

Social Places and Spaces on and beyond Kythera during the Second Palace Period: Exploring the Island's Landscape and Connectivity

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Abstract: The impact of Crete on the societies and material culture of the Greek mainland, particularly in relation to the emergence of elite groups during the early Mycenaean period, has long been a focus of debate between proponents of indigenist versus interactionist models of mainland dynamics. The intervening island of Kythera has played an important role in this phenomenon not least because of its location as a stepping stone between these two distinctive geographical and cultural regions. The 1960s excavations at the coastal site of Kastri revealed a unique case of Minoanisation, both due to its early beginnings and its intensity. Understanding of this phenomenon has since been significantly enhanced through an intensive field survey that covered one third of the island, as well as through several excavations, including those on two peak sanctuaries. What becomes apparent, after c. 2000 BC, is the exclusive presence of a Cretan-style culture and the lack of any contrastive continuing local tradition, thereby rendering Kythera in cultural terms effectively a part of Crete.

The intensive field survey results for this period reveal a landscape with dispersed rural settlements and an extensive, multi-focal, potentially urban zone at coastal Kastri. The multidisciplinary study of these two parallel dimensions of the island's landscape provides significant insight into local and regional dynamics. Spatial analysis combined with geoarchaeological investigations gives a better understanding of the development of the settlement pattern and accompanying agricultural regimes, while the stylistic and scientific/technological study of material culture (mainly pottery) provides unprecedented knowledge of the island's craft traditions and their reproduction through time and across space, under strong Cretan influence. Such an approach to the island's craft products makes even more meaningful the contextual study of their spatial distribution both among the numerous communities of the island, but also beyond, among Peloponnesian groups, so shedding new light on the transfer and reproduction of technological traditions, as well as on consumer's preferences and the social context of innovation.

Keywords: Kythera, Kastri, Bronze Age, Minoanisation, field survey, landscape, connectivity, pottery analysis

Placing Kythera

Mycenaean Greece emerged regionally but also in relation to a larger mosaic of societies and spaces in the Aegean, the wider Mediterranean and southeast Europe. The material evidence for this is uncontroversial.³ What is far less certain, both in the early Mycenaean case and more generally among the extensively networked societies of the 2nd millennium BC Mediterranean, is exactly how these relations were articulated spatially, economically and politically in terms of the human actors involved. In particular, the grain of research has typically been far too coarse, and insufficiently attuned to the specifics of particular conduits of connection, intervening places, and key groups of intermediaries.

The case of early Mycenaean Greece (especially the Peloponnesian) and the island of Kythera furnishes a classic example of the problem. Ever since the 1960s excavations by Nicholas Coldstream and George Huxley,⁴ which established the presence of a coastal community at Kastri that was culturally and potentially politically affiliated to Minoan Crete, Kythera has in countless

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³ Dickinson 1977; Dickinson 1994; Shelmerdine 2008; Broodbank 2013, 345–444.

⁴ Coldstream – Huxley 1972.

