

COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION

THE CIRCUM-AEGEAN AREA DURING THE 5TH AND 4TH MILLENNIA BC

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

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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.² 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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Archaeological soundings conducted in the center of ancient Tlos in the stadium area near the

acropolis yielded evidence of habitation dating to the EBA.⁶ 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.⁷ 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.