

# AEGIS

ESSAYS IN MEDITERRANEAN  
ARCHAEOLOGY

PRESENTED TO MATTI EGON

BY THE SCHOLARS OF THE GREEK  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMITTEE UK

edited by

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and Doniert Evely**



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Gordon House  
276 Banbury Road  
Oxford OX2 7ED

[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978 1 78491 200 0  
ISBN 978 1 78491 201 7 (e-Pdf)

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Printed in England by Oxuniprint, Oxford  
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website [www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)



THE FOUNDER OF GACUK MATTI EGON WITH THE 'UNUSUAL BOUQUET' OFFERED BY THE SCHOLARS.

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# The Bronze Age on Karpathos and Kythera

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## Introduction

Though an analysis and comparison of the islands of Karpathos and Kythera may seem strange at first glance, yet the two share a number of characteristics as well as, of course, exhibiting a number of differences. This choice made here is influenced as much by geographical considerations as cultural. The combination of these two variables provides a sound and broad basis, permitting useful analogies to be made.

Through this study, the assessment of the different routes of developments taken in the BA will be facilitated, as both lie within the broader zone of the Aegean Sea. It will become apparent how Cretan cultural influence penetrated the two islands, the elements this influence introduced and the ways in which it developed, both correspondingly and otherwise. The geographical position of these two islands in relation to Crete is an important factor for assessing their cultural development through the Bronze Age. Minoanisation has become a research issue in the Aegean outside Crete where Minoan finds, either imported or locally imitated, have been found.<sup>1</sup> The same topics apply in an assessment of the Mycenaean cultural influence attested on these islands, which followed or replaced the Cretan.

## Topographic and research: similarities and differences

Karpathos and Kythera are islands in the Aegean Sea, located at the south part of the basin. They do not, however, belong to the same insular region, the first lies in the south-east part of the Aegean and belongs to the Dodecanesian island group and the latter is situated in the south-west, along with a few smaller islands, between the Peloponnese and Crete. Direct interaction between them, if any, was limited through most of prehistory, separated as they were by more than 360 km of open sea. Though Karpathos (301 km<sup>2</sup>) and Kythera (278 km<sup>2</sup>) have almost the same size, they are quite differently shaped, the first is long and narrow, while the latter is broader and rounder. Karpathos has semi-mountainous terrain, with its highest peak close to 1,200 m above sea level, with its more fertile area extending chiefly across the southern part of the island. Kythera has a number of small coastal plains and inland plateaux, but its highest peak is barely above 500 m in altitude. Both have an arid Mediterranean climate, but Kythera is in part richer in water resources.

The most significant geographical element of these two islands, however, is their position in relation to Crete. This last is relatively isolated from the rest of the Aegean islands, as well as from the Greek mainland and Anatolia. To the north of Crete, the Cycladic islands can be reached after a voyage of some 100 km of open sea, against the often prevailing north winds. Karpathos is situated about 70 km north-east of Cape Sidero, i.e. the north-east tip of Crete; the island of Kasos lying between them (roughly 50 km from Crete and *c.* 6 km from Karpathos) makes the voyage much easier. Kythera too is around 75 km off, north-west from Cape Gramvoussa, i.e. the north-west tip of Crete, with the small island of Antikythera situated in between (some 33 km from Crete and *c.* 33 km from Kythera), again providing easier access to Kythera proper. Sea-travel from Crete through Karpathos provided access to the larger island of Rhodes and the wider island chain of the south-east Aegean and around south-west coastal Anatolia. This was an important route for the Cretans, part of their network of contacts to the Eastern Mediterranean as well. Likewise, a voyage from Crete via Kythera would provide almost immediate access to the south Peloponnese and more broadly to the east coast of mainland Greece. Thus both islands were important stepping-stones for accessing larger land-masses beyond them, a significant factor in pushing forward Cretan exchange networks. At the same time these islands could also act as middlemen, where Cretans could locate and exchange both local produce and that imported from the Peloponnese (in Kythera), Rhodes and south-east Anatolia (in Karpathos).

