 2011, 39.

85. Davis 1992, 703.

86. Zas Cave, Naxos, and the Antiparos Cave belong to this phase as well; Mavridis 2010, 20-21; Zachos 1999, 154.

87. Mavridis and Tankosić 2009, 11. For further discussion see Takaoğlu 2006, 312-313; also Mavridis 2008, 114.

88. Cullen et al. 2011, 36.

89. ¹⁴C dates from the site's deepest stratum range around 5100-4800 BC; Fakorellis and Vardala-Theodorou 2015; Sampson 2006, 174.

90. At Ftelia, the discovery of Patterned Crusted Bichrome decoration and the scarceness of light-on-dark pottery is characteristic of this site.

91. For example, the particular pedestalled basins (*réchaud*-type vases).

92. Sampson 2002, 155.

93. Phoca-Cosmetatou 2008, 40-41.

94. Sotirakopoulou 1996, 583-595.

95. Evans and Renfrew 1968, figs. 56, 20, 21; Sotirakopoulou 2008a, 123-124.

96. For a detailed discussion, see Sotirakopoulou 2008b, 533-537.

97. Mari in Sampson 1993a, 147-149; Phelps 2004, 65; Sampson 1997, 323-326.

98. *Sensu stricto*, by use of the brush for decoration prior to original firing.

99. Sampson 1993a, 126.

100. Mari in Sampson 1993a, 147; Zachos and Douzougli, Forthcoming.

101. Sampson 2008b, 283-284.

gateway between the Aegean and central Greece. Despite the homogeneity present between Euboea and Boeotia in the Late Neolithic I, however, in the Late Neolithic II the marked increase of sites which occurred on Euboea did not equally occur in Boeotia. This contrast indicates new circumstances on the island, most probably following the developments in the islands of the Aegean. On Euboea, sites are located in diverse areas, on the coast, in the hinterland, even in remote upland areas at 800-m elevation. Most of them lie in the central and southern parts of the island, opposite the coast of Attica¹⁰²—a sharp contrast is observed between north and south Euboea, as sites are scarce to the north, unlike in earlier millennia. To the south, Plakari represents a major site in the Karystia, where the mountainous terrain meant better visibility and communication with Attica, Andros and Kea.¹⁰³

Late Neolithic IIB (3800-3300) and the transition to Early Bronze Age I

Although beyond the scope of this paper, the subsequent Early Bronze Age is briefly included, in order to further elucidate the diachronic changeability of perceived ‘distinct regions’. Homogeneity around the Aegean is more profound during the Late Neolithic IIB phase.¹⁰⁴ Although a hiatus around the mid-4th millennium is maintained by several authors,¹⁰⁵ past and recent excavations point to the opposite: numerous sites appear parallel to existing ones in central and southern Greece, such as Eutresis in Boeotia,¹⁰⁶ Strofilas¹⁰⁷ on Andros, Kephala on Keos, the Cyclops Cave on Youra, the Kitsos Cave,¹⁰⁸ and Tsepi in Attica,¹⁰⁹ to name but a few. Thus far, the available ¹⁴C dates range around 3600-3500 BC.¹¹⁰ In the Skoteini Cave at Tharrounia and the Sarakenos Cave, radiocarbon dates are clustered around 3500 BC.¹¹¹ Sites of the Grotta-Pelos phase in the Cyclades and in the Dodecanese also date to this period.¹¹² The recently excavated site of Nyphi at Ikaria¹¹³ is well in accordance also with this data. Moreover, a similar chronological framework is proposed both for the Peloponnese¹¹⁴ and the Rachmani phase in Thessaly.

