

THE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF KYTHERA

The island of Kythera is found (located) a short distance from Cape Maleas (Capo Malea), the South Eastern tip of the Peloponnese, where the rough seas around the Cape make the area one of the most dangerous in Mediterranean. (**χάρτης 1, χάρτης 2, εικ. 3, εικ. 4, εικ. 5 ο Μαλέας από το Διακόφτι**). The island is located where maritime routes between Crete and the Peloponnese and from the Aegean and Black Sea (Euxeinos Pontos) to the western Mediterranean cross. (**χάρτης 6**). Throughout the centuries, this strategic crossing point has resulted in much animosity between the various powers who have previously dominated this area of the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean.

Kythera carries many influences. In a moment I shall present to you the strong influence on Kythera of Lakonia, which is still evident today. However, before doing so, I shall say a few words regarding the geography and history of the island.

The soil of Kythera has provided a relatively comfortable living to its inhabitants and the mountains surrounding the larger western part of the island (**χάρτης 7**), have protected it from the eyes of pirates. Furthermore, it possesses a large number of fountains and a water supply, even a water fall (**εικ. 8, 9 καταρράκτης**). Also the two high points at the north and south of the island respectively boast several areas of arable land. (**εικ. 10, 11, 12, 13 olive grove**).

From the fossils, sea shells and fish bones which can be found all over, it seems that the island has emerged from the sea at least 3 times (**εικ. 14 fossils**). The first time was 200 million years ago and the last such event started 5 million years ago, ending

2 million years ago in the Pleistocene era. The changing sea level of the Mediterranean sea, because of eras of ice, have affected Kythera's land surface up to our own time. These events, which are recorded in the fossils of the island, may have been the founding element for the myth connecting "Emerging Aphrodite" with Kythera.

Today there are few points on the island where a ship can safely harbour. Most coastal areas are steep (**εικ. 15** East coast). The map shows: Kapsali (**εικ. 16, 17**) to the South towards Crete, the gulf of Palaiopolis (**εικ. 18, 19** Palaiopolis in Antiquity) in the Southeast also facing towards Crete, Diakophti (**εικ. 20**) to the North East towards the Peloponnese and to the West the gulf of Limionas. The gulf of Palaiopolis, which today seems small, was the main harbour in the time of the Peloponnesian War and in Antiquity was indeed much deeper, thus providing a safe harbour, as we shall see below.

Kythera until the Roman Times

The earliest human presence on the island discovered in recent excavations goes back to the fifth millenium, the Late Neolithic Period (**εικ. 21, 22, 23** **μεγάλο Τελικής Νεολιθικής – σπηλιά Αγ. Σοφίας Καλάμου**). [να βάλω εικόνα της σπηλιάς]

In the early Bronze Age, in the 3rd millenium, more people inhabited the island (**χάρτης 24**). Pottery discovered in the excavations and the field surveys proves that the peoples of that period originated from the North, i.e. the Peloponnese (**εικ. 25, 26** **πολλά ΠΕ**). From the early 2nd millenium B.C. and especially in the Middle Bronze Era, the Minoan thalassocracy of Crete expanded up to Kythera which was for the Cretans a stop over base on their way to the Peloponnese, in particular to Lakonia

from where they imported mineral copper and other raw materials. Cretan products and Cretan techniques were subsequently imposed on the island which remained for several centuries under the influence of Crete (εικ. 27, 28, 29, 30, 31 **λίθινο μινωϊκό**). **** Ανασκαφή Αγ. Γεωργίου – Σακελλαράκη **** After the middle of the 15th c. B.C. the Cretan Minoans seem to have abandoned the island while the Myceneans appear on the scene. During the 14th & 13th c. B.C., that is the Late Bronze Age (Late Helladic III), during which period the Mycenaean civilization flourished, their presence becomes fully established. (εικ. 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 **μυκηναϊκός ψευδόστομος**). Mycenaean tablets of that time found in Pylos exhibit Linear B script showing the interesting forms *ku-te-ra*, *ku-te-ra-o*, and *ku-te-ri-ja*, which it is thought refers to Kythera. To which Mycenaean kingdom did Kythera belong? We do not know. In Homer it is mentioned that Agamemnon did not only reign over the plain of Argos but also over many islands whereas Apollodorus mentions that when Atreus' brother, Thyestes, was expelled he went to Kythera. So, it is possible to assume that the Argive Myceneans controlled the island.

In the period of the so-called Dorians, i.e the period of the Dark Ages are particularly dark for Kythera. Neither the sources nor the archaeological finds so far provide any evidence. It is a fact that during this period or a bit earlier the cult of Aphrodite was introduced by the Phoenicians who took advantage of the crumbling Mycenaean kingdoms or more likely, had established on the island centres of craftsmanship/commercial bases for the production and trading of the purple (porphyra) which was their main produce for export. After such produce, the island in Antiquity was named as Porphyris **(ο αμφορέας με την Πορφύρα)**.

The sources mention that the Argive Dorians were in control of the island during the Archaic Period. Sporadic archaeological finds also confirm their presence at the beginning of the 8th c. B.C. on the island. (Unfortunately I do not have a slide proving the presence of Argives on the island) -- **(pottery from Argos of the Geometric Period have been found on the island)**. From Herodotus we know that the Argives had commercial relations with the Phoenicians and that most probably towards the end of the Geometric Period both were coexisting on the island, the Argives on the one hand who had political control and the Phoenicians on the other who had commercial bases and processed the porphyra.

