

# COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION


The Circum-Aegean Area During the 5th and 4th Millennia BC



EDITED BY

Søren Dietz, Fanis Mavridis, Žarko Tankosić and Turan Takaoglu



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*Front cover: Ships carved into a rock from the site of Strophilas on Andros (photograph from the personal archive of C. Televantou); drawing of a rock carving from the main bastion on the wall at the site of Strophilas on Andros representing a procession of ships (drawing by C. Televantou).*



## Cave habitations in Chalcolithic Lycia: The case of Tavabaşı near Tlos

*Taner Korkut, Gül Işın and Turan Takaoğlu<sup>1</sup>*

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### Introduction

It was after the initiation of archaeological investigations at the Bronze Age site of Karataş-Semayük on the Elmalı Plain in 1963 by M. Mellink from Bryn Mawr College that we first began to obtain a picture of prehistoric life in inner Lycia in South-Western Anatolia.<sup>2</sup> Besides Bronze Age remains, Mellink's valuable investigations also identified the presence of Late Chalcolithic habitation in Lycia through the finds at Karaburun, Boztepe and Bağbaşı near Karataş-Semayük.<sup>3</sup> However, one of the most important contributions of this work on the Elmalı Plain was C. Eslick's recognition of the Middle Chalcolithic period, representing roughly the first half of the 5th millennium BC, in the archaeological record of Lycia for the first time.<sup>4</sup> Recognition of the Middle Chalcolithic period among finds at Kızılbél and Lower Bağbaşı was therefore an important step since this period is one of the poorly-understood stages of Western Anatolian prehistory. What was happening in upland areas located between the Lycian coastal zone and inner regions in the Middle Chalcolithic period has consequently become a curious archaeological issue, as this mainly mountainous region of Lycia was often considered to be a marginal environment with little human activity in prehistoric times.

Recent archaeological investigations initiated at the ancient Lycian city of Tlos in the hinterland of Fethiye began to broaden our knowledge of pre-Bronze Age Lycia (Fig. 56.1). Because Tlos was among the major Western Anatolian cities mentioned in Hittite texts as *Tlawa*, the pre-classical past of the city and its territory has attracted a great deal of attention among Lycian specialists. In this context, a team involved in the Tlos excavations has begun to focus more on exploration of the pre-Classical sequences at Tlos and its surroundings.<sup>5</sup> Archaeological soundings conducted in the center of ancient Tlos in the stadium area near the acropolis yielded evidence of habitation dating

back to as early as the beginning of the 5th millennium BC.<sup>6</sup> The earliest evidence that the team came across is from the remains of a mound-type settlement identified at the mouth of the Girmeler Cave. Situated in the valley below the city of Tlos, the Girmeler Cave has revealed proof of habitation from the end of the 9th to the 4th millennium BC.<sup>7</sup> A number of pot sherds that could be ascribed to the Middle and Late Chalcolithic period have also been identified among the pottery assemblage of the Girmeler Cave, though they were not found in stratigraphic contexts.

### The site and its remains

Archaeological surveys conducted in the mountainous terrain of Tlos in 2011 identified two caves located very close one another in a district called Tavabaşı, which are the focus of this study. These two caves, an upper cave and a lower cave close by (Fig. 56.2), are situated on the northern slope of the mountain range approximately 900 m above sea level. An agricultural plain with a perennial spring has been attested about 60 metres below. The two caves at Tavabaşı yielded evidence mainly for Middle Chalcolithic habitation roughly occupying the second quarter of the 5th millennium BC, which was previously rarely attested in Lycia.