A tripartite periodization has been proposed for Euboea:¹¹⁵ the first phase around 3500 BC, the second around 3300 and the third around 3000. Consequently, if indeed a hiatus occurred, it must have lasted no more than 200 years, given that dates for the EBA I range around 3300-3100 BC. Such a short gap could be attributed to various factors, other than actual desertion: economic and/or demographic demise, change in habitation areas, or even the light quality of building material, which generated thin deposits. The duration and nature of the transitional stage between the Neolithic and the EBA remain controversial,¹¹⁶ partly due to the preservation of EB I sites, with typically meagre deposits¹¹⁷ or architectural remains.¹¹⁸ But perhaps the most important constraint is the scarcity of carbon dates.¹¹⁹

102. Sampson 1981, 129.

103. Cullen et al. 2011, 40; Sampson 1981, 147; Tankosić and Mathioudaki 2011, 132.

104. Vagnetti 1996.

105. Coleman 2011; Nowicki 2002.

106. Caskey and Caskey 1960.

107. Televantou 2005.

108. Lambert 1981, 277-279.

109. Pantelidou-Gkofa 2005.

110. Alram-Stern, Forthcoming.

111. Sampson 2008b, 49-50.

112. Sampson 1987, 116-118.

113. Sampson 2014, 90; Sampson and Mastrogiannopoulou 2009, 5-6.

114. Alram-Stern, Forthcoming.

115. Sampson 1987, 198.

116. Coleman 2011; Vitelli 2007, 135.

117. Alram-Stern, Forthcoming.

118. With the exception of mortuary remains.

119. Alram-Stern 2014, 307-308.

Numerous new sites of varying size appeared all over Euboea during the very early Early Bronze Age I, i.e. after 3300 BC, next to the older ones. In consequence, in comparison with Boeotia, Euboea itself was probably influenced from the Aegean Bronze Age onwards or slightly earlier. Excavated sites, such as Manika and Kaloyerovrisi,¹²⁰ elucidate the course of developments in the late 4th millennium. Smaller coastal sites such as Linovrochi and Magula are also dated to between 3300 and 3000 BC. The vast quantities of obsidian suggest increased contact with the Cyclades. The pottery was neither typical Early Helladic (EH) II nor Neolithic. The same pottery was found in the settlement outside the Skoteini Cave, and in the deepest stratum at Manika and Kaloyerovrisi, again preceding the EH II stratum. The cemetery at Tharrounia, paralleled with Kephala, Tsepi and Early Cycladic I cemeteries, probably dates to this period. The coastal proximity of many EBA sites of southern Euboea,¹²¹ also observed in the Corinthian Gulf, demonstrates the marine orientation and increasing importance of seafaring.¹²²

Therefore, the developments in the Cyclades and Crete in the EB I not only affected the mainland a few hundred years later, but they also materialized differently. The juxtaposition of stratigraphies from Boeotia and Euboea illustrates this in the best way: the close synchronicity of the LN I-IIa gives way to a different picture at the turn of the 3rd millennium. At the Sarakenos Cave, the actual shift in the sequence is observable at the end of the EBA I and not between the LN IIB and the EB I, as was the case at Eutresis. Similar observations are made for stratified sites in the north-eastern Peloponnese such as Aigeira.¹²³

Suffice to say, the diverse terminology for this phase constitutes not only a methodological issue of description and synchronization, it portrays actual differences in the perception of scholars specializing in either the Bronze Age or the Neolithic. The fact that the Early Bronze Age culminated in very different phenomena around the Aegean in the Middle Bronze Age indicates that despite the observable similarities in material culture, the underlying economy and social structure might in fact have differed fundamentally. This differentiation was the outcome of the nexus between the rural (Neolithic) and urban (Bronze Age) economy,¹²⁴ boosted by the ‘international spirit’ of trade and seafaring.

Conclusions

The Euboean Neolithic can be used to partly explain the absence of sites in the islands of the central Aegean during the Early and Middle Neolithic. Habitation was centred in the west and central parts of the island and was related to the mainland. The association with the islands of the northern and north-east Aegean underlines a parallel maritime orientation which was already established by the Early Neolithic.