Despite their similarities in geographical setting, the scholarly attention each island has attracted is somewhat uneven. The prehistoric period of Karpathos is largely known from random research programmes<sup>2</sup> and one synthesis.<sup>3</sup> The island has more often been integrated into more general thematic or spatial studies of the Mycenaean and the Neolithic–EBA periods.<sup>4</sup> The only systematic excavation on Karpathos has been conducted at a Minoan-type farmhouse in the southern part of the island.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Broodbank 2004; Niemeier 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Charitonidis 1961–1962; Zachariadou 1978; Platon and Karantzali 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Melas 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Hope Simpson and Lazenby 1962, 159–162; 1970, 68–69; Sampson 1987, 107–108; 2006, 233; Georgiadis 2003a, 35–36, 68, 77, 86–87, 98; Georgiadis 2003b; Georgiadis 2008, 110–112, table 1; Georgiadis 2012a, 168, 191.

<sup>5</sup> Melas and Karantzali 2000; Melas 2009.

Kythera, on the other hand, has experienced a number of systematic studies, both excavations<sup>6</sup> and surveys.<sup>7</sup> There is a published synthesis of the prehistoric and historic sites,<sup>8</sup> while rescue excavations have also been published.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, specialised studies on different aspects of Bronze Age Kythera are also available.<sup>10</sup>

### Cultural developments

The cultural development of these islands during much of the Bronze Age seems to be an interplay between local processes and Cretan influences. The same is true for the mainland Greek culture in the later part of the Bronze Age.

#### 1. The EBA

During the EBA, the occupation of Karpathos appears to follow the earlier FN settlement pattern, with sites located mainly in the south part of the island close to the fertile plains, but the evidence is not as clear as in the previous period.<sup>11</sup> The finds suggest a rather limited interaction with and cultural influence from Crete, while displaying closer relationship with Rhodes. The smooth transition from the FN to the EBA is also reflected in the local pottery production and consumption. This seems to be local in character with some elements held in common with the rest of the Aegean.<sup>12</sup> The circulation of obsidian from Melos and Yiali probably falls more within the practices of Rhodes and the rest of the Dodecanese rather than Crete.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, stone tools of volcanic origin from the Nisyros-Yiali-Kos area were also imported to the island. The similarities in fabrics visible in the FN in the south-east Aegean and east Crete, as well as shared shapes such as the cheese-pot do not continue into the EBA,<sup>14</sup> thereby suggesting reduced cultural ties between the two regions.

The finds from the early EBA on Kythera reveal both continuity from the earlier FN traditions as well as affinities with the tradition from mainland Greece. The pottery styles follow the development of the Early Helladic I and II early phases, shared broadly with the south Peloponnese. The settlement pattern followed the characteristics of the FN with small, short-lived sites dispersed across the landscape. In the later EB II phase at the site of Kastri, there was a new and clearly distinguishable archaeological horizon, which included Minoan elements.<sup>15</sup> It appears that Cretan colonists, who produced Minoan style pottery, came and settled at this

site.<sup>16</sup> However, this was a localised phenomenon since at the other contemporary sites on Kythera the pottery followed mainland EH II late prototypes. During the EB III phase, this new Minoan pottery style affected only a couple of sites close to Kastri, on the central-east coast of the island. Elsewhere on Kythera the mainland pottery tradition looks to still persist.

In the EBA, then, the Cretans, or at least the western communities of this island, appear to have been more interested in Kythera than Karpathos, despite the fact that the former was slightly further away. Broadly speaking, Karpathos was seen as an infertile island, more useful in providing access to Rhodes, which has yielded limited evidence from the EBA. Kythera was the main geographic link between Crete and the Peloponnese, whose regional resources were already widely circulated during this period. Through this route, Melian obsidian and, more importantly, the metal sources of the west Cyclades and Attica were accessible to Crete. Crete was also brought into closer contact with the most complex contemporary sites of the middle 3rd millennium BC in this part of the Aegean, such as Lerna and Tiryns. For Crete, then, the incentive for interactions and contacts initiated during this period were more oriented towards the west Aegean.