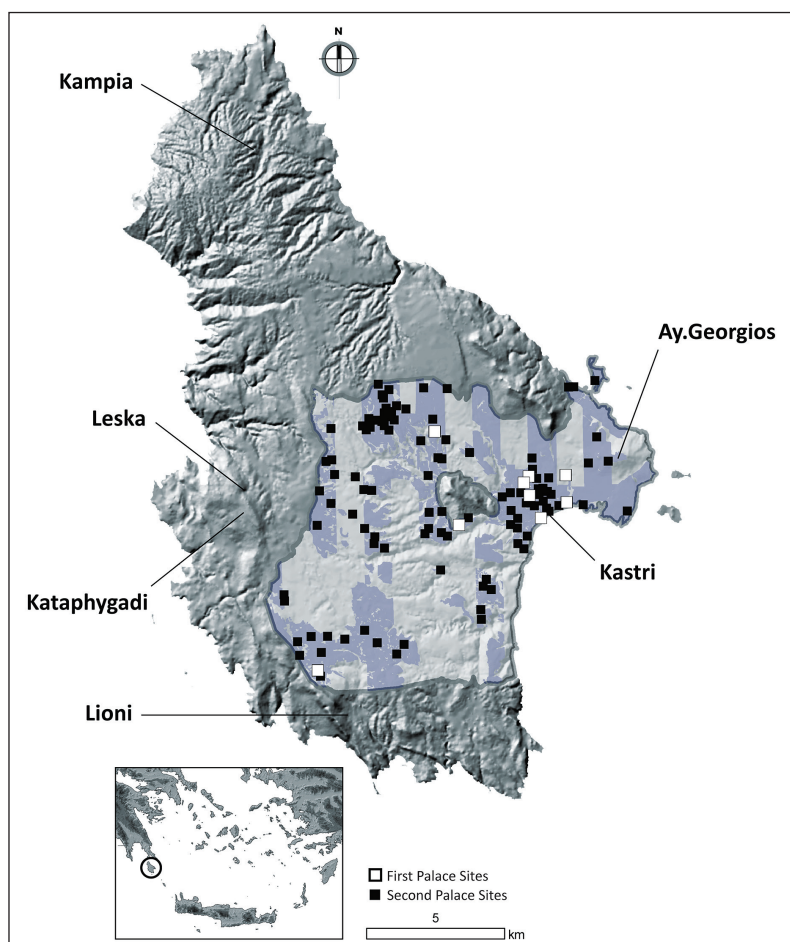


Fig. 1: Map of Kythera showing the borders of the study area and the transects covered by the KIP survey (the darker grey zones), with SPAL sites (black squares) and FPAL sites (white squares), as well as other locations mentioned in the text (D. Nenova; KIP)

studies been awarded the glorious burden of acting as a key transmitter of Cretan innovations to the Greek mainland, starting early in the 2nd millennium BC and continuing throughout the Palatial period.⁵ It is worth emphasising, however, how tightly restricted our knowledge of prehistoric Kythera remained until the 1990s: a series of trenches and tombs at Kastri (then considered one hectare in size)⁶ sufficient to establish a cultural sequence but too limited to shed light on social structure, and an almost complete blank across the rest of the island, including, of course, the then undiscovered peak sanctuary of Ayios Georgios.⁷ To the south lay the then least-known, western end of Minoan Crete; to the north, a limited number of excavations at places such as Pavlopetri⁸ and Ayios Stephanos,⁹ but otherwise expanses of sea and rugged land before one reached archaeologically more solid ground in Messenia, northern Lakonia or the Argolid. On the basis of

⁵ Coldstream 1973; Coldstream – Huxley 1984, although references to Kythera exist in many subsequent studies: Hägg – Marinatos 1984; Rutter 1993, 746; Broodbank 2004; Broodbank et al. 2005; Broodbank – Kiriati 2007; Kiriati 2010; Dickinson 2014.

⁶ Coldstream – Huxley 1972.

⁷ With the exception of some possible LM I material in both funerary and apparent adjacent settlement contexts reported by Stais 1915 at Lioni in southern Kythera, and a small number of additional sites or finds recorded by Waterhouse – Hope Simpson 1961, 148–160. See also Petrocheilos 1984.

⁸ Harding et al. 1969; Gallou – Henderson 2012.

⁹ Taylour 1972; Rutter – Rutter 1976; Taylour † – Janko 2008.

such knowledge, it was truly difficult to understand precisely how Kythera, or more specifically, certain Kytherans, might have operated between the large, variegated palatial societies of Crete and those emergent on an even more diverse mainland. During the last two decades, however, a number of fieldwork projects on the island have produced ample new evidence that provides the basis for addressing such issues.¹⁰

Based on this growing amount of data, the current paper sets two targets:

First, to outline and synthesise some of the results of 22 years of fieldwork and analysis by the Kythera Island Project (hereafter KIP), as well as those published by other recent fieldwork projects on the island, in order to characterise the hugely expansive societies and economies of this island during the Second Palace period (hereafter SPAL),¹¹ contemporary with early Mycenaean Greece. In terms of the present volume's theme, therefore, the aim is to explore the construction of social places and spaces on a near island neighbour.¹²

Second, to offer new evidential insights into the material basis of Kythera's off-island connections at this time, both in general and with specific regard to the Greek mainland, incorporating some of the results of ongoing research on contemporary mainland sites by the Fitch Laboratory (British School at Athens) and, based on the existing evidence, to explore how such Kythera-mainland links may have been articulated.

Within Second Palace Period Kythera

Surface survey by KIP in central and southern Kythera has revealed that during the two to three centuries of the SPAL, Kythera's landscape experienced a major transformation, evident in a dramatic increase in the number of sites across the island and the clear contrast in their character/type and extent between the coastal Kastro zone and inland areas (Fig. 1). Following completion of the study of all the collected survey pottery, the total number of SPAL sites in the fieldwalked area has risen to c. 110, many of them small scatters in the rural hinterland. These comprise either single-period sites or multi-period ones, in the latter case with more than 2% of their datable collected pottery associated with this period, on the basis of fabric and diagnostic morphological features. Although it is acknowledged that not all of these sites may be strictly contemporaneous, the number indicates a huge rise in relation to the previous First Palace period (hereafter FPAL), when not more than a dozen sites have been identified in the surveyed area, with a concentration mainly in the coastal Kastro zone and adjacent areas (Fig. 1).