During the Middle and Late Neolithic I, Euboea was principally integrated in the socio-cultural traditions of central Greece. Sites were mainly concentrated in the central part of the island and to the north to a lesser extent. Nonetheless, the maritime perspective persisted, judging by the association with the Sporades-Skyros Culture but also with east Attica (Nea Makri). This aspect should not be overlooked when deeming central Greece a region isolated from the Aegean. The advantageous position of Euboea provided an outlet to the open sea but also a protected stretch of water between the continental coast and Euboea, thus contributing fundamentally to the multiplication and diversification of available resources for Euboean societies.

120. Sampson 1993b, 36-44, 73-74.

121. Cullen 2001.

122. Alram-Stern, Forthcoming.

123. Alram-Stern 2007, 5.

124. Nakou 1995; Renfrew 1972.

In the 4th millennium, transformations are palpable, and settlement expanded in the Aegean islands and along the mainland coast. Settlement in central Euboea continued; in south Euboea new sites appeared, unlike in north Euboea. Another shift is also visible in the late 4th millennium: Euboean societies responded more promptly and profoundly to the transformations of the Early Bronze Age, in comparison to Boeotia.

All in all, Euboea provides an example of the constant negotiation of interregional contact and mobilization which did not rely solely on geography but also on the conscious choices of the local societies who surpassed presumed limitations such as the mediation of the sea. From a very early stage, this area had perceivably distinct cultural entities and participated in extensive social networks. This review of the Euboean Neolithic can thus contribute to the re-evaluation of methodological classifications such as insular/continental or marginal/central.

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Figures

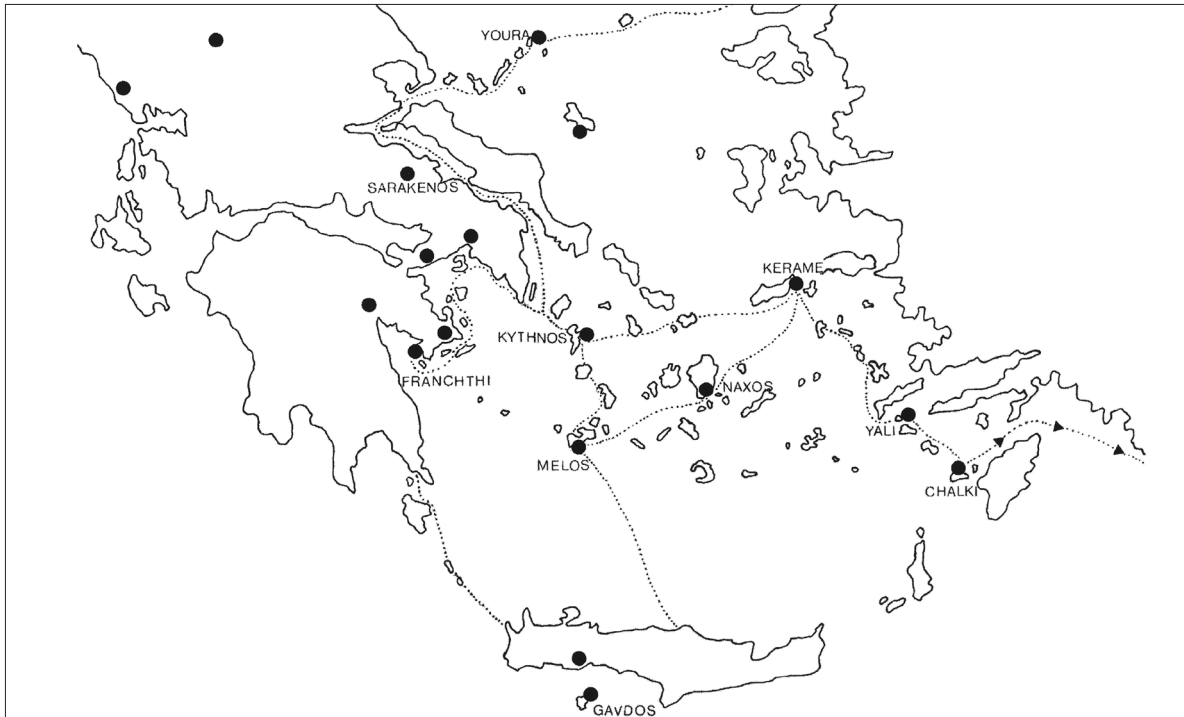


Figure 1: Mesolithic marine routes in the Aegean Sea (after Sampson 2014).

