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**PREHISTORIC AEGEAN AND THE REGIONS OF THE BLACK SEA AND  
KAUKASOS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND MYTHS**

Our knowledge for contacts between the prehistoric Aegean and the regions of the Black Sea and Kaukasos is still very limited. Recently there is an increasing interest in detecting these relations and solving relevant problems.

For the study of these relations one has two classes of evidence on which to base his results: the archaeological material and the much later literary tradition. The question arises, which of the two classes should be given priority? In this paper I intend to use the archaeological evidence as the basic material, at the same time assuming oral tradition and myths as providing additional and useful information of certain movements and consequent connexions, between the two areas.

A start may be made with the pottery. Unfortunately imported Aegean pottery in the area of the Black Sea is extremely scarce, coming from one site only, *Masat*, in the southern coast of the Black Sea. It consists of six vases (five flasks and one stirrup jar) of late Mycenaean date (LH IIIA/B) and some other Mycenaean potsherds, which are thought to have reached this site via the sea route of Hellepont and the coast of Black Sea rather than an inland route via Asia Minor<sup>1</sup>. The identification of some other "Mycenaean" sherds, mentioned by Fimmen in 1924, from Akalan and the meaning of a clay animal (ram) figurine from Samsun bearing an Aegean inscription are still questionable and doubtful<sup>2</sup>.

Objects other than pottery appear to have been imported from the Aegean more frequently and in greater number. So, while there is as yet no traces of Mycenaean pottery to the north of Greek Thrace and in the west coast of the Black Sea, several metal objects, such as bronze double axes, spearheads and rapiers are reported. Irrespective of an Aegean or most likely local origin (imitations of Aegean prototypes) of these objects, they strongly indicate links between the two areas<sup>3</sup>.

Additional and clearer evidence for these contacts is provided by an impressive number (150) of still unpublished stone anchors found at Nessebar, Sozopoli, Cape Kaliakta and some other places<sup>4</sup>. They are similar in shape and functional device to those already known from several Late Bronze Age Mediterranean and especially Aegean coastal sites<sup>5</sup>. Without denying the possibility that they are of a later date and locally made, I should be inclined to think, on consideration of their shape and use that they most probably betray a Mycenaean origin and inspiration. This, however, does not mean that all these anchors belonged to lost Aegean ships. As their making was easy and cheap, they could have been made locally, imitating those used by the first Aegean ships reached there.

Aegean connexions with the west coast of the Black Sea are also indicated by the finding some years ago at Cape Kaliatra and at Cerkovo near Karnobat-Burgas of two (or more?) oxhide ingots similar to those known from several Aegean sites. Whether these ingots are Aegean imports, judging by an "Aegean" sign stamped on the Cerkovo specimen, or, as Harding<sup>6</sup> suggests, indicative of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. T.Ozguz, *Masat Hüyük* (1978) col.pl. D, Pl. 83f. Also, D. French, "Mycenaean in the Black Sea?", *Thracia Pontica* 1 (1982) 21ff.; K.Bittel, "Das zweite vorchristliche Jahrtausend im östlichen Mittelmeer und im Vorderen Orient, Anatolien und Ägäis", *Gymnasium* 85 (1976) 528ff.; Hiller, "The Mycenaean and the Black Sea" *Aegaeum* 7 (1991) 208.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mee, "Aegean Trade and Settlement in the Second Millennium B.C." *Anatolian Studies* 23(1978) 121ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Panayotov, "Bronze Rapiers, Swords and Double Axes from Bulgaria", *Thracia* 5 (1980) 173ff; Bouzek, *The Aegean, Anatolia and Europe: Cultural Interrelations in the Second Millennium B.C.* (1985) 30FF; Harding, *The Mycenaean and Europe* (1984) 127, 152, 262.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lazarov, *Thracia* 3 (1974) 107ff.; Hiller, *Aegaeum* 7 (1991) 209.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Frost, "Stone anchors as indicators of Early Trade Routes", *Societes et compagnes de commerce en Orient et dans l' Ocean Indien, Actes du huitieme colloque international d' histoire maritime* (ed. M. Mollot, Paris 1970) 55ff.; also, McCaslin, *Stone anchors in antiquity: Coastal Settlements and maritime trade-routes in the Eastern Mediterranean ca. 1600-1050 B.C.* (1980).