#### 2. The MM I–II phase (the Protopalatial period)

The MM I–II period on Karpathos is characterised by both the import and, primarily, the local imitation of contemporary Minoan pottery styles. There is uniformity in the shapes and fabrics manufactured, recovered from a number of sites across the island.<sup>17</sup> These elements were followed by the introduction of new decorative motifs, as well as innovative techniques, such as the clay preference, fabric recipes, improved firing conditions within the kiln and the employment of the wheel. The settlements of this period are limited, recovered again mainly in the south fertile part of the island, where, following earlier trends, small sites have been recognised.<sup>18</sup> The cultural interaction between east Crete and Karpathos is very evident in this phase. It is interesting to note that during MM I–II the Cretan influence is also more clearly seen in the material record of Rhodes and in particular at Trianda, both at the coastal settlement and on Mount Filerimos, but local pottery products also seem to exist.<sup>19</sup>

At Kythera, the Protopalatial period is better known from finds recovered at the settlement of Kastri. Only a few contemporary sites have been identified in the systematic survey conducted in the central-east of the island. They tend to be small, scattered settlements in fertile parts of the island, in both coastal plains and inland plateaux.<sup>20</sup> Kastri was the largest site on the island, acting as an important nexus in sea travel between Crete and the Peloponnese, it

<sup>6</sup> Coldstream and Huxley 1972; Sakellarakis 1996; also 2011; 2012; 2013; Georgiadis 2012b.

<sup>7</sup> Broodbank 1999; Paspalas and Gregory 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Petrocheilos 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Stais 1915; Bevan *et al.* 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Banou 2000; also 2003; 2007; 2012; Tournavitou 2000; also 2006; 2009; 2011; 2014; Bevan 2002; Kiriati 2003; Broodbank *et al.* 2007; Preston 2007; Krahtopoulou and Frederick 2008; Sapouna-Sakellarakis 2012; Varoufakis 2012; Trantalidou 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Georgiadis 2012a, 168, 191.

<sup>12</sup> Melas 1985, 155–15.

<sup>13</sup> Georgiadis 2008, 112, table 1.

<sup>14</sup> Melas 1985, 172.

<sup>15</sup> Coldstream and Huxley 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Broodbank and Kiriati 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Melas 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Melas 1985, 173.

<sup>19</sup> Benzi 1984; Marketou 1998.

<sup>20</sup> Bevan 2002; Krahtopoulou and Frederick 2008.

was the economic, social and political centre of Kythera. The limited burial remains suggest that single graves were preferred and that a few simple offerings accompanied the deceased.<sup>21</sup> However, the appearance of two peak sanctuaries during this phase, at the central-east and central-west ends of the island, is a significant development.<sup>22</sup> They signify a close emulation of the cultural and religious developments in contemporary Crete. This sanctuary type was employed by the local population to express their own beliefs and traditions, which shared many elements with Crete, but also had idiosyncratic characteristics. The pottery from this period is predominately locally made, with fabrics, production techniques, shapes and decoration similar to examples from central Crete.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the 3rd millennium BC came a revolutionary change in sea-travel, with the introduction of the sail into the Aegean. Crete appears to be among the first areas in the Aegean which imported objects from the East Mediterranean. Ships were now constructed with larger cargo capacity, less manpower was needed for their handling, and longer distances could be travelled in a shorter time. The new technology opened to the Aegean peoples new markets with the new exotic objects, techniques and ideas of the East Mediterranean. For Crete, the east route ensured access to this region via Karpathos and Rhodes. As a result more interaction with these regions was sought, explaining the interest expressed in these islands during the Protopalatial period. The importation of exotica from the East Mediterranean supports this. Kythera, and in particular the Kastri coastal settlement, remained significant for Crete during this period as well. The influx of Minoan pottery and their imitations in the southern Greek mainland are evident from the MM I phase,<sup>24</sup> suggesting an intensification of interactions.