The upper cave, which lies just above and to the left of the lower cave, has a wide entrance 19 metres across. It is composed of two galleries and a small room. Due to the large boulders that had fallen from the ceiling, it was very difficult to access and examine this cave in detail and open trial trenches there. A small assemblage of artefacts mainly left over from illicit digs was collected from the interior. The homogeneous pottery assemblage identified over the surface of the cave is easily dated to the Middle Chalcolithic period, corresponding to the first half of the 5th millennium

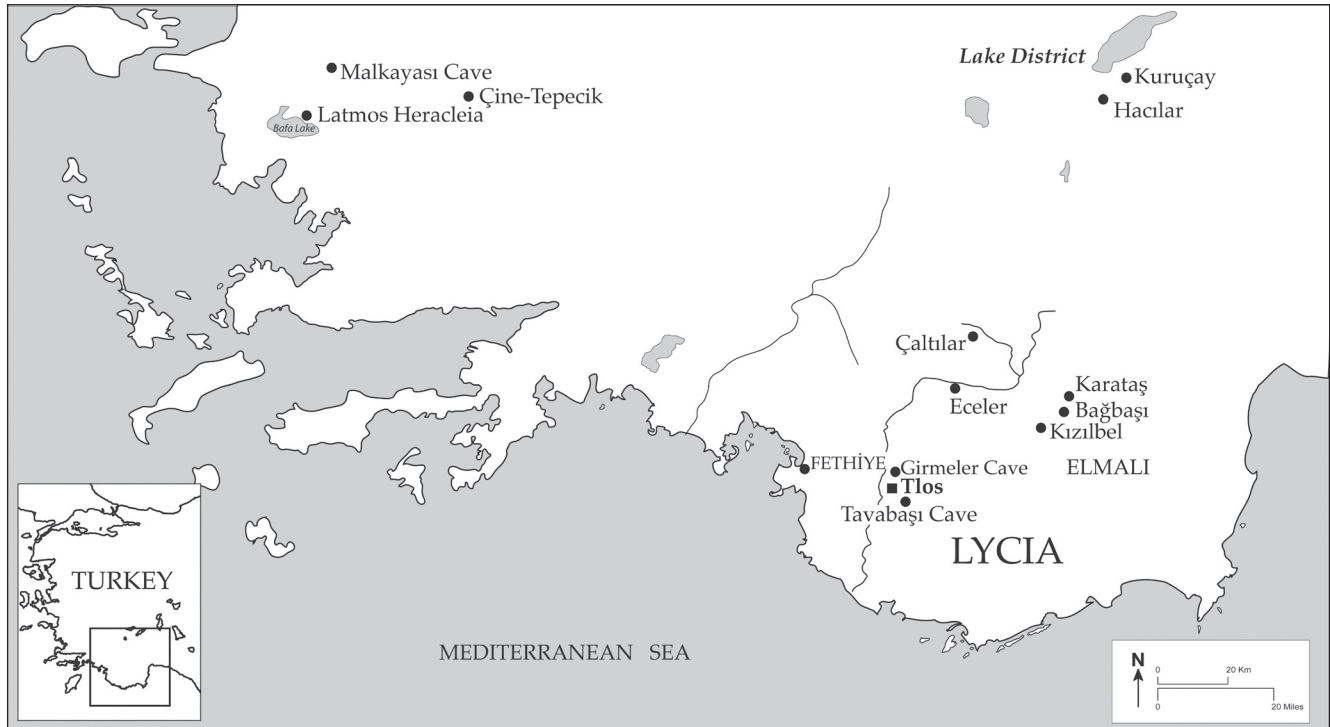


Figure 56.1. Map locating Tavabaşı and other major sites mentioned in the text.

BC. Remains of cisterns and pot sherds inside and outside the upper cave indicate that this locus was also settled in Greek and Roman times as well as in the Byzantine period.

Due to the dangers of working in the upper cave, the lower cave at Tavabaşı became the focus of investigations. This lower cave runs inwards perpendicular to the valley in front of it. A terrace is present in front of the weathered rock face (Fig. 56.3). The lower cave consists of a small chamber measuring 10 m long and 6 m wide and is accessible only through a narrow entrance measuring 1.2 m high and 0.6 m wide, preventing daylight from reaching the interior. In order to gain insight into the stratification of the cave, we decided to dig a trial trench. A 2 × 2 m trial trench was laid out on the western edge of the lower cave in an area previously disturbed by looters. The trench, which reached down to bedrock at a depth of 2.5 m, yielded a 60 cm thick Middle Chalcolithic stratum formed of loose dark-brown soil above the virgin soil (Figs 56.4–5). A burnt layer with ash and other traces of fire was identified on the floor of this Middle Chalcolithic stratum. There was no indication of structures but irregular pieces of rock up to 25 cm in length were found. A small assemblage of pot sherds and animal bones retrieved from this stratum provides information on the cave's users. The small amount of animal bones found above the ash layer represent sheep/goats, cattle, wild goat (*Capra aegagrus*), fallow deer (*Dama dama*), and wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), indicating that hunting was an important subsistence activity at the sites in addition to agricultural pursuits. The trial trench unfortunately yielded

almost no evidence of groundstone objects such as querns, handstones, mortars and pestles, although several fragments of pithoid vessels were found, which could be accepted as evidence of utilisation of the cave for storage.

A chronological estimate obtained through comparisons of pottery from Tavabaşı with that found at several sites in Western Anatolia and the adjacent Eastern Aegean islands is confirmed by radiocarbon dates. Two samples, one of charcoal and the second a bone sample, were taken from the Middle Chalcolithic stratum for radiocarbon determinations. The AMS radiocarbon dating of these two samples was carried out by the Waikato Dating Laboratory in New Zealand, and gave a range for the lower cave from *ca.* 4838 to 4459 cal BC. These two radiocarbon dates from Tavabaşı correspond to roughly 300–350 years of occupation in the second quarter of the 5th millennium BC. Evidence from the lower cave therefore suggests that additional cave sites might be expected from this period in addition to the settlements located on fertile alluvial plains.

The pottery from the trial trench in the lower cave is fragmentary but quite sufficient to obtain clues about the cultural and chronological affiliation of the site. Both open and closed vessels of various shapes can be identified among this representative pottery assemblage. Excluding fragments of several pithoid vessels with greyish-black cores and reddish-brown-surfaces, the pottery is rather homogeneous in fabric and consists of both fine and semi-coarse wares.

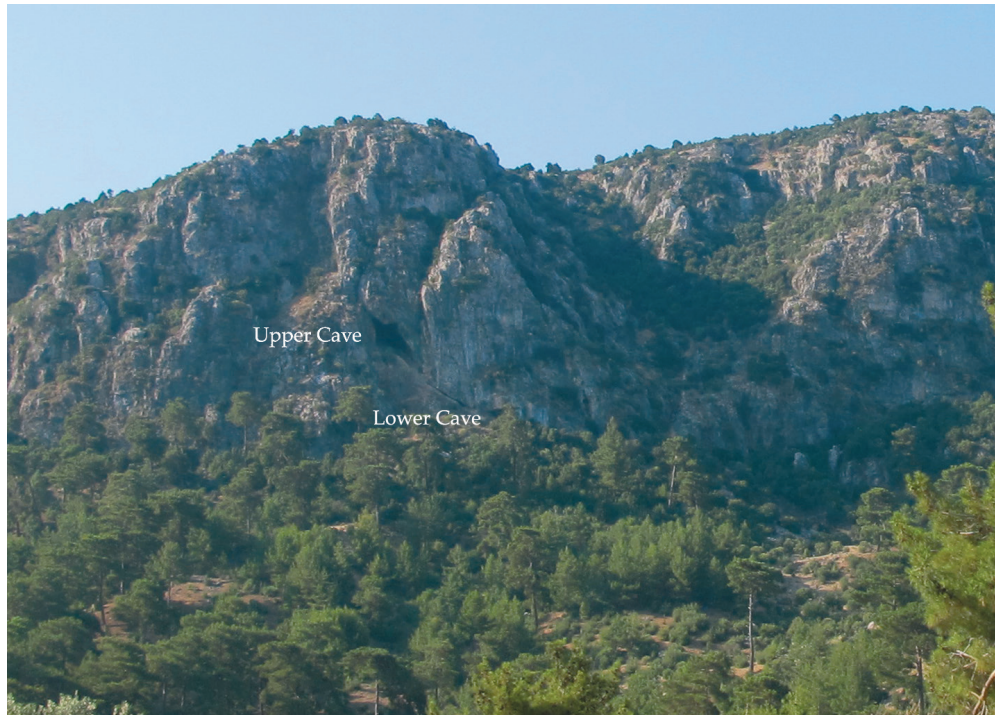


Figure 56.2. A view of the upper and lower caves at Tavabaşı in the steep cliffs from the south.



Figure 56.3. Entrances of the lower cave with the façade with rock paintings.

A reddish-brown clay was used to manufacture the semi-coarse vessels. The fine wares were generally made from greyish-brown fabric and their surface is either finely smoothed or moderately burnished. The surface colour ranges from brown to grey and black. Some of the pots have a mottled surface because of uneven firing. The most notable pot shapes are rounded bowls, flaring-rim bowls, open bowls with horn-handles, bowls with high handles rising above the rims, bowls and jars with mushroom-headed handles, necked



Figure 56.4. A view of Trench A in the lower cave.

jars with strap handles with knobs or pinched-up ridges, bowls and jars with knob-like decorations, pattern-burnish decorated necked jars, incision decorated necked jars, and *pointillé*-decorated small jars (Fig. 56.6). Several white-on-dark painted sherds with linear decoration have also been noted among the pottery assemblage. Pottery from the lower cave appears to correspond more or less with pottery from the upper cave.

The pottery from both caves finds some parallels among Western Anatolian sites. These include Malkayası Cave and Çine Tepecik IV to the north of Tavabaşı, Liman Tepe, Ulucak II, and Yeşilova III in the İzmir region in



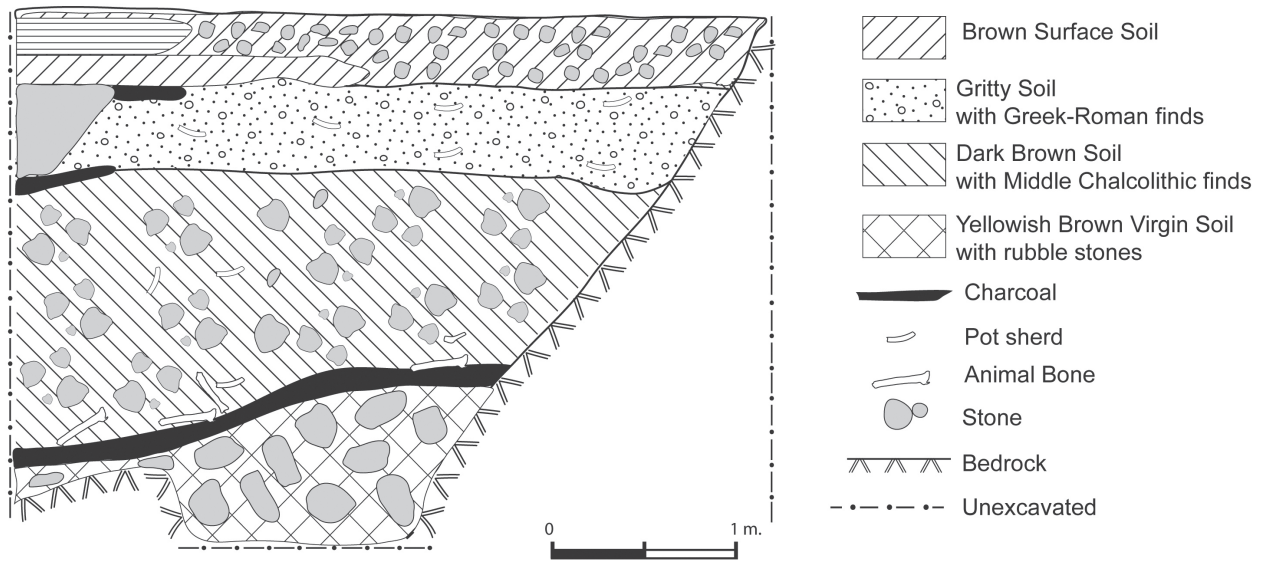


Figure 56.5. Section drawing of Trench A showing stratification.

Central-Western Anatolia, Kumtepe IA, Beşik-Sivritepe, Hanaytepe, and Gülpınar III in the Troad, as well as sites of the Eastern Aegean islands such as Emporio X–IX on Chios, Tigani I–II on Samos, Kalythies I–II on Rhodes, Vathy Cave on Kalymnos, and Kos. In particular, the pattern-burnished pottery identified on nearly a dozen sherds from Tavabaşı bears a close resemblance to that found at Malkayaşı Cave and Çine-Tepecik, Liman Tepe, Ulucak, Gülpınar, and Beşik-Sivritepe in Western Anatolia, as well as Kalymnos, Tigani on Samos and Emporio on Chios on the Aegean islands.<sup>8</sup> Wares with white paint on a dark-burnished surface represented by several sherds from Tavabaşı have parallels at Malkayaşı Cave, Gülpınar, Vathy Cave on Kalymnos, Kalythies Cave on Rhodes, and Emporio on Chios.<sup>9</sup> Jars and bowls with mushroom-shaped handles commonly attested at Tavabaşı closely resemble those at Hanaytepe, Gülpınar, Liman Tepe, Yeşilova, and Beçin in Western Anatolia.<sup>10</sup> Although local variations occur in the Middle Chalcolithic pottery of Tavabaşı, some of the pot shapes from the Tavabaşı assemblage are analogous to the pottery repertoires of other sites of this period. It should also be mentioned that there are as many differences as similarities between the pottery assemblages of Tavabaşı and that of other sites in Western Anatolia and the Eastern Aegean islands. There appears to have been a sense of cultural unity in the first half of the 5th millennium BC covering most parts of Western Anatolia and the Eastern Aegean islands. The mechanisms of this cultural uniformity might be explained by the extent of exchange that took place through seafaring among these regions.

The lower cave at Tavabaşı is also important for prehistoric rock art in Western Anatolia. A group of figures

Painted in red have been documented on the weathered surface of the rock face above and to the left of the small entrance to the lower cave. These rock paintings are characterised by various geometric motifs, ornaments, unidentified signs and human figures (Figs 56.7–8). In terms of style, they strongly resemble rock paintings identified at numerous locations in the Latmos Mountains to the north-west.<sup>11</sup> Previously, it was accepted that the Latmos examples were the only testimonies of rock art in western Anatolia. Tavabaşı presents new evidence for the southward expansion of this tradition. It is probable that the paintings observed on the façade of the lower cave date from the period when the cave was inhabited, meaning that the rock paintings should date to the first half of the 5th millennium BC at Tavabaşı. This dating is more or less in accordance with the date proposed for rock paintings in the Latmos Mountains, which is accepted to be from the late 6th and 5th millennium BC based on the stylistic comparison of figures with those observed on painted pottery from the Lake District.<sup>12</sup>

### Discussion of evidence

Up to the present, no site with Middle Chalcolithic evidence had been documented in the coastal zone of Lycia for a number of reasons. Middle Chalcolithic period sites are generally represented by short-term occupations which makes them invisible on the surface. Geomorphological changes or vegetation cover make them almost undetectable on the rough surface terrain of the Lycian region. Located in the uplands in the vicinity of Tlos, the lower and upper caves at Tavabaşı illustrate one way in which the



Figure 56.6. Typical Middle Chalcolithic sherds retrieved from the lowest stratum in Trench A.

populations of this period could have lived. Tavabaşı also occupies a gap on the land-based route linking the coastal zone of Lycia and the South-Western Anatolian hinterland in the Chalcolithic period. There was probably a second route passing through Tlos and running towards the north-east along the Eşen (Xanthus) River basin in this period. The settlements of Eceler and Çaltılar would have benefited from this river-based land route reaching to the Büyük Menderes (Meander) River Basin as early as the Late Chalcolithic period.<sup>13</sup> The results of ongoing investigations at Çaltılar will demonstrate how a community managed to make a living at an elevation of 1250 m above sea level in the Lycian uplands.<sup>14</sup>

Whether or not the lower cave indeed served as a cultic place such as an open-air sanctuary similar to sites with rock paintings in the Latmos Mountains is difficult to answer. If so, the cave would have enjoyed periodic use on certain days of the year for religious ceremonies, rituals and festivals, *etc.* Although periodic use of caves is plausible and archaeologically demonstrated elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> this cannot be documented archaeologically at Tavabaşı at this point in the research.

