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Insularity and Identity in the Roman Mediterranean

Edited by
Anna Kouremenos

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Front cover: Mosaic fragment depicting two men on a boat. From Carthage, AD 200–250. Courtesy of Penn Museum, image # 3348.

Back cover: General View of the 2nd Century AD South Building, Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates, Kourion, Cyprus (Photo: J. M. Gordon).

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Preface

This volume had its beginnings in a TRAC panel I organised at the University of Reading, UK in March 2014. Since my own doctorate at the University of Oxford concentrated on houses and identity on the island of Crete under Roman rule, I thought it would be worthwhile to consider how other Mediterranean islands conceptualised their own identities in the Roman period *vis-à-vis* their insularities.

The aim of this volume is to discern, through several case studies, similarities and differences between the islands of the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire and to investigate how insular environments, mobility, connectivity and materiality affected the development and maintenance of social and cultural identities throughout the Roman period. The papers are arranged geographically from east to west and the case studies focus on four large islands – Cyprus, Crete, Sardinia and Corsica – and four island groups – the Northern Sporades, the Ionian Islands, the Dalmatian Islands, and Malta (including Gozo).

In my endeavour, a great number of people have provided information, advice, and encouragement and it is with much gratitude that I would like to thank them here. In addition to the contributors, who worked tirelessly to finish articles on time and provided many useful comments about the topic, I am grateful to Nicholas Purcell, Ewen Bowie, Dragana Mladenovic, Michael Vickers, and Craig Barker for fruitful discussions on insularity and identity and for help in tracking down references and illustrations. I am also indebted to Maxine Anastasi for her generosity in preparing maps for this book and Vasiliki Brouma for coming to my aid with images. The libraries of the following institutions provided much needed help in locating published material: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, The British School at Athens, The Scuola Italiana di Atene, The Archaeological Society at Athens, and The Sackler Library, University of Oxford. Finally, the editorial team at Oxbow books – Julie Gardiner, Isobel Nettleton, Katie Allen, and Mette Bundgaard – provided much needed assistance and comments throughout.

I would like to dedicate this volume to the memory of my mother, Lili Kouremenos.

Anna Kouremenos
New Haven, April 2018

Chapter 4

Insularity and Identity in the Northern Sporades Islands: The Question of Roman Policy in Central Greece

Alkiviadis A. Ginalis

Introduction

The Northern Sporades, also called *Skopeloi* or *Magnesian islands*, are an archipelago situated in the Northwest Aegean Sea and belong to the province of Thessaly (Bees 1915, 248). They include the three inhabited islands of Skiathos, Skopelos (known in antiquity as Peparethos), and Alonnesos (known in antiquity as Ikos) as well as the so-called *Erimonisia* or *Demonisia* (Fiedler 1841, 1; Philippon 1901, 123; Philippon and Kirsten 1959, 40) (Fig. 23).¹

With a distance of just 2 nautical miles (4 km) from the southern coast of the Magnesian or Pelion peninsula and 7 nautical miles (13 km) from the northern coast of the island of Euboea, the archipelago lies off the northern entrance to the Pagasetic and Euboean gulf. Due to their geographical position, the Northern Sporades played a significant role in the Aegean sea-trade and maritime connectivity between the mainland of Greece and the coast of Asia Minor. Hence, due to increasing commercial activity and heightened maritime trade and the volume of sea traffic particularly since the beginning of the Classical period, the islands constituted a decisive junction of the N-S and E-W axis in the Aegean during Antiquity among the cities of Athens, Troy, Ephesus and later Thessaloniki as well as connecting Rome with the coasts of Asia Minor, the Black Sea and the wider Eastern Mediterranean (Ginalis 2011, 285). Accordingly, by virtue of coastal navigation, the Northern Sporades formed ports of call for merchants within the Aegean system of tramping and cabotage trade (Fig. 24), which is shown further by numerous wreck sites in the area (Ginalis 2008, 115–122; 2011, 291–292; 2014, 79, 252).