Beyond this increase in the total number of sites, Kastro itself grew significantly to cover 6–7 hectares (Fig. 2), and was surrounded not only by its cemeteries but by several further foci of occupation, some fairly substantial, that create a multi-focal, potentially urban, coastal zone and blur the edges of the wider community concentrated in and around Kastro. In tandem, the excavation of one peak sanctuary on Ayios Georgios¹³ and another, more recently, in the west, at Leska,¹⁴

¹⁰ Beyond the Kythera Island Project, fieldwork projects that have contributed new evidence for Second Palace period Kythera are: the excavations at the peak sanctuary at Ayios Georgios sto Vouno (Sakellarakis 1996; Sakellarakis 2011; Sapouna-Sakellarakis et al. 2012; Tournavitou 2014); the Australian Paliochora-Kythera Archaeological Survey (Coroneos et al. 2002; Paspalas – Gregory 2009); rescue investigations by the local department of the Archaeological Service (Tsaravopoulos 2009), including excavations of burial sites in the vicinity of Kastro (Bevan et al. 2002) and of another peak sanctuary at Leska (Georgiadis 2012), and by the Ephoreia of Speleology and Palaeoanthropology at Kataphygadi Cave (Trantalidou et al. 2019).

¹¹ For the First-Second-Third Palace periodisation of the second millennium BC Aegean adopted by KIP, see Broodbank et al. 2005, 70 n. 1.

¹² The current paper also aims to bridge the gap in the series of KIP preliminary publications to date, between analysis of Kythera's preceding, 3rd millennium BC, 'Minoanisation' (Broodbank 2004; Broodbank – Kiriati 2007; Kiriati 2010) and the complex later trajectories of cultural endurance and economic abeyance during the Mycenaean full palatial age (Broodbank et al. 2005).

¹³ Sakellarakis 2011; Sapouna-Sakellarakis et al. 2012; Tournavitou 2014.

¹⁴ Tsaravopoulos 2009, 564; Georgiadis 2012.



Fig. 2: Distribution of SPAL diagnostic pottery across the Katri (Site 064) collection grid, also showing the distribution of SPAL cooking pot sherds (D. Nenova; KIP)

together with evidence for potential cult and/or burial activity at Kataphygadi Cave,¹⁵ sheds new light on the sacred landscapes of Kythera (Fig. 1). Overall, by SPAL, the island's landscape had clearly become Minoanised in a range of respects.¹⁶ This process in fact started earlier, towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC,¹⁷ but it now intensified, possibly in part through an influx of new population. Using provisional KIP data, Andrew Bevan estimated a SPAL population of c. 3500–7500 people for the entire island (more than half concentrated in the coastal zone of Katri).¹⁸ Although these calculations need to be adjusted using the final data, the orders of magnitude still stand, and distinguish Kythera from the far lower estimates for contemporary Melos¹⁹ or Keos,²⁰ let alone the tiny population of nearby Antikythera,²¹ and are more comparable to potential densities on pre-eruption Thera.²²

KIP's identification of a dense spread of SPAL pottery across a core area of 6–7 hectares, with a penumbra of further occupation, renders Katri one of the largest known settlements of its time in the Aegean outside Crete, and comparable in scale to emerging mainland centres.²³ The distribution and proportions of classes of pottery and other types of material culture across this area, in

¹⁵ Leonhard 1899, 15; Petrocheilos 1984, 63–64; Bartsiakos 1998, 33, 92, fig. 70; Broodbank et al. 2005, 21; Tsaravopoulos 2009, 564; Georgiadis 2014; Trantalidou et al. 2019.

¹⁶ Broodbank 2004.

¹⁷ Broodbank – Kiriati 2007; Kiriati 2010.

¹⁸ Bevan 2002, 246–247.

¹⁹ Wagstaff – Cherry 1982, 136–140.

²⁰ Cherry et al. 1991, 227–229.

²¹ Bevan – Conolly 2013.

²² Davis – Cherry 1990, also for a comparative discussion on settlement patterns and population of the three Cycladic islands during Late Bronze Age I.

