

Pikermi; New Excavations at a Classical Locality

G. Theodorou¹, S. Roussiakis¹, A. Athanassiou², V. Mitsopoulou¹, Ch. Solomos¹, A. Lychounas¹

¹National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Faculty of Geology and Geoenvironment, Department of Historical Geology and Palaeontology, Zografou, GR-15784, Athens, Greece. gtheodor@geol.uoa.gr, srousiak@geol.uoa.gr, vamitsop@geol.uoa.gr, terrfilii@gmail.com, lychounas@gmail.com

²Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology–Speleology, Ardittou 34B, GR-11636, Athens, Greece. aathanas@geol.uoa.gr

The fossiliferous locality of Pikermi (Attica, Greece) is one of the oldest known and most famous Eurasian localities. The richness of the fossils discovered has marked out Pikermi as a reference locality for the European continental Upper Miocene. The first fossils in Pikermi were discovered in 1836. Subsequently, several excavations were carried out. Those conducted by Albert Gaudry (1855-56 and 1860), A. Smith Woodward and Theodore Skouphos (1901) and Othenio Abel (1912) were the most important and yielded an abundance of fossils that today constitute significant museum collections. After Abel's excavation and for almost 100 years there had been no research activity in the classical site. The fauna of Pikermi includes a great number of mammalian taxa, as well as some reptiles and birds. It is generally considered to be of Late Miocene age and is correlated to the middle Turolian (MN 12). However, early authors (Gaudry 1855; 1862-67; Woodward 1901; Abel 1922) noticed that the fossils occurred along a ravine (the ravine of the Megalo Rema stream) on two or locally three stratigraphic levels. Additionally, the exact stratigraphic provenance of the specimens unearthed is not specified in the relevant museum collections or publications. Consequently, the faunal content of each fossiliferous level is unknown and most Pikermian collections do not represent a chronologically homogenous fauna (Theodorou et al. 2010).

In 2008 the University of Athens started new research in Pikermi which resulted in the discovery of the new site "Pikermi Valley-1" (PV1). This locality is about 500 m east-southeast of the classical Pikermi site and the fossils occur at the bottom of the ravine of the Megalo Rema stream (Theodorou et al. 2010). Since 2009, when the first excavations were carried out in PV1, excavations are conducted on a yearly base. Moreover, further geological prospecting resulted in the discovery of more sites. The most recent excavations were carried out in April 2013 at the location where the historical excavations are believed to have taken place.

The aim of the new excavations is: (1) to spot new fossiliferous sites and collect a statistically adequate number of specimens; (2) to provide taphonomical data; (3) to identify the number of the fossiliferous levels and define their exact faunal content; (4) to investigate possible faunal and palaeoecological changes through time; and (5) to clarify the local stratigraphy. The research has been supported by grants 70/3/9494, 70/3/10437, 70/4/11078.

Keywords: Pikermi, Late Miocene, Turolian

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