However, despite their wealth of resources and rich agricultural products such as wood, grain, wine, and olive oil, as noted already by Demosthenes in the 4th century BC,² the islands primarily functioned either as key stations to secure the passing

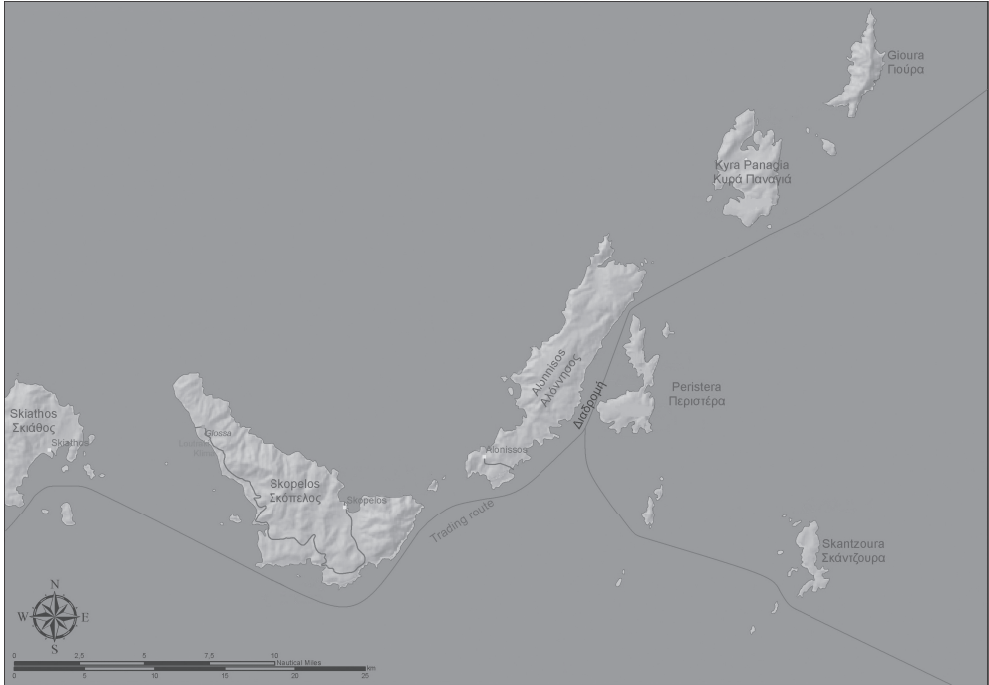


Fig. 23: Geographical map of the Northern Sporades (Graeco-Arabica 11 2011, fig. 1).

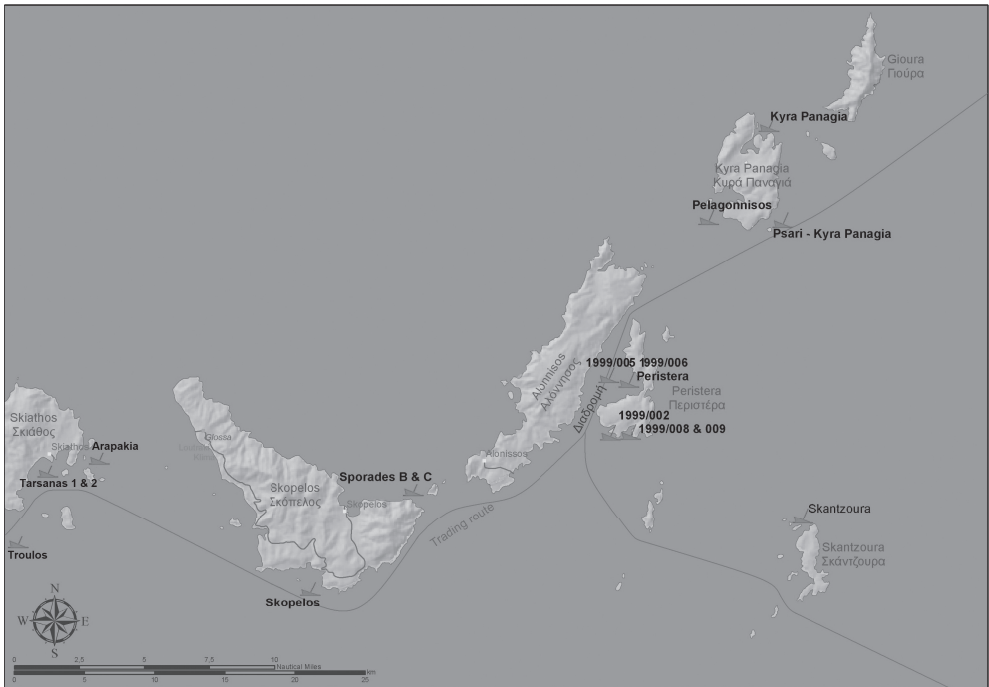


Fig. 24: Wreck sites and associated trading routes along the Northern Sporades (Graeco-Arabica 11 2011, fig. 4).