Generally speaking, then, new raw materials were sought out in greater volume to produce the exclusive and highly specialised artefacts on Crete, both for consumption by the local elites and also for export to the markets of the East Mediterranean, where a new exchange network was developing. Artefacts, ships, craftsmen, techniques and ideas must have passed frequently through Kythera and Karpathos, enriching the local cultures. This traffic, ensured by the new ship technology, stimulated the locals into participating in a more complex interactive environment within the Aegean, one that extended beyond its natural boundaries.

### 3. The MM III–LM I phase (the Neopalatial period)

In the MM III–LM I period, data from Karpathos is both more quantitative and qualitative.<sup>25</sup> A number of sites have been identified, especially on the south plains of the island as well as in the central-west, where a few more small

plains existed. No significant change from the previous period is detected, apart from the intensification of sites across the island. Most of them seem to represent isolated farmhouses and, less commonly, small settlements, such as Fournoi in the south and more fertile part of Karpathos.<sup>26</sup> The high concentration of sites around the coastal Pigadia area strongly suggests that it acted as the main centre of the island during the Neopalatial period. Although the available evidence is not the result of an intensive survey like that from Kythera, it appears that there was a similar settlement pattern. In other words, a central settlement existed, with a port that provided a good anchorage for passing maritime traffic, as well as an entry point for materials and ideas to the island's interior. The rest of the sites consisted of small ones representing family or kin units that colonised the landscape of Karpathos. The pottery continued to have a Minoan character in both the painted and the coarse versions. For Melas,<sup>27</sup> all this can be explained as the result of Cretan colonisation, which took place during the Neopalatial period and started in the south part of the island.

At Neopalatial Kythera there are ample finds from the main settlement of the island, Kastri. Now the first chamber tombs were introduced on the island; these had Knossian prototypes and spread across Kythera during this period.<sup>28</sup> It is worth observing that during the Neopalatial period this burial tradition was not popular in Crete beyond the north-central part of the island. At Kythera it became accepted, but at the same time single burials also appear to continue. The settlement pattern of this period is rather dispersed in character, consisting of one or two farmsteads, whilst a few larger sites developed in central-east Kythera and possibly throughout the island.<sup>29</sup> This pattern follows earlier tendencies only in the way that sites appear to be in close proximity to each other, suggesting an intensive exploitation of the land. In the same period, the two peak sanctuaries grew in size, receiving more and better quality of offerings.<sup>30</sup> Sacred caves, such as the Katafygadi cave on Mount Mermigkari and the Ayia Sofia cave at Karavas may have also been established in this phase.<sup>31</sup> At the peak sanctuary of Ayios Yeoryios sto Vouno the offerings included a large number of vessels, as well as stone objects and metal artefacts. There was also a unique assemblage of bronze figurines, emphasizing the wealth of this sanctuary and its significance for the local population. The pottery tradition continued to have close Cretan parallels in shape, decoration, fabric and manufacturing technique. At the same time, local shapes and preferences, such as skeuomorphism and miniaturisation, appeared all over the island, providing a strong idiosyncratic element in the local pottery production.<sup>32</sup> Local workshops of stone and metal objects were established in this period, which experimented with shapes and styles.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Melas and Karantzali 2000; Melas 2009.

<sup>27</sup> Melas 1985, 174.

<sup>28</sup> Preston 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Bevan 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Sakellarakis 1996; 2011; Georgiadis 2012b.

<sup>31</sup> Trantalidou 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Bevan *et al.* 2002; Broodbank 2004; Preston 2007; Georgiadis 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Banou 2000; 2003; 2006; 2012; Broodbank and Kiriati 2007;

<sup>21</sup> Preston 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Sakellarakis 1996; Georgiadis 2012b.

<sup>23</sup> Kiriati 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Kiriati 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Melas 1985.