The selection of caves for habitation in such an upland location as far from the coast as Tavabaşı is quite unusual when one considers the lack of cave sites in the entire Lycian region in the Middle Chalcolithic period. The Malkayası Cave in the Latmos Mountains area to the north of Lycia is a rare example showing evidence of settlement,<sup>16</sup> while cave sites are common in this period on nearby islands such as Kalymnos and Rhodes in the Dodecanese.<sup>17</sup> The decision to settle in such a marginal environment as Tavabaşı probably had something to do with the subsistence strategies adopted by the occupants of the cave. Ethnoarchaeological data leads one to consider the possibility that environmental, climatic, and topographic factors led the populations of Lycia to pursue seasonal activities. J. Yakar has argued that EBA farmers could have adopted a subsistence economy based on exploitation of more than one niche, requiring at least two seasonal settlements located in different exploitation zones. Yakar notes that:<sup>18</sup>

The natural environment in Lycia provides rural communities with a choice of subsistence strategies



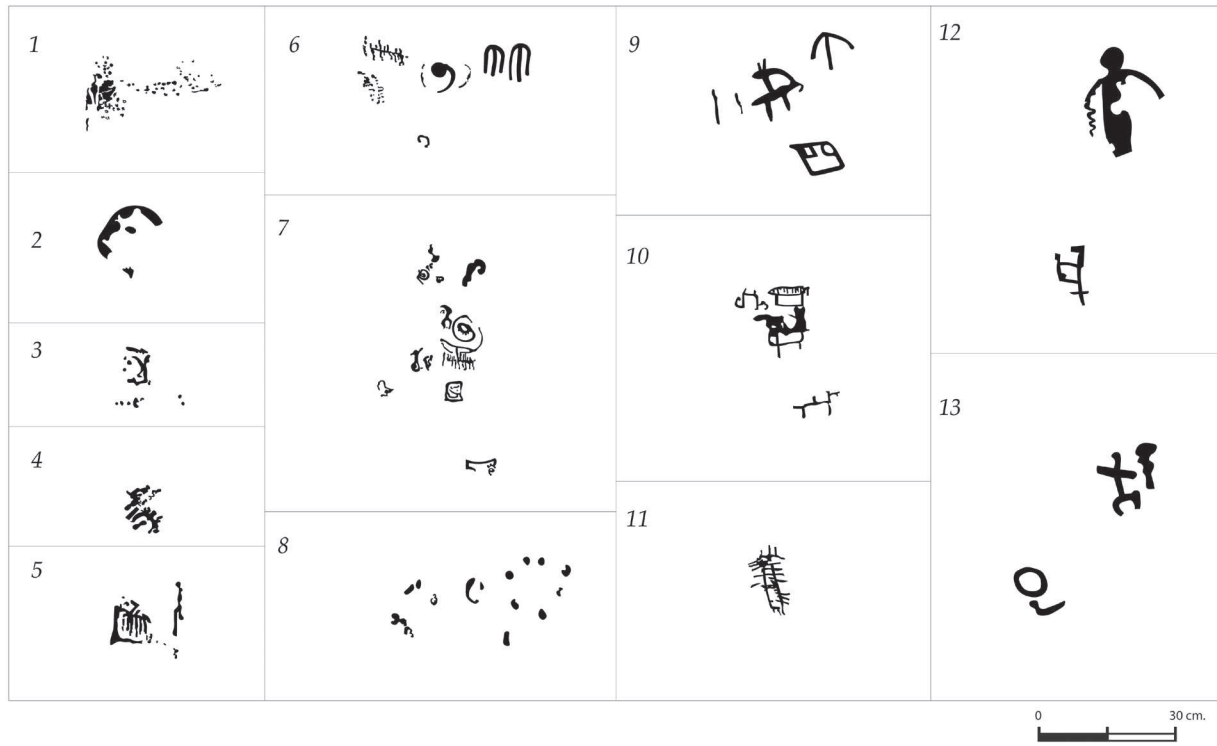
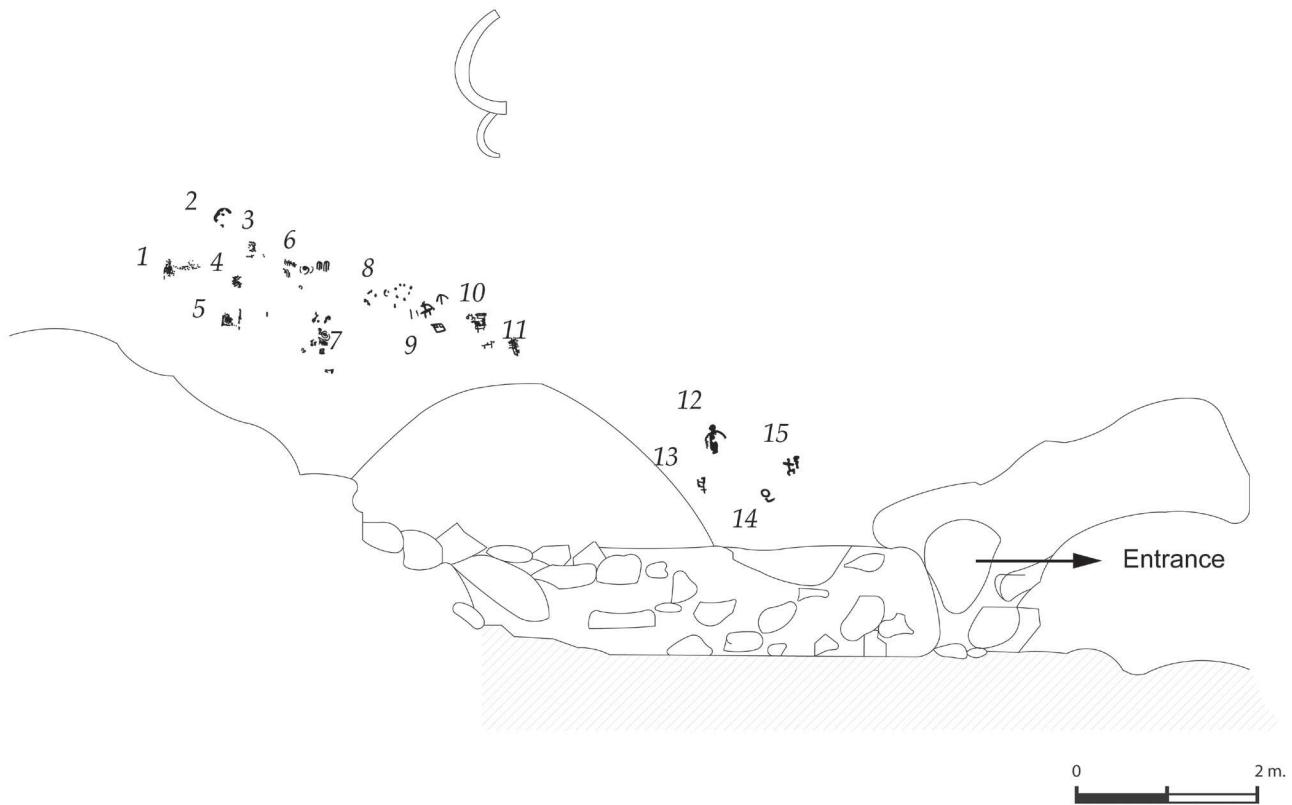


Figure 56.7. Drawings of the façade with rock paintings, lower cave.



Figure 56.8. Scene 9 of the rock paintings on the façade of the lower cave.

which include a broad-based economy combining agriculture, horticulture, and pastoralism which could be supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gathering. However, this type of economy requires some degree of mobility in the pattern of settlement due to the multi-resource exploitation.

Although this attractive theory favouring transhumance requires further archaeological demonstration and research in Lycia, such a subsistence strategy favoured for EBA Lycia might also have been in existence in the Chalcolithic period. A similar argument was developed by D. French, who proposed that a pattern of transhumance might have existed between lowland and highland areas in 6th millennium BC Lycia, in which sites such as the Girmeler Cave could have served as a station for transhumants.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, it is reasonable to state that the recent finds from Tavabaşı enrich our current knowledge of the Lycian Middle Chalcolithic period. Our increasing knowledge of the Middle Chalcolithic in Western Anatolia, now complemented by Tavabaşı, demonstrates that the 5th millennium BC was a crucial stage in the Eastern Aegean world. The similarities observed between the material culture of sites in Western Anatolia and the Eastern Aegean islands might have been the result of much more than casual contacts.<sup>20</sup> There existed a form of cultural unity derived from an increasing level of cultural interactions and trade in the 5th millennium BC among communities of Western Anatolia and the Aegean islands, and this uniformity

probably had its roots in the late 6th millennium BC. A research strategy involving exploration of new cave sites not only in the upland regions but also in the coastal zone is necessary. Whether they were used on a seasonal or year-round basis, the lower and upper caves at Tavabaşı demonstrate what type of settlement could be expected in this period in upland locations far from the coastal zones. Furthermore, the rock paintings of the lower cave remain silent witnesses to the rock art of Lycia, representing the southern extension of a tradition now represented by the Latmos Mountains.

## Notes

- 1 We are grateful to C. Eslick for commenting on the earlier version of this paper. This research was conducted under the supervision of the Department of Antiquities and Museums of Turkey and with the financial support of the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBİTAK) (Project no. 111K227).
- 2 Mellink 1964, 269.
- 3 Mellink 1975, 355; Eslick 1992.
- 4 Eslick 1980, 8.
- 5 Korkut 2015.
- 6 Sezgin 2017.
- 7 For the results of the archaeological soundings undertaken at the Girmeler Cave with pre-pottery and pottery Neolithic finds, see Takaoğlu *et al.* 2014. For the Chalcolithic finds from Girmeler, see Köktürk 1996/1997; French 2008, 197.
- 8 Benzi 2008, fig. 20; Felsch 1988, pl. 19; Furness 1956, 187, pl. 17; Günel 2007, 78, fig. 7; Lamb 1932, fig. 13; Peschlow-

- Bindokat and Gerber 2013, fig. 44; Seeher 1985, fig. 16; Takaoğlu 2006, 298, fig. 10; Takaoğlu & Özdemir 2013.
- 9 Benzi 2008, figs 2–3; Hood 1981, 225, pls 33d, 40d; Peschlow-Bindokat and Gerber 2013, fig. 42; Sampson 1984, figs 2–3; Sotirakopoulou 2008a, 535.
- 10 Derin 2007, fig. 6; Lamb 1932, figs 2.15–6; Takaoğlu 2006, figs 6, 8. See also Tuncel and Şahoglu this volume.
- 11 Peschlow-Bindokat and Gerber 2013, 69; Korkut *et al.* 2015.
- 12 Peschlow-Bindokat and Gerber 2013, 76.
- 13 Aksoy and Köse 2005; Momigliano *et al.* 2011; Yaylalı 2006, 9–10.
- 14 Momigliano *et al.* 2011.
- 15 Sampson 1988b; Sampson 1992.
- 16 Peschlow-Bindokat and Gerber 2013.
- 17 Furness 1956; Sampson 1984.
- 18 Yakar 1998, 815.
- 19 French 2008, 197.
- 20 Several Melian obsidian artefacts found in the Early Neolithic levels at Girmeler Cave clearly show that this part of Lycia participated in some kind of exchange system long before the 5th millennium BC, see note 4.