trading routes and shipping lanes to Asia Minor and the Black Sea or as important naval bases for the military control over central Greece during the Roman period. As the closest island to the mainland, Skiathos was almost exclusively used as a military post. In association with its strategic position and important harbour, the latter provided shelter and provisions for various fleets throughout antiquity, either temporarily anchoring or overwintering at Skiathos (Fredrich and Wace 1906, 106; Evangelides 1913, 29, 37, 43–44, 46–47, 57; Arvanitopoulos 1928, 96, 103; Philippson-Kirsten 1959, 44; Sampson 1968, 53–76; 1977, 15–19, 38); Koder and Hild 1976, 257–258; Fragkoulas 1978, 45, 47; Mavrikes 1997, 44–72; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2001, 113).³

From the Roman conquest to Late Antiquity

In contrast to the meagre information concerning the Northern Sporades islands during the Hellenistic period (Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2001, 115), there is ample evidence to suggest that from around 200 BC onwards Skiathos and Skopelos played an important role in the Roman expansion to the East. Together with Euboea, the two islands formed key factors for control over the Aegean. Being closely related with the outcome of the second and third Macedonian wars of 200–196 BC and 172–168 BC, as well as the Roman-Syrian war of 192–188 BC and the first and second Mithridatic wars of 88–84 BC and 83–81 BC, the Northern Sporades had been standing in the centre of historic events for hundreds of years (Evangelides 1913, 28–31; Sampson 1968, 70–72; Ginalis 2014, 83).

According to written sources such as Livy,⁴ during these conflicts between the Roman Empire and the Macedonian kingdom, the Seleucid Empire and the kingdom of Pontus, the islands served as strategic outposts and important bases for fleets acting in the Aegean Sea and securing access and military actions in Thessaly. This led to the destruction of the Northern Sporades during the first Macedonian war by King Philipp in 199 BC, in order to render them useless as naval bases for the Roman navy.⁵ That same year the Roman fleet arrived at Skiathos intending to plunder it for agricultural goods but found the island already looted and destroyed by Philipp.⁶ During the Roman-Syrian war, Antiochus III of Syria conquered the islands but after his defeat in 191 BC, the entire archipelago came under Roman domination again. Furthermore, during the second Macedonian war, the islands of the Northern Sporades were again almost exclusively referred to in context with military activities, such as the overwintering of the Roman fleet under Marcus Figulus in 169 BC.⁷ After the defeat of the Macedonian kingdom, the Romans granted freedom to the islands and Skiathos, Skopelos and Alonnisos continued as independent democratic states (Sampson 1977, 19).

At the beginning of the first Mithridatic war the Northern Sporades were taken by Mithridates VI's admiral Mitrophanous and remained under Pontian rule until the Roman admiral Vrotius Souras reconquered them in 82 BC. The importance of the Northern Sporades for the struggle of naval supremacy also attracted piratical activities. According to Appian, this resulted in a period of frequent lootings and the near destruction of the islands.⁸ Alonnisos, in particular, suffered from piracy.

Only in 67 BC did Pompeius relieve the Northern Sporades and stabilise the Roman supremacy in the area by defeating unknown pirate fleets (Mavrikes 1997, 70). After the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, the Thessalian islands were handed over to Athens and an independent democratic regime was re-established by Antonius (Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 639), which lasted until the reign of Emperor Hadrian (AD 117–138). Although Emperor Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) replaced the Roman suzerainty and formally incorporated the Aegean into the Roman Empire, epigraphic documents mention the presence of oligarchs on Skiathos and Skopelos, which indicates the institutionalisation of democracy.⁹ As a result, the continuation of the islands' independent democracy led finally to a friendly attitude towards Emperor Septimius Severus and Roman hegemony (Sampson 1977, 19–20).¹⁰ Consequently, despite the great extent of destruction throughout the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, which according to Seneca even caused a temporary desertion of the islands,¹¹ Skiathos and Skopelos at least recovered quickly. This rapid social revival of the islands was associated with the beginning of a time of prosperity during the period of the *Pax Romana* (Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 639).

As a result of these events, dedicatory inscriptions to the emperors Nerva (AD 96–98), Trajan (AD 98–117), Hadrian (AD 117–138) and Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) suggest a rich social life on the islands from the 1st to the 3rd century AD (Fig. 25).¹²

This is additionally confirmed by the frequent references particularly of Skiathos and Skopelos in written sources of that time, such as Athenaeus of Naucratis, Claudius Ptolemaeus, Plinius Secundus, Pomponius Mela, and Strabo, demonstrating a period of social and economic growth (Mavrikes 1997, 73–74; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2001, 115–117).¹³ Only with the Imperial crisis during the 3rd century AD do such accounts terminate.