In the Neopalatial period, Cretan material culture had affected the south of mainland Greece, most of the Aegean islands, and even parts of coastal south-west Anatolia. Raw materials, finished goods, techniques, ideas, and people were circulated, enriching and forming common cultural characteristics throughout the Aegean, with Crete as the centre. Karpathos and Kythera were integral parts of already established sea-routes, through which Cretan contacts reached the rest of the Aegean. However, the variation of the cultural elements attested at Karpathos and Kythera emphatically reveal the eclectic character of this process. They suggest that the locals chose certain foreign elements which were then mixed with local ones to form a local hybridised material culture. The similarity in the settlement patterns which developed at Karpathos and Kythera is an interesting phenomenon. A Cretan influence could be inferred by the preference for farmsteads as the main habitation unit outside the middle and larger sized settlements. However, the local topography and the socio-economic conditions may have been the most prominent features which affected this local choice.

#### **4. The LH II–LH III phase (the Mycenaean period)**

During the LH IIB–III A1 period the first chamber tombs of Mycenaean type appeared on Karpathos.<sup>34</sup> They had one chamber (of various shapes) with a dromos, where multiple burials were deposited. The pottery vessels placed in them as offerings were an amalgam of mainland Greek and Cretan elements, in both shape and decoration. At the same time, certain preferences in form and adornment suggest that this hybridisation included local elements as well. A small number of burial locales have also been found across the island from the LH IIB–III A1 phase until the LH IIIB period, usually consisting of one tomb.<sup>35</sup> Pigadia is the only site where a larger number of chamber tombs have been recovered, where remains of contemporary occupation have also been identified. All this may indicate the presence of a central coastal site alongside a dispersed settlement pattern of small sites, identical to the pattern seen in the previous period. Although older trends continue without significant changes, there does seem to be a decrease in the overall number of sites during this period throughout Karpathos. The presence of a clay larnax suggests more similarities to Cretan burial customs, while remains of cremated bones within a LH IIIA2 chamber tomb may indicate one of the earliest occurrences of cremation in the Aegean. If so, it would suggest something recalling the experimentations seen on Rhodes during the LH III period and a burial tradition with possible affinities to western Anatolia. The current lack of LH IIIC finds from this island is surprising, considering the contemporary cemeteries in south Rhodes.

The presence of Mycenaean culture on Kythera is also marked by the introduction of mainland-type chamber tombs.<sup>36</sup> While a scattered settlement pattern existed, there

was a significant decrease in the number of settlements and cemeteries. The latter continued the earlier chamber tomb tradition, but followed the new mainland prototype of simpler forms, i.e. with a single chamber. Mycenaean chamber tombs appeared from the LH IIIA1 period and continued until the LH IIIC phase. Kastri appears to remain a significant centre in the LH IIIA2–B1 phase, although a preference for settlement locations in the hinterland of the island has been identified.<sup>37</sup> This trend could be related to concerns as to the defensibility of the island from external threats. Such a pattern could be associated with the intensification of contacts and interactions between the Aegean and the Central Mediterranean seen during the LH III period, which would have added to the value of the strategic position of Kythera, lying between the Peloponnese and Crete. The fabrics of the pottery followed the earlier local tradition, but the shapes became mainland Greek in character.

The Cretan cultural influence progressively declined in the Aegean after LM I and was replaced by that of the Greek mainland. On Crete during LB IIIA–B there were still important centres actively participating in the exchanges with the Eastern and Central Mediterranean, such as Chania, Knossos and Aghia Triada/Kommos. As a result, Karpathos remained significant in the interaction between Crete and the East Mediterranean for the movement and exchanges of people and goods, while Kythera remained important for contact between Crete and mainland Greece, as well as a seafaring nexus for the interaction between the broader Aegean and the Central Mediterranean. The settlement patterns on both islands possibly witnessed a nucleation process, although that of small scattered sites with a large insular centre was still overall preferred. The Mycenaean cultural influence is clearly seen in both the adoption of the mainland burial tradition and the shapes and decorations in pottery production. The lack of important Cretan centres during the LH IIIC period may be one of the reasons for the decline at Karpathos, as the limited interaction between Crete and the East Mediterranean lessened the strategic position of the site during this phase. In contrast, contacts between Crete and the Greek mainland, as well as movement from the Aegean to the Central Mediterranean, favoured Kythera in the LH IIIC phase. However, this did not mean that this island especially flourished in this period. Arguably the locals were uninterested in participating in these long-distance networks, as their preference for settlements in more inland locations may suggest.