²³ Whitelaw 2001, 29.

comparison to sites in the rural landscape of the island, significantly advances our understanding of the nature and role of this centre. The high frequency at Kastri of painted pottery, comprising mainly small and medium-sized vessels, and, conversely, the relatively lower frequency of coarse wares, in particular large storage jars (pithoi), in comparison to the rural sites, are striking. Evidently, the emphasis was on consumption, cooking and short-term storage, rather than agricultural production and bulk storage of foodstuffs. Interestingly, at Kastri a further ceramic distinction can be identified between habitation and/or crafting zones, and the surrounding funerary areas, as shown by the distribution of cooking pots (Fig. 2). As such vessels are absent from excavated funerary contexts at Kastri,²⁴ the higher surface concentration of cooking pot fragments across the promontory and its inland continuation most probably signifies the habitation areas of the site. In contrast, their lack or limited appearance along the Vothonas Valley and the furthest inland sector of Kastri seems to further confirm the existence of cemeteries around and in between habitation areas.²⁵ Although macroscopic study, combined with petrographic and chemical analysis, seem to indicate that the majority of the Kastri SPAL finewares was locally produced,²⁶ the Kastri area also produces markedly more pieces of imported pottery, in comparison to the inland sites. Other revealing patterns concern the concentration of craft activities in specific areas in the wider Kastri zone, while craft production in the inland farmsteads seems to have been of a very limited scale, mostly aiming to satisfy localised everyday life needs (e.g. manufacture of grinding stone tools for on-site processing of agricultural products).²⁷ Direct evidence for pottery manufacture is rare, but the few potential kiln wasters concentrate in the Kastri zone, with good access to appropriate raw material sources. The same applies to evidence of weaving, associated with discoid loom weights. The latter, indicating use of the Cretan-style warp-weighted loom,²⁸ appear only at Kastri and sites in its immediate vicinity (Fig. 3). Furthermore, the limited evidence for stone vase manufacture also focuses at Kastri, as do the few known scraps of raw copper and recycled silver.²⁹ Overall, Kastri and the extensive zone immediately around it, with its sizeable foci of habitation, cemeteries and craft activities, resembles in certain respects other contemporaneous extensive sites in Crete, also considered to exhibit urban characteristics.³⁰ Most are characterised by a relatively loose plan, large extent but relatively low density of habitation/use, and absence of defensive walls, in contrast to many contemporary mainland and island centres that exhibit a more closed plan, often demarcated by fortifications.³¹

Turning to the rural sites, more than eighty SPAL scatters have been identified by the KIP survey beyond the wider coastal Kastri zone. These show a consistent surface signature and most appear to be between 0.1 and 0.3 hectares in extent.³² Data from the Australian Paliochora-Kythera Archaeological Survey, in the northern part of the island, indicate that a similar pattern obtains there.³³ Based on KIP data and GIS analysis,³⁴ we can go beyond the mere identification of site numbers and sizes to look at how they operated and interacted with each other, and with the coastal zone, at the landscape scale. The evidence points to the vast majority of such sites representing small, one- or two-family farms. Moreover, the presence of rock-cut tombs near to several of them and the range of activities materially attested indicate that they were probably occupied year round as a principal residence. Gridded collections of surface finds from almost half of these

²⁴ For the types of ceramic vessels present in the Kastri chamber tombs, see Bevan et al. 2002, fig. 11.

²⁵ The 1960s excavations at Kastri revealed chamber tombs in Vothonas (Coldstream – Huxley 1972, 220–258), while limited rescue work recovered parts of destroyed chamber tombs in the Tholos area (Bevan et al. 2002).

²⁶ Kiriati – Georgakopoulou 2014.

²⁷ Tsoraki et al., in preparation.

²⁸ Cutler 2012.

²⁹ Broodbank et al. 2007; Georgakopoulou 2014.

³⁰ Whitelaw 2001.

³¹ Branigan 2001a, 42–43.

³² Bevan 2002, 222–226.

³³ Paspalas – Gregory 2009, 554–555.

³⁴ Bevan 2002.