Despite the islands' wealth of resources, Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* is the only account referring to their rich agricultural products, particularly grain, during the Roman Republic. However, Livy's account is only linked with military activities rather than the agricultural exploitation of the islands.¹⁴ This confirms the exclusively strategic role of the Northern Sporades islands during the Roman Republican period as part of the historical events of the Roman expansion to the east. In contrast, from the 1st century AD onwards, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* refers to the production of olive oil on Skopelos and the early 3rd century AD *Deipnosophisticae* by Athenaeus of Naukratis mentions the remarkable *Skiathitian* black wine and attests to the importance of the Northern Sporades for the economy of the Roman Empire.¹⁵

As for the understanding of the political and economic history of the Northern Sporades in context and relation to the question of insularity, one has first to define their island identity. Based on the islands' physical and geographical conditions, as well as further principles such as the model of 'Hinterland' and 'Foreland' (Ginalis 2014, 9–12), Broodbank differentiates generally between *analytical islands* and *perceived islands* (Broodbank 2000, 16).¹⁶ According to the latter, the inhabitants of so-called 'analytical islands' seem not to consider themselves as islanders and therefore practice

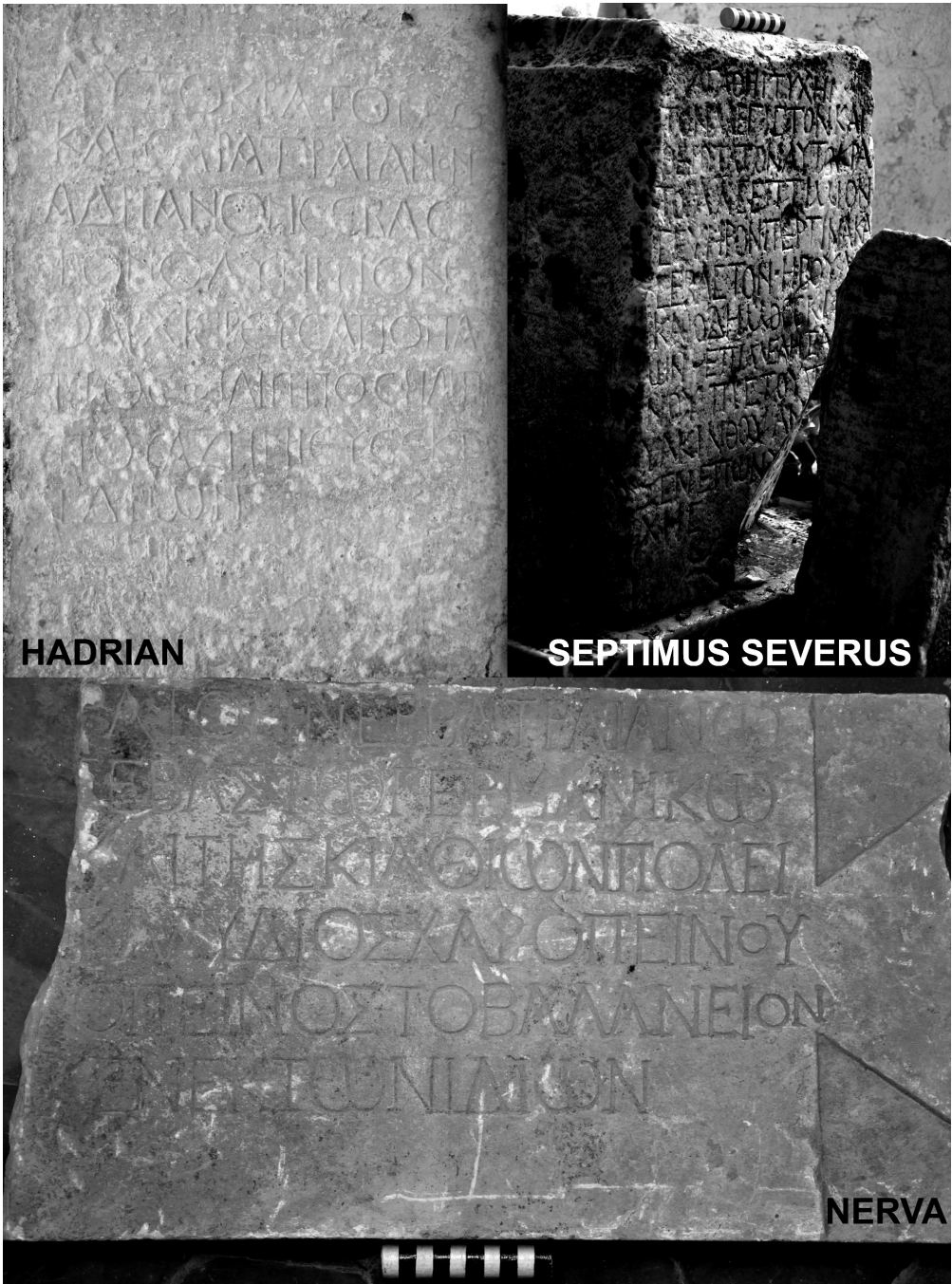


Fig. 25: Roman dedicatory inscriptions (Photo: author).