#### **Conclusions**

Crete was a common denominator in the stories of both islands for a large part of the Bronze Age, while later on, mainland Greece also acted in the same way, although for a more limited period of time. Developments on Karpathos and Kythera are both related to the increased interest in greater contact and interaction between Crete and the

Sakellarakis 2012; Sapouna-Sakellarakis 2012; Varoufakis 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Melas 1985; Georgiadis 2003a.

<sup>35</sup> Charitonidis 1961–1962; Zachariadou 1978.

<sup>36</sup> Stais 1915; Tsaravopoulos 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Coldstream and Huxley 1972.

broader Aegean. The cultural impact of Crete began to influence areas outside the island via the establishment of sea routes in the EBA. This process revealed an emphasis, first towards the west, where it has been associated with the need for access to raw materials, such as obsidian and metals. Kythera was geographically close to Crete and a close relationship was forged, allowing Minoan culture to be introduced on the smaller island. However, this process was not simply imposed on Kythera from Crete; it took time and the willingness of locals to accept the new ideas and forms in their material culture.

This phenomenon intensified during the 2nd millennium BC at Karpathos, Kythera and other parts of the Aegean. Cretan interest expanded across most parts of the Aegean, in which both these islands were important stepping-stones in these interactions. In the MB I–II phase, pottery production at Karpathos and Kythera followed Minoan prototypes in shape, decoration, technique and technology, whilst adding their own local elements. The settlement pattern was restructured, with small and dispersed sites across these islands and a larger, central, coastal settlement. These ports allowed these islands to participate in the exchange networks at a regional and interregional level, and through them the cultural influences were introduced. The present archaeological data argue that at Kythera additional characteristics were adopted from Crete, such as peak sanctuaries and their associated beliefs, ritual and practices.

For the MB III–LB I period, Minoan elements can be clearly seen in the larger quantity and array of finds, making it easier to identify foreign trends as well as local developments and idiosyncrasies. Karpathos and Kythera had a similar settlement pattern, an intensification of the previous type. The pottery followed contemporary Cretan tendencies, but local preferences have also been observed once again. At Kythera, the peak sanctuary tradition continued uninterrupted, and it is very likely that the sacred caves also appeared during this phase. On the same island, the chamber tomb tradition was introduced from the area of Knossos, suggesting a closer link in this period with the north-central region of Crete.

During the LH IIB–IIIC period the mainland Greek cultural influence replaced the Minoan one. The local pottery followed Mycenaean trends in style, but local trends were also once again found. The mainland Greek chamber tomb tradition replaced older practices on both islands, indicating new social conditions. The settlement patterns retained the same characteristics, although a nucleation process has also been identified. At Kythera there may have been a new orientation regarding the location of the sites, with a preference for more inland locations.

Karpathos and Kythera enjoyed a parallel cultural development during the course of the Bronze Age. They were both closely related to and interdependent with Crete for a long period of time and shared a number of characteristics. The most obvious were the pottery, with clear Minoan affinities and the settlement patterns formed

on both islands. These elements could be equally attributed to Cretan influences and local needs, creating hybrid cultures with many similarities between them. The current archaeological data is uneven for the two islands, suggesting that on Kythera more Minoan elements were adopted, such as different sanctuary types and burial practice. Interestingly enough the Mycenaean influence on material culture appears to be more uniform on both islands.

Karpathos and Kythera, two medium-sized islands, provide excellent examples for analysing the processes of Minoanisation and Mycenaeanisation in the Aegean. They allow a strong diachronic representation of just how outside influences were accepted and adapted according to regional needs, so creating local hybrid cultures.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr K. Soar for her useful help and comments on this article.

### Contact

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