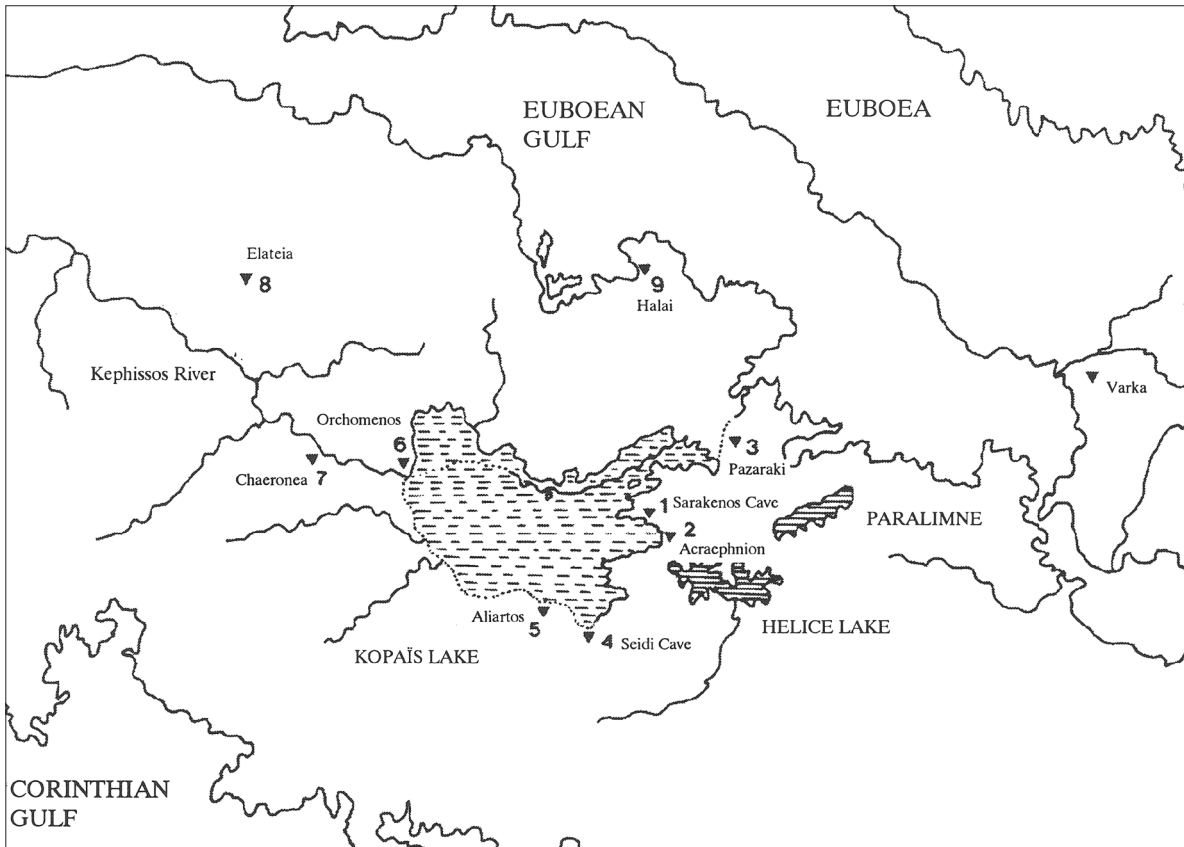


Figure 2: Neolithic sites in central Greece (after Sampson 2008b).