connectivity rather than insularity. In contrast, perceived islands readily face the problem of isolation, which results in the inhabitants experiencing and practicing the phenomenon of insularity. As such, the question of insularity and identity of island societies is closely connected with the notion of where the island ends and where the continent begins; more precisely the relationship between sea and land as well as certain insular spaces (Braudel 1991, 183–185, Malamut 1998, 27; Veikou 2015, 358–361). Additionally, Veikou and contemporary geographers such as Bonnemaïson pick up the concept of complementing the notion of insularity and Broodbank's differentiation of islands with that of the notion of 'islandness' (Veikou 2015, 359–360). This leads to the understanding of insularity as isolation and islandness as separation from the rest of the world (Bonnemaïson 1991, 119; Bonnemaïson 1997, 122).

As a result of various historical events, the written sources consequently suggest a high degree of insularity for the Northern Sporades and consequently the preservation of an independent identity as social entities at least during the Roman Republic. This is supported by the fact that in around AD 40–45, Seneca the Younger refers to the Northern Sporades and in particular Skiathos as a place of exile during the Roman period, which together with Skyros served as such also during the Byzantine era, despite their strategic importance (Evangelides 1913, 31; Mavrikes 1997, 75–76; Koder 1998, 280; Ginalis 2014, 85).¹⁷ Only with the *Pax Romana* did their agricultural exploitation of the islands gradually become beyond the level of being self-sustaining and therefore come to bear for the wider Mediterranean economic networks which in turn affected both the social identity of the Northern Sporades as well as the degree, or rather understanding, of insularity. Based on the differentiation of insularity and islandness by Veikou and others, we have to suggest the broad concept of islandness for the Northern Sporades during the Roman Imperial period and Byzantine era. The level of islandness, of course, differs in time as well as between the various islands, depending on their territorial structure and the physical and geographical conditions as well as the principles of hinterland and foreland, defined as 'broad matrix of exchange' by Veikou (Veikou 2013, 378).

In contrast to the rich picture of social and economic developments in written sources and epigraphic testimonials, archaeological investigations on the archipelago produced only poor and inconclusive data for the Roman period until recently.¹⁸ The scattered material, mostly revealed on and around Skopelos and Skiathos (AD 42 (1987) 261–262; AD 50 (1995) 365–368; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2001, 101–109; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 633; Parker 1992, 408) is limited mainly to stray finds. However, a joint coastal and underwater archaeological survey project on the island of Skiathos initiated by me in cooperation with the Greek Archaeological Services in 2011 has shed more light on the Roman cultural heritage of the Northern Sporades, providing for the first time a compact and coherent picture of social developments in the area during the Roman period. As such, since 2012, systematic archaeological research is bringing to light material from Roman period, such as amphorae, table ware, and architectural elements from houses and public buildings (Ginalis 2014, 111–114, 134,

148). Interestingly, the investigation of the harbour bay of Skiathos revealed a total gap of material remains for the Hellenistic and the period of the Roman Republic, as did previous archaeological investigations on Skiathos and Skopelos by the Greek Archaeological Services. Unsurprisingly, this gap of material from the 3rd to 1st century BC for the entire Northern Sporades correlates exactly with the time of the Roman expansion to the east and the ravages of the islands in the turmoil of the second and third Macedonian wars, the Roman-Syrian war and the first as well as second Mithridatic wars. In contrast, Roman ceramic material dated to the Roman Imperial period, such as Italian Sigillata Ware, Amphorae of type Dressel 1b, and Dolia from the 1st–2nd century AD, 2nd–3rd century AD Eastern Sigillata C or so-called Çandarlı Ware and 4th–5th century AD African Sigillata Ware have been recovered on Skiathos since 2012 (Fig. 26).