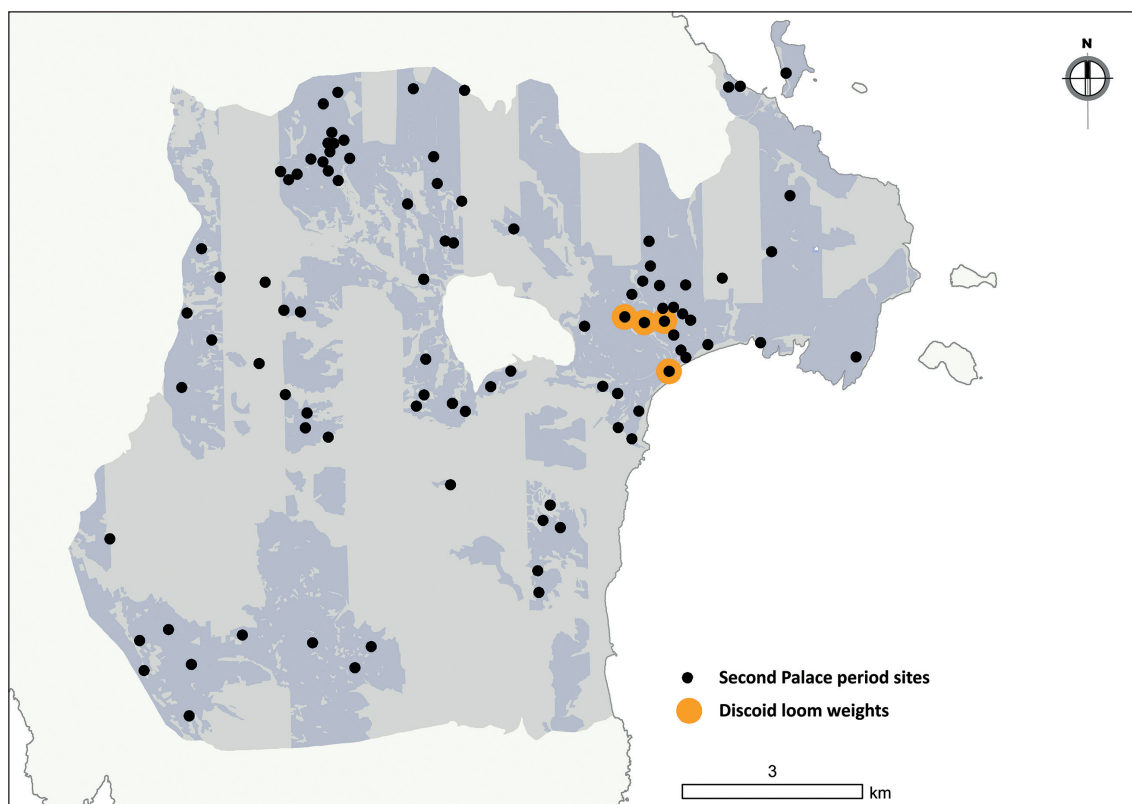


Fig. 3: Distribution of Cretan style discoid loom weights in SPAL sites across the area covered by the KIP survey (D. Nenova; KIP)

sites have produced assemblages that consistently indicate a full range of household activities, including the storage and processing of agricultural products (pithoi and grinding stones), as well as food preparation and everyday consumption (tripod cooking pots, jugs, jars and limited amounts of cups and other fine wares). There is much less emphasis, in relation to Kastri and the coastal zone, on painted fine wares and an almost complete absence of pottery imported from outside the island. A whetstone on one such site points to otherwise invisible metal cutting tools, presumably related to agricultural production. On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that these sites performed any specialised roles (industrial, ritual or other) beyond agriculture, in contrast to the strong evidence for such activities from similar sites of much later periods in the countryside of Kythera.³⁵

Bevan's GIS analysis reveals a consistency in site spacing and location that reflects specific intensive agricultural practices and consequent choices when colonising new land.³⁶ The precise scale of production, however, and for whom they produced, potentially beyond the family unit, is much harder to gauge. Some surplus is indicated by their ability to access craft products not produced in situ, including their entire pot repertoires, and presumably metal tools, probably through a dense network of local exchanges within the island landscape, although Christina Tsoraki's analysis of the associated grinding stones indicates non-specialised domestic-scale production.³⁷ Finally, the obvious complementarity between the different repertoires of pots associated with the farms and the Kastri zone might well indicate flows of grown, harvested and already processed

³⁵ Kiriati et al. 2012.

³⁶ Bevan 2002.

³⁷ Tsoraki et al., in preparation.

agricultural goods from the former to the latter, either in exchange for material and other desirables, or as part of an unequal political relationship.

It is worth emphasising several further distinctive features of this rural phenomenon.

Firstly, it emerges rapidly out of a much more thinly populated FPAL landscape, and only a small minority of the sites survive into the Third Palace period,³⁸ thereby defining a flourish of some 200–300 years, or 8–12 generations. Although this remarkable demographic spike could have been partly generated within the island, an additional off-island input might be postulated and could be supported by other strands of evidence (such as funerary).³⁹

Secondly, either because of this relatively rapid and brief evolution or the smaller social or spatial scales operating on Kythera, intermediate-sized, monumentalised settlements, equivalent to the so-called ‘villa’ sites on Crete, are conspicuously absent. There are a tiny number of slightly larger sites, beyond the coastal Kastri zone, but their material evidence does not seem to indicate radically different functions or connections. Despite the lack of a deