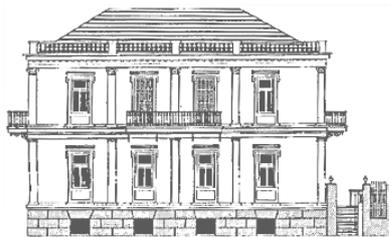


The History of Macedonia



Edited by

Ioannis Koliopoulos



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I. Prehistoric Macedonia

by Kostas Kotsakis

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1. Introduction

In regional archaeology, interest is often accompanied or caused by specific geopolitical events. The classic example of such a relationship is Napoleon's campaign in Egypt with the rise of Egyptology in Europe, and the history of research is full of such instances, even in recent times. Macedonia is no exception to this. The Balkan Wars and the First World War in particular brought this mysterious and little known area of the Balkans to public attention. It is not by chance that the first studies were conducted by allied troops stationed at various points of Macedonia. Sometimes these were nothing more than the chance result of activities such as digging trenches. They had in any case been preceded by Rey's article and the useful book by Casson at the beginning of the century, which accompanied Wace and Thompson's classic work, itself a result of the then recent annexation of Thessaly to the Greek state. Systematic research, however, appeared only in 1939 with W. Heurtley's valuable book *Prehistoric Macedonia*, a founding work for the study of the prehistory of this region and based on research conducted in the 1920s.¹

Without a doubt, however, as soon as research into Macedonian prehistory began, the region was seen in contrast to the South. This was to be expected: the South of Greece, the locus of classical civilisation and its prehistory, had from the 18th century been the core stereotype of the European perception of Greece, captivating the imagination of Europeans, through travellers, the landscapes of engravings, romantic descriptions of the *places* of classicism, and, of course, the archaeological artefacts. The European gaze defined research stances and approaches and scientifically shaped the type of archaeology that was practiced in the South: an archaeology that puts emphasis on art history as a high form of civilisation. For the history of archaeological research in Greece the role of Macedonia, as with that of Thessaly, has to a great degree been to act as a catalyst against the stereotypes of South Greek archaeology. It is not by chance that the first truly interdisciplinary archaeological programme in Greek prehistory, which marked the beginning of contemporary archaeological research, was conducted in Macedonia in the early 1960s; despite its unfortunate progress, it provided a model for much of the subsequent research carried out in Greece.²

If, as Heurtley himself explained in the introduction to his book, the purpose was to demonstrate that 'Macedonia goes with the South' and not with the 'North',³ this deep sense of difference must have been widespread at that time, a feeling strengthened by the recent political history of the region. Such discontinuity continues to shape research approaches even today, although to a lesser degree. The 'North-South Divide' has been repeatedly discussed in relation to developments in South Greece that were absent in Macedonia, such as the appearance of palace culture and 'social complexity', thus creating a kind of geographical and cultural 'boundary'.⁴ Just what the contribution of ancient political thought was to the formation of this notion of a difference that can be seen to the north and south of an imaginary 'boundary' is a matter for specialist

scholars. The only thing one should say about the prehistory of the region, admittedly on a general level, is that such a view of the boundary most probably leads to the essentialisation and objectification of multi-dimensional phenomena, such as social organisation or complexity, which neither have a stable content nor, as such, are they necessarily always manifested in the same way. For example, social complexity can be ascertained in various fields and not simply in the field of political organisation, nor in particular in the way in which power is diffused throughout the social structure. The last appears to predominate and to characterise certain societies in the Late Helladic period in the Peloponnese and Central Greece, obviously through specific social situations and special structural characteristics, but it does not necessarily prevail in other geographical areas, with different historical parameters. An archaeological discussion that insists on similar limits ends up looking at the appearance of specific archaeological forms, on both sides of the boundary, which it usually considers as stable and unchanging, and labels as ‘types’, e.g. palace type or a special pottery type. The presence of a ‘palace’, however, cannot be considered necessarily concomitant with political hierarchy, nor does it fully explain a hierarchy, whilst the absence of a palace does not necessarily also mean the absence of any form of social hierarchy. Pottery types cannot be compared without first understanding the function of the pots and the process of their production within different social contexts, in which they participate and partly produce, as elements of the material culture. There is, therefore, a deeper difficulty in formulating an analytic discourse that is based on stable categories that are formed through the concept of the ideal boundary. For this reason, each phenomenon shall here be approached, as far as possible, within its own parameters without being subject to generalised categories that presuppose in advance a specific content, meaning and role.