The rich ceramic assemblage, including both trading goods and high class cargo such as columns and other decorative elements, suggests that Skiathos was fully integrated into the Roman maritime network already by the 1st century AD. In fact, similarly to the Adriatic islands (Dzino in this volume), the rich remains of cargo and

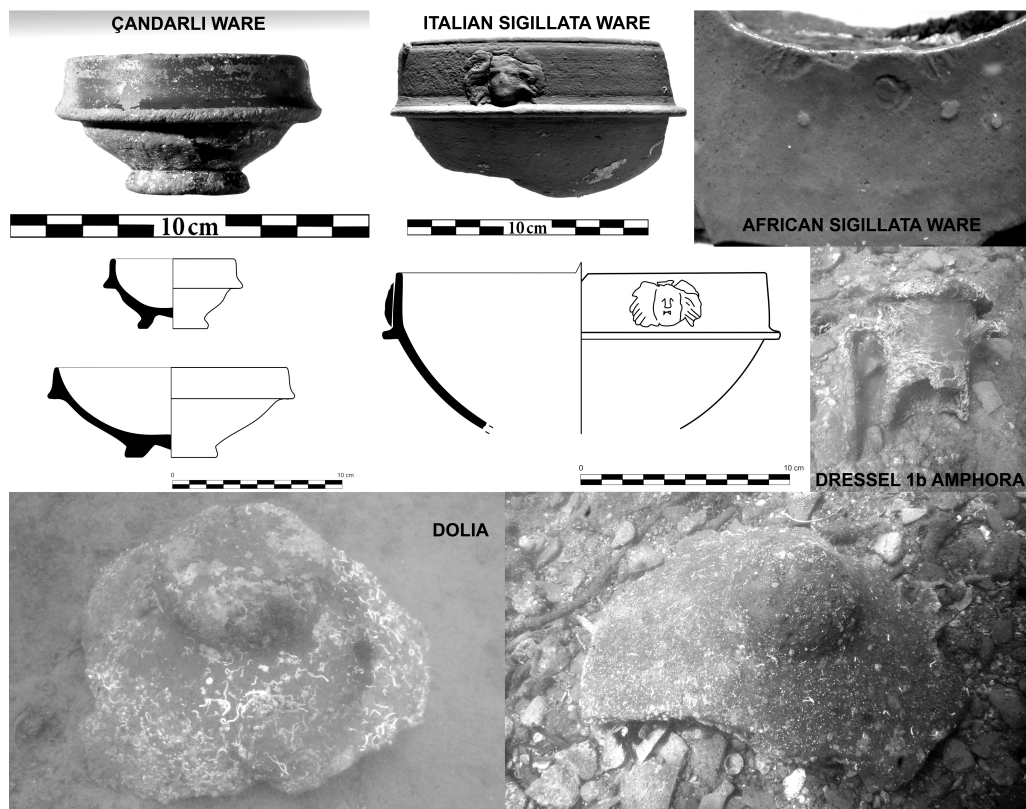


Fig. 26: Roman ceramic finds from Skiathos (Photo: author).

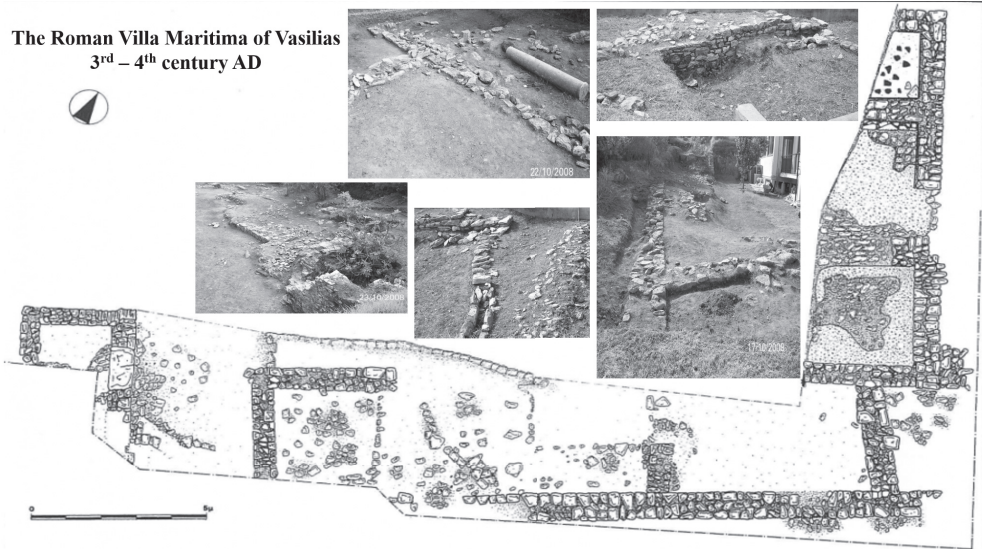


Fig. 27: The Roman villa site of Vasiliás on Skiathos (modified figure after AD 20 (1965), B¹, 336 / AD 52 (1997), 470-472, Πίνακας 182c / Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 641 σφ. 1).