<sup>6</sup> Harding, *op.cit.* (n.3), 45, 52, 261, fig. 7.

Balkan ore transportation to the Mediterranean and the Aegean, as the Bourgas region is rich in metals, is by no means certain<sup>7</sup>.

Turning to the South Russia and the north west coast, relations with the Aegean may be detected by the presence of some Late Bronze Age double axes of the so-called Kilindir and Hermones types and ten others of Aegean Type B with an oval shaft hole, similar to those of "Treasury P" from Troy VI<sup>8</sup>, at several sites in the hinterland and the Krimaia peninsula (Kozorezovo, Kerc, Scetkovo, Berezan, Jekaterinoslav)<sup>9</sup>.

The evidence for contacts between the two areas is supplemented by bone cheek pieces of horse bits from Trachtemirov near Kievo, a bone disc from Iljicevka (Donec area), the spiral ornament of the pin-head from the Borodino Treasure (near Odessa) and a "Stangen -Knebel " from Belz near Sokal (Ukraine), which have more or less good parallels from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae<sup>10</sup>.

I am not sure, whether the occurrence of faience beads in South Russia and the Kaukasos area should be taken as an additional evidence for contacts between Aegean and the Black Sea, possibly via Troy and the Pontic route<sup>11</sup>.

Moving eastwards, to the south of the Kaukasos range, connexions with the Aegean are possibly observable first in the presence of some weapons (long swords and spearheads) from tombs of the so-called *Trialeti culture* in Georgia, resembling Aegean types A and B of swords and Höckmann's G Type of spearheads and secondly in the occurrence of an impressive, still unpublished, silver vessel from Kirovakan in Armenia, very similar in shape to a large Vapheio cup<sup>12</sup>.

Turning to the oral tradition and myths, it may be said that they support to some extent the archaeological evidence. So, the literary tradition of the classical times suggests<sup>13</sup> by equating Kolchis, i.e. the NW. region of the Black Sea to the mythological land of Aia, that people of the prehistoric Aegean travelled as far as that area. Furthermore, it has been argued by Leaf, Korfmann and most recently by Doumas<sup>14</sup> that the island of Lemnos and Troy owed their importance during the Bronze age to their strategic geo-commercial position controlling access to the Black Sea and the regions of Kaukasos as well as to their role as anchorages of ships waiting for favourable weather conditions to enter and pass the Hellespont.

It is tempting, therefore, to suggest that the island of Lemnos and Troy, situated at the entrance of the Dardanelles, if they were intended to bring commercial benefits to the Aegeans, must be seen as two very important stepping-stones to the north. Access to the Black Sea and Kaukasos required bases in those sites, which were indeed rightly placed to provide facilities to ships coming and going to the north and voyages there, and perhaps beyond, would obviously find such bases highly desirable, if not essential.

The metallurgical needs of the Aegeans were covered partly by the local ores of Cyclades and Laurion and partly by a still not known source in the north<sup>15</sup>. According to recent isotopic and metallurgical studies this source must be sought beyond the SW Europe and the Asia Minor, perhaps in the regions of Kaukasos (Afganistan). If this is correct and taking into account the well-known metallurgical myths ((Prometheus, Argonaut expedition) according to which the prehistoric Greeks maintained

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hiller, *Aegaeum* 7 (1991) 210.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hawkes, "The Double Axe in Prehistoric Europe", *BSA* 37 (1936) 141ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Harding, "Mycenaean Greece and Europe": The Evidence of Bronze Tools and Implements", *PPS* 41 (1975) 183ff. Also, Bouzek, *op.cit.* (n.3), 46, nn. 5-14.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hüttel, *Bronzezeitliche Trensen in Mittel- und Osturoopa, Grundzüge in ihrer Entwiklung*, *PBF* XVI.2 (1981) 43ff.; Karo, *Schachtgräber*, pls. LX.320, LXII, 685; p. 146, fig. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Sulimirski "Aegean Trade with Eastern Europe and its Consequences", *Mélanges de préhistoire, d' archéocivilisation et d' ethnologie offerts à André Varagnac* (1971) 715, map 3 and p. 720. See, however, Harding, *The Mycenaeans and Europe* (1984) 262 ("The faience industry was well established there, too, in the later second Millenium, but this probably reflects the industry of Mesopotamia rather than any connections with the Aegean")