A similar difficulty, connected completely to the above, arises from the application of ethnic or cultural categories that are often adopted, seemingly indiscriminately, in an effort to reconstruct Macedonian prehistory. The meaning of cultural group (which, at bottom, does not represent anything more than selected archaeological categories of material culture, mainly pottery), is a popular tool in archaeological studies for historically reconfiguring peoples and groups with a supposed distinctive spatial behaviour, traceable thanks to the material culture and archaeological remains.⁵ According to this view, the archaeological evidence reveals ethnic and cultural origins, movements and even migrations and colonisations. It overlooks, however, the fact that this traceable distribution of finds is essentially the result of the one-dimensional significance that archaeological research attaches to material culture, pottery in particular. If pottery and material culture are not evidence of cultural origins, but elements of the identity of the groups living in a region, then the picture that emerges is significantly different. In place of a linear movement of cultural groups, a dense multi-dimensional network of relations and contacts between prehistoric communities is shaped, which may not have the schematic simplicity of conventional reconstruction, but is undoubtedly richer and perhaps nearer the reality of prehistoric life. We shall not, however, discuss the question of origins in general, a question with particular theoretical and semiological overtones, and which goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

Finally, in terms of the history of research, a couple of words on the geography of this region. Regardless of geopolitical developments, the geographical region of Macedonia is defined by the outflow basin of the River Axios, which connects the areas to the north and south of the contemporary political boundary, i.e., from the borders of Greece and the F.Y. Republic of Macedonia. In this presentation of the prehistory, the aim shall not be to adopt a new, contemporary boundary to replace the ideal one between North and South of the early 20th century, shifting the dividing line some kilometres to the north, to today’s borders between the two countries. Even so, it is in-

teresting, and ought to be noted, that, in terms of the international interest, the reconstruction of prehistory on both sides of the borders has not followed parallel paths. In the F.Y. Republic of Macedonia, foreign research projects have only recently taken off, in parallel with the local ones. On the Greek side, the initial picture was shaped within an international environment, already before the Second World War. The participation of Greek scholars has been felt only in the last few decades, becoming prevalent from the 1980s onwards.

2. The natural environment

No record of human activity is complete without the parameter of the environment. As prehistorians had already observed in the previous century, the environment provides the totality of the potential and resources that any human group has available to it, independently of how much and in which way it uses them. It is a potential productive dynamic, which, in contrast with the widespread notion of stability, is in constant motion and change, as a result of repeated natural processes and phenomena. At the same time, humans, in their daily contact with their surroundings, are constantly transforming the natural environment into landscape, and space into the *place* of their daily practices. The natural environment, then, as it is being transformed into social environment, is in constant dialogue with social reality. In order to understand the parameters of the life of prehistoric man, the successive creation of prehistoric landscapes is a central theme in the history of human settlement. Throughout the whole of the prehistoric period, we can closely observe the creation of these prehistoric palimpsests that were marked on space by, sometimes lesser and sometimes greater, human interventions.

Our knowledge of the Macedonian environment is not so detailed as to permit a particularly good picture, specialised for different regions. We have fragmentary knowledge of the natural changes, for certain regions where related research has been carried out. A classic example is the alluvial deposits of the Thermaic gulf. Struck and Hammond's historical hypothesis has been confirmed by systematic later studies in the region, which indicate an extensive episode of alluvial deposits, which in later antiquity transformed the deep Thermaic gulf into a lagoon, and from a shallow lake in more modern times to a complex interaction of alluvial deposit deltas, with a rise in the sea level.⁶ Studies on the geomorphology of the area of North Pieria have reconstructed the stages in the complicated sequence of erosion and alluviation, in which humans also played a part. The deposits in the plain of Katerini exceed 10 metres. The distinct episodes of deposits in the adjacent streams date from the early 7th millennium BC, i.e. the beginning of the Neolithic period, whilst the last episodes date to the middle and modern historical era. As such, many sites, of which only a very few have so far been found by chance, are presumed to be 'buried' at the lowest points of the relief. In contrast, the hills that surround the plain have undergone extensive erosion and the archaeological sites in these areas have, to a great degree, been destroyed. The coastline of Pieria has experienced similar dramatic changes. The conclusion is that the picture that we have for diachronic human settlement is to a great degree distorted by natural geomorphic processes, whilst the available microenvironment of sites was at any given moment completely different from that suggested by the present picture of the landscape.⁷

The example of North Pieria shows just how important reconstruction of the environmental history is in order to understand the elements of the landscape independent of period, also highlighting the need for extensive geomorphological studies. In this context, the sense of the 'immobility' of the natural environment, which general opinion sees as a stable parameter within the mobility of history, is demonstrated to be inaccurate and unreliable. This is compounded when vegetation, the element with which

humans developed a direct and multi-dimensional relationship, is added to the environmental factors. Thankfully, analyses of the pollen that covers the whole of the area of Greek Macedonia give, to a certain extent, a clearer picture of the fluctuations in deciduous forest, in comparison with the geomorphology, allowing hypotheses to be made as to temperature changes and, primarily, the relationship between vegetation and human activity. For example, it is suggested that in the 5th millennium BC summer in the uplands may have been up to 4 degrees warmer than today. In contrast, only by the Bronze Age, indeed towards its end, does there appear to be some vegetation regression, most likely a result of the intensive grazing and colonisation of the uplands. Even so, the palaeobotanical evidence is not conclusive enough to verify this.⁸

3. Early Prehistory

The earliest human presence in Greece has been identified in Macedonia. The Petralona hominid of Chalkidiki has been extensively discussed, both for his age as well as for his anthropological characterisation. It is generally agreed today that he represents a distinct species of Eurafrian Middle Pleistocene archaic *Homo sapiens*, known as *Homo heidelbergensis*, whilst the most recent laboratory datings place his presence to around 150–250,000 before Present (B.P.).⁹ This has now closed an issue that caused a number of disagreements and, on occasion, strong controversies, whilst older estimates at dating have been demonstrated to have been exaggerated.¹⁰

Human presence during the earliest period of Greek prehistory, known as the Lower Palaeolithic, has now been demonstrated by the discovery of surface finds. The findings at Rodia in Thessaly have been added to those of the South Peloponnese, whilst recent finds at Zagliveri near Thessaloniki demonstrate that human presence was far more regular during this period than had previously been thought.¹¹ The exceptionally patchy data cannot at present but underline the gap in our knowledge and our inability to discuss the more complex questions that preoccupy specialists of the early periods, such as, for example, the African origin of Neanderthals and the first entry of human beings into the Greek peninsula.¹² A similar indication is the well-known handaxe from Palaiokastro near Kozani, the work of a human similar to the Petralona hominid. The locations of these finds, at strategic passes between distinct geographical units, confirm the particularly large-scale movement of groups of that time. Tracing the archaeological evidence for human presence will undoubtedly require systematic and painstaking research, which in Greece, and in particular in Macedonia, has only just started, with few and limited resources.¹³

There is a significant gap in the early prehistory of Macedonia, in relation to the late Pleistocene and early Holocene. We do not have any specific indications of human presence in the area before and after the glacial maximum of the 18th millennium, and the gap is not even filled for those areas of Macedonia which are today located to the north of the Greek border. The haematite mines at Limenaria on Thasos, dating to the Late Palaeolithic, are an exception.¹⁴ It is logical to attribute this gap to the lack of dedicated, specialist research and to a limited understanding of the Pleistocene deposits and their complicated geological characteristics, as well as to the difficulty in locating and interpreting archaeological remains that are not easily visible and recognisable. So far, however, the first clear archaeological traces of the Holocene can be dated to the late 7th century BC. This means that the crucial phase of permanent settlement and agricultural life is not represented in Macedonia, at least not to the extent and in the same way that it is represented in Thessaly. Research has only just cautiously taken off, and it is certain that there will be more data in the near future, which will permit a more complete understanding.

On the available data, the first Neolithic settlements do not precede the last quarter of the 7th millennium — in other words, they are much later than the corresponding Thessalian ones dated to the first quarter of the same millennium. The processes by which the first landscapes of the Neolithic farmers were shaped escape us, since even the systematic excavations of this phase are not yet adequate. The process by which the earliest communities emerged at the beginning of the Neolithic period in Greece escapes us completely, although various versions as to how they made their appearance can be found in the scholarly literature. In general, the discussion focuses either on the idea of ‘neolithisation’ or on that of the ‘Neolithic transformation’. The former usually emphasises the imposition — or transfer — of a social and economic structure, usually through the movement of people and colonisation, that had already been formed in the Middle East and Central Anatolia, thus explaining the first Neolithic settlements.¹⁵ The latter, by contrast, without excluding movements, lays greater emphasis on the process by which the supposed economic and social model is transformed, as it reorients itself to the many and various interactions with the environment (natural and social), local populations and moving groups.¹⁶ Of course, the simplistic way in which the question of the beginning of the Neolithic was posed by the previous generation of archaeologists, i.e. as either a question of autochthonous development or as a result of migration, no longer stands. Both contemporary hypotheses understand that the shift to the Neolithic represents a deeper social change that must be understood on its own terms, within a context that research must reconstruct as far as possible.

In the case of Thessaly, the view that the earliest settlements are due to population movements from the Middle East and Central Anatolia prevails.¹⁷ Research knows nothing of the local pre-Neolithic populations of Macedonia, and as such it has so far proven simply impossible to determine their relationship with the exogenous groups. Although it was proposed in the 1980s, the view of the autochthonous rise of the Neolithic has today been abandoned. Neither does the issue of the movement of farming populations from Anatolia to southern Greece via Macedonia arise, since the earliest known settlements are later than those of Thessaly. Moreover, no sites dating to the Early Neolithic (i.e. the 7th millennium) have been located in East Macedonia and Thrace, making it difficult to argue for the movement of these populations through these areas.

The classic view for the position that Macedonia had in the spread of the Neolithic throughout Europe follows the model of Gordon Childe, formulated in the inter-war period.¹⁸ According to this model, Macedonia was the natural channel for the penetration of the Neolithic to Europe, along the Axios, Morava and Danube river valleys. Following the chronology of the sites-stops on this route, this movement must have taken place in the last centuries of the 7th millennium. Yet, this linear route can only be observed if one is limited to the rough framework of the archaeological data, as earlier scholars were of necessity due to a lack of data. When we take a closer look at the particular manifestations of this cultural route, then a whole set of differences arises to destroy this simple picture. For example, the early sites identified in the Ochrid area could shift the dates for the movements of the Neolithic period if it is proven that they are earlier than the early sites of Greek West Macedonia.¹⁹ Indeed, some scholars, such as Catherine Perlès, believe that Neolithic colonisation of Greek Macedonia came from the Balkans and not the other way round. The Neolithic Balkans are now associated by some scholars more with NW Anatolia, via the Bosphorus, and less with Neolithic Thessaly, with which the similarities truly do seem less close.²⁰

As noted in the introduction, this debate wholeheartedly accepts the basic hypothesis of cultural archaeology, that the similarities in the material culture of different regions indicate a cultural relationship, and that this is only possible through population