Fig. 28: Remains of a Roman bath at Loutraki (ancient Selinous) on Skopelos (Photo: author).

precious as well as high-quality objects show that not just Skiathos but the entire Northern Sporades islands were actually highly frequented by long distance trade activities due to their strategic position, connecting Italy with the Northern African coast and Asia Minor. This is further attested by a series of Roman Imperial coastal sites containing baths and villa estates along the coasts of the Northern Sporades. Besides the Roman bath of Selinous on Skopelos dated to the end of the 3rd century AD (Fig. 28), a series of considerable coastal villa estates, so-called *villae maritimae*, such as that of Lazareta or Vasilias on Skiathos (Fig. 27) (AD 20 (1965) B'1, 336; AD 52 (1997), 470–472, Πίνακα 182c; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 638–650; Ginalis 2014, 128–133; 142–144) and Potamoi on Skopelos (AD 40 (1985) B' 194; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 633), show not only an economic recovery and prosperity but even a social revival, reaching its peak in the 3rd to 5th centuries AD.

Consequently, supporting the picture provided by the written sources, the phenomenon of insularity during the Roman Republican period stands against the picture of connectivity and globalisation drawn for the Roman Imperial period. Consequently, this can also be interpreted as a development of insularity during the Roman Republic to islandness during the Roman Imperial periods.

Conclusion

Both the literary evidence and the material remains for the region support a tendency toward insularity and closed social and economic identity of the Northern Sporades during the Roman Republican period in order for the islands to preserve self-sustainability. Similar to the island of Cyprus (Veikou 2013, 363–369; Gordon in this volume), Andros (Veikou 2013, 369–373) and Sicily (Veikou 2013, 373–376), only by the 1st century AD and in particular from the 2nd century AD onwards were the islands established as regional and supra-regional trading stations within the networks of the Roman *Mare Nostrum*. Specifically, the existence of numerous Roman Imperial coastal sites such as *villae maritimae* on Skiathos and Skopelos suggests that the adoption of the Roman social system ultimately abandoned the independent identity and insularity by the 3rd-5th century AD at the latest, establishing open systems with different levels of islandness. In that sense, Skiathos and Skopelos, with their intensive settlement and agricultural activities of more than eight agricultural and villa installations for Skiathos alone (Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou 2013, 639), seem to have faced a much lower level of islandness than Alonnesos or Skyros. Overall, the diverse insular identity and consequently changing attitude and experience of the islanders towards foreigners can be read out both by the written accounts and the material culture of Roman policy in central Greece. The understanding of the diachronically changing notion of insularity to islandness provides important new insights into the study of the Aegean world. Finally, a closer look at the nature of insularity and identity will also help to push the debate on the concepts of 'Hinterland' and 'Foreland' as the matrix of exchange as part of Mediterranean and, in particular, Aegean network systems.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the Greek Ephorate for Underwater Antiquities, the former 13th Greek Ephorate for Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities (in particular Dr Argyroula Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou), and the 7th Greek Ephorate for Byzantine Antiquities for their support and cooperation and providing further information for this article.

Notes

- 1 Including the uninhabited islands of Peristera, Kyra Panagia (ancient Pelagonnisos and later Limen or Gymnopelagesion), the Adelfi islands, Gioura, Psathoura, Skantzoura and Piperi.
- 2 Demosthenes 1885, 4.32.91–92: ... ὑπάρχει δ' ὑμῖν χειμαδίῳ μὲν χρῆσθαι τῇ δυνάμει Λήμνῳ καὶ Θάσῳ καὶ Σκιάθῳ καὶ ταῖς ἐν τούτῳ τῷ τόπῳ νήσοις, ἐν αἷς καὶ λιμένες καὶ σῖτος καὶ ἄ χρή στρατεύματι πάνθ' ὑπάρχειν.
- 3 Demosthenes informs us about the stationing of the Athenian fleet and an army of 350 soldiers in around 360, 354/3 and 351 BC. In 334/3 and 325/4 BC the Athenian fleet stayed at Skiathos under Cephisodotus (Kephisophon). In 199 and 169 BC the Roman fleet under Marcus Figulus overwintered at Skiathos. In 192 BC the fleet of the Seleucid king Antiochus III stationed at Skiathos and in the 88 BC Mitrophanes, the admiral of king Mithridates VI, used the harbour of Skiathos as base for his fleet. This is further supported by later centuries: around AD 680 a Byzantine fleet under the *strategos* Sisinnios reached the island and in AD 758 the Byzantine Imperial fleet anchored at the harbour of Skiathos. The Byzantine admiral and later Megas Dux Licario passed by the island in AD 1276/7. In AD 1278 around 90 Genoese pirate ships are documented to have anchored at the harbour. In 1470 a Venetian fleet under admiral Nicolo La Canale was stationing at Skiathos. In Post-Byzantine time among others the stationing of the Ottoman fleet under Hayreddin Barbarossa in 1538, the Venetian fleet under admiral Francesco Morosini in AD 1660 and the Greek fleet in 1897 are documented.
- 4 Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Lib.31.28.6: Sciathum et Peparerthum, haud ignobiles urbes, ne classi hostium praedae ac praemio essent, diruit.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Lib.31.45.12–16: **Sciathum traiecere, vastatam urbem direptamque nuper a Philippo.** per agros palati milites frumentum et si qua alia usui esse ad vescendum poterant ad naves rettulere; praedae nec erat quicquam, nec meruerant Graeci, cur diriperentur ... unde nenerant Sciathum et ab Sciatho Euboeam repatunt. ...
- 7 Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Lib.44.13.11: Marcus Figulus praetor parte classis in hiberna Sciathum missa cum reliquis navibus Oreum Euboeae petit. ...
- 8 Appianus, *Mithridatica*, 114: ... ἐφορώντος τοῦ Μητροφάνου. ὁ δὲ καταπλαγεὶς ἔφευγε, καὶ αὐτόν, αἰσίῳ ἀνέμῳ χρώμενον, ὁ Βρύττιος οὐ καταλαβὼν Σκίαθον ἐξείλεν, ἢ τῆς λείας τοῖς βαρβάροις ταμειῶν ἦν, καὶ δούλους τινὰς αὐτῶν ἐκρέμασε καὶ ἐλευθέρων. ...
- 9 IG XII.8.634–635: ... ΘΕΙΟΤΑΤΟΝ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΑ Λ. ΣΕΠΤΙΜΙΟΝ ΣΕΒΗΡΟΝ ΠΕΡΤΙΝΑΚΑ ΣΕΒΑΚΤΟΝ Η ΒΟΥΛΗ ΚΑΙ Ο ΔΗΜΟΣ ΣΚΙΑΘΙΩΝ ΕΠΙΜΕΛΗCΑΜΕΝΟΥ ΠΙCΤΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΥΑΚΙΝΘΟΥ ΑΝΘ ΗC ΗΡΞΕΝ ΕΠΩΝΥΜΟΥ ΑΡΧΗC. ...
- 10 However, the democratic titles granted by the emperor, which are mentioned at the epigraphic testimonials, had already lost their actual meaning, becoming more of an honorary value: IG XII.8.631–639.
- 11 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Consolatione ad Helvium*, VI.4: Deserta loca et asperrimus insulas Sciathum. ...
- 12 IG XII.8.631–639.
- 13 Athenaeus of Naucratis 1887, 56; Claudius Ptolemaeus, *Geographia*, III.12.44; IV.5.35; Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*, IV.27; Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia*, II.7.8–10 (106); Strabo, *Geographica*, IX.5.16.

- 14 Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Lib.31.45.12–16: ... per agros palati milites frumentum et si qua alia usui esse ad uescendum poterant ad naves rettulere ... iam enim et graves praeda naves habebant – retro unde venerant Sciathum et ab Sciatho Euboeam repetunt.
- 15 Ovidius Naso Publius 1992, VII.469–471: At non Oliaros Didymaeque et Tenos et Andros et Gyarus nitidaequae ferax Peparèthos olivae Gnosiacas iuvere rates. ... ; Athenaeus 1887, 71 (I.56.16): ... Στράτις δὲ τὸν Σκιάθιον ἐπαινεῖ οἶνος κοχύζει τοῖς ὀδοιπόροις πιεῖν μέλας Σκιάθιος, ἴσον ἴσω κεκραμένος.; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou and Garlan 1990, 363.
- 16 For the interpretation of physical and geographical conditions as well as that of the model of ‘Hinterland’ and ‘Foreland’ see: Karmon, Y. (1985) Geographical Components in the Study of Ancient Mediterranean Ports. In A. Raban (ed.) *Harbour Archaeology. Proceedings of the first international Workshop on ancient Mediterranean harbours Caesarea Maritima*, 1–6. British Archaeological Reports International Series 257. Oxford.
- 17 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Consolatione ad Helvium*, VI.4: ... Transi ab iis, quarum amoena positio et opportunitas regionis plures adlicit; **deserta loca et asperrimas insulas, Sciathum et Seriphum, Gyarum et Cossuran, percense; nullum invenies exilium, in quo non aliquis animi causa moretur**; for the Byzantine period see: Failler, A. and Laurent, V. (1984) *Georges Pachymeres Relations Historiques. Einführung, Edition, Übersetzung und Indices*, II.3.31–501, 499. Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 24. Paris.
- 18 Roman archaeology is in its infancy, which is still general phenomenon for entire central Greece.

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