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Japaridge, "The Trialeti culture in the light of the latest discoveries and its relation to Anterior Asia and the Aegean Sea", *Actes du VIIIe Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques, Belgrade 1971* (1974) vol. III, 39-43; M. Gimbutas, *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* (1965) 89ff. The cup is possibly still unpublished, cf. Leveque, "La Colchide du VIIe au IVe siècle av. n. è.", *IV Symposium de Tsxoltubo, Géorgie, RA* 1986, 398f; Melink, "Archaeology in Asia Minor", *AJA* 92 (1988) 116; Hiller, *Aegaeum* 7 (1991) 212-13.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. e.g. Meuli, *Odysee and Argonautika* (1921); Lesky, "Aia", *Wiener Studien* 63 (1948) 22ff.

<sup>14</sup> Leaf, *Troy, A Study in Homeric Geography* (1912) 26; Korfmann, "Troy. Topography and Navigation", *Troy and the Trojan War. A Symposium held at Bryn Mawr College, October 1984* (1986) 1ff.; Doumas, "Telchines", *Cyprus and the Aegean in Antiquity from the prehistoric period to the 7th century A.D. Nicosia 8-10 December 1995* (Nicosia 1997) 81f.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. H.Gale, "Some Aspects of lead and silver mining in the Aegean", *Miscellanea Graeva*, fasc.2, 9ff.; H.Gale-Z. Stos-Gale, "Lead and Silver in the Ancient Aegean" *Scientific American*, 244, 176ff.; Doumas, *op.cit.*

contacts with the Kaukasos area, it is reasonable to agree with Dumas's suggestion for a northern origin of the EBA metals of the northern Aegean. The archaeological evidence for a local metal industry at Poliochni in Lemnos during the EBA in conjunction with the mythological tradition (invention of fire, homeland of the chief-metallurgist god Hepaistos and his sons and grandsons Kaveiroi) support the idea for its important role.

The metal finds mentioned above (the Ukrainian cheek pieces, the Trialeti weapons and possibly the Borodino hoard) may indicate an early Mycenaean arrival at the regions of the Black Sea and Kaukasos. Such an early contact between the two areas is probably, reflected by the mythical Argonautic expedition, which, according to the Greek myths, could be assigned before the Trojan War.

Of special interest is that Mycenaean links with the north appear to be stronger in the earlier rather than in the later Mycenaean period. It has been argued by J. Muhly<sup>16</sup>, on the evidence of the similarities of some gold objects from the Royal Shaft Graves at Mycenae (e.g. gold sheets from Grave V), the unusual spiral ornament and the horse-burials – a characteristic feature of the Volga-Ural area cultures – that some influence, if not immigration, of steppe people to Greece may be detected during the Shaft Grave period.

Without denying the possibility that Muhly is right, I should be inclined to think that the gold treasures from Mycenae, simply indicate commercial contacts of the Mycenaean with the rich in gold Pontic area. Whether they should be connected or not with the mythical Golden Fleece<sup>17</sup> I cannot say.

Lastly, the considerable quantity of Mycenaean pottery found in the ruins of Troy VI and VII suggests that there is no difficulty in presuming normal traffic between the Aegean and the Black Sea with an intermediary port at Troy at least during the great expansion of the Mycenaean power and until the destruction of that city ca. in the middle of the 12th century B.C.

<sup>16</sup> Muhly, "On the Shaft Graves at Mycenae", *Studies in Honor of T.B.Jones*, ed. by M.A. Powell and R.H.Sack (*AOAT* 203 (1973) 311ff.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion on the origin of the Shaft Grave gold see, G.Korres, *PAE* (1976) 501ff.; Muhly, "Metals and Metallurgy in Crete and the Aegean at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age", *TUAS* 5 (1980) 25ff.; Dickinson, *The Origins of Mycenaean Civilisation* (1977) 53f.; Hiller, *Aegaeum* 7 (1991) 215.