

THE DOMESTICATION OF THE VINE AND OLIVE IN THE AEGEAN AND CYPRUS

Evi MARGARITIS¹

Key words: Bronze Age, Olea, Vitis, cultivation, oil and wine production

In 1972, Colin Renfrew presented for the first time in the *Emergence of Civilisation* the so-called Mediterranean polyculture (olive, vine and wheat) hypothesis, arguing that during the early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BCE) the systematic exploitation of olive and grapevine transformed traditional Neolithic subsistence, until then based on cereals, pulses and livestock.

The timeframe of the initial intensive cultivation of both grapes and olives in Greece is a cornerstone of the debate. While Renfrew suggested the early Bronze Age, others have proposed the late Bronze Age or even later periods. These scholars have emphasised the absence of archaeological and especially archaeobotanical evidence for the intensive production of olive oil and wine during the Aegean Bronze Age.

This project will for the first time directly address the insufficient study of archaeobotanical evidence. Previous and ongoing fieldwork by this applicant is leading to the formation of a comprehensive programme of sample collection covering a wide region and timespan in a collection strategy specifically designed to address the question of the introduction of intensive olive and grapevine cultivation. The present proposal is to approach these issues through the direct analysis of archaeobotanical remains of olive and vine found charred in securely dated archaeological contexts. Such remains, retrieved mainly from sites in the Aegean and Cyprus, will be analysed in order both to create a) reliable models and techniques for the distinction of wild and domesticated olive and vine and b) to detect direct archaeobotanical evidence for wine and olive oil production, such as pressed grape pips and crushed olive stones respectively. These analyses will lead to clear-cut, direct and statistically valid evidence for the domestication and intensive cultivation of vine and olive in the Aegean and thereby offer a solid evidential basis for the roles played by olive and grapevine cultivation in the formation of the earliest complex societies in Europe.

¹ British School at Athens, 52 Soudias Street, 10676 Athens, Greece, e-mail: evimargaritis@gmail.com