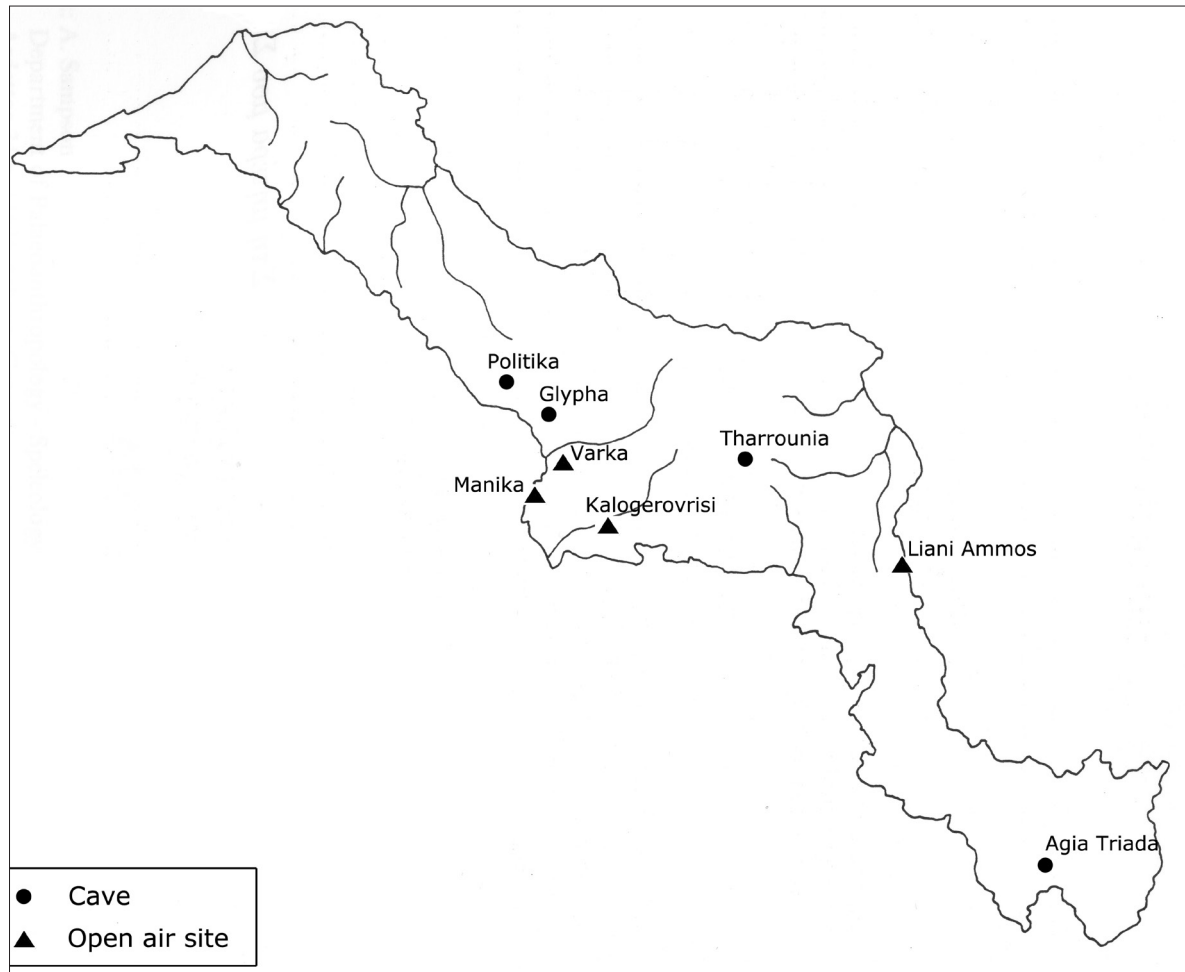


Figure 3: Map of Euboea with excavated Neolithic sites.