

# Human ancestors may have sailed across the Aegean Sea

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A team of researchers at the University of Patras's, OCEANUS- Lab has found evidence suggesting that early human ancestors (extinct hominids) may have sailed across the Aegean Sea.

In their paper published in the journal *Quaternary International*, the group describes analyzing sea level drops in the Aegean Sea during the time of [early human ancestors](#) and the possibility of such ancestors walking over land bridges to get to what are now islands in the area.

The Aegean Sea sits between what is now modern Greece and Turkey. It also has a large number of islands of various sizes. Prior research has suggested that during glaciation periods, sea levels would have dropped sufficiently to allow animals and human ancestors to walk between many of the islands known today using temporary land bridges.

In this new effort, the researchers challenged this theory by conducting a study of global glaciations and sea level drops in the Aegean Sea. Their work involved studying [sea level](#) markers in river deltas at multiple sites in the area. They found no evidence of sea levels dropping to the extent that land bridges would have appeared between most of the islands. Their research shows that there never was a [land bridge](#) between the mainland and the Cyclades Archipelago. They also note that prior research has shown that ancient human ancestors made their way to the archipelago. Without a land bridge, they suggest, sailing would have been their only option.

The researchers note that early sailors would not have needed the skill and thus brainpower of modern sailors— islands in the region are close enough that they can be seen with the [naked eye](#). If the early sailors made boats, (or floated on logs) they could easily have paddled to the Cyclades Archipelago. They also note that sailors would have not only become better at sailing through experience, they would also have improved their brain power over time, as sailing requires more spatial awareness than land dwelling. They conclude that ancient human ancestors could have walked from Africa into and across the Middle East and then sailed across the Aegean Sea as a shortcut to Eurasia.

**More information:** G. Ferentinos et al, Archaic hominins maiden voyage in the Mediterranean Sea, *Quaternary International* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.quaint.2022.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2022.09.001)

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