Currently, through archaeological excavations, we are seeking to find the presence of the Phoenicians but until now we have no positive result. The control of the island by the Argives ,who were in constant warfare with the Spartans, made it possible for the former to attack Lakonia from the South. Such attacks lasted until the middle of the 6th century when with Sparta's victory in the war for control of the Maleas peninsula the island passed under the control of the Lacedaemonians. The Spartans brought with them their peculiar cults of which we have in recent years found evidence in several of our excavations. We shall discuss these later. Sparta's control lasted until the 2nd c. B.C. when it is observed that for a limited period of time the Kytherans minted their own coin suggesting that following the troubles of Lakonia they then enjoyed relative independence.

The history of the island is unknown at the time when the Peloponnese and the whole of Greece fell under the Roman domination. It is a fact that after the battle of Actium (31 B.C), in 21 B.C., Augustus handed Kythera over to his Spartan friend Gaius Iulius

Eurykles whom he appointed as the overseer of the Lacedaemonians. Two inscriptions of the Roman period show the continuity of the island's connection to Lakonia (εικ. 46 – the doctor's inscription, 47 η Υακινθίς).

Kythera in Medieval Times

After the fall of the Roman Empire Kythera remained connected to Lakonia. Christian churches appear relatively early (εικ. 48 Αγ. Θεόδωρος – Σέργιος και Βάκχος) and the island became part of the tenth province, that of Achaia, whereas in terms of church administration it belonged to the province of Illyrikon, which was more dependent on Rome than on Constantinople, up until the middle of the 8th c. A.D. During that period, that is after the middle of the 7th c. A.D., the invasions of the Slavs and Arabs harassed the local Kytheran population/community.

According to certain views based primarily on church chronicles of the 15th century, the island was abandoned until the 10th c. when the Byzantines expelled the Arabs from nearby Crete. According to my view, the Arabs settled on the island only as pirates taking over the harbours which they used as bases for their invasions against the Byzantine territories of the Peloponnese and the Aegean (Cyclades). (εικ. 49, Διακόφτι αραβικά). On the image you can see building of one type which exists only in the harbours of the island and which remind us of the architecture found in the desert of Northern Africa.

The Christian inhabitants of the island withdrew to the interior of the island and developed, for more than one century, a very particular symbiotic relationship with the Arab pirates to whom, during the winter, they gave food and received in exchange

part of their illicit maritime spoils. Certainly the contact with the Byzantine administration would have been rudimentary, if it existed at all, with the result that the island remained outside the political arena of Constantinople, especially during the period of Iconoclasm *****]].

With the return of the Byzantines (**εικ. 50, 51 Κάστρο Κολοκυθά**) many churches were built and others were decorated with frescoes (**εικ. 52, 53, 54, 55 Παναγία Αγ. Ανδρέα, 56 Αγ. Νίκων, 57 Παναγία, 58 Αγ. Πέτρος**) but the fear of pirates did not allow for settlement in coastal areas. This continues, with the exception of the military and harbour services in Kapsali and Aulaimon, until the end of the 19th century.

In the 12th c. A.D., Kythera was all but the property of the powerful Byzantine family of the Eudaimonogianides from Monemvasia, who, after the 4th Crusade in 1204 and the surrendering of the island to the Venetians, offered the island as dowry to one of their daughters who married the son of the Venetian Marco Veniero and who acquired the title of Marquis de Cerigo, as the Venetians called the island (**εικ. 59, 60 Νομίσματα Τορνέζια, 61, 62 Κάστρο Χώρας, 63, 64, 65 Αυλέμωνας και κανόνι με λιοντάρι**).

The Ottomans never conquered the island. Only in 1527, for a few months, the Turkish fleet conquered the Northern part of the island, destroying it after taking as slaves almost all its inhabitants (**εικ. 66, 67 Παλαιόχωρα**). The Venetians gave privileges to those who wished to inhabit the Northern part of the island, new settlers from Turkish occupied Peloponnese. They also transferred the capital of the Northern part of the island to a different, safer, location, in Mylopotamos (**εικ. 68, 69 the lion**).

The difference in the origin of the inhabitants, the old ones and the new ones is evident in the village architecture: in the South the roofs are horizontal as one can see them in Crete and the Cyclades, whereas in the North they are slated on two sides as found in the Peloponnese (**εικ. 70, 71 σπίτια με δώμα, 72, 73 σπίτια με κεραμίδες, 74 τα Δόκανα – Dogana**).

The most Serene Republic of Venice lasted until Napoleonic times. After a short French occupation which nevertheless resulted in little social upheaval and, following the order of the Sacred League, a further Turco-Russia occupation, the island came under British rule from 1815 (**εικ. 75 Bridge, 76 Μηλαπιδέα**) until 1866 when Kythera was ceded together with the other Ionian islands to the Greek state.

During the 1st World War when the Greek State and Monarchy grappled with the problem of to whom she owed loyalty, The Antente or the Axis powers, in 1916 the country appeared divided: On the one hand there was the Southern Greece, particularly the Peloponnese, where the Royal family was very influential and Germanophiles who favoured remaining neutral, which in British eyes was tantamount to endorsing German aspirations, while on the other side the army in the North of Greece with El Venizelos (you may be familiar with the name from the Athens airport) was keen for Greece to enter the war on the Anglo-French side. Kythera belonging to Southern Greece however made the latter choice yet in order to do so its various communities declared the island independent; the Kytheran Constitution, which being supported by the English and French fleet lasted from the middle of 1916 until the early (**phot of a seal**) when the civil war ended and Greece went in war with Antente.

During the Axis occupation the Italian army occupied the island until the subsequent treaty with Italy was signed and a seal from this time of the Italian Military Post can be seen in the museum.

In the last slide can be seen an Egyptian light boat with economic emigrants as today Kythera, as entire Greece, became a destination target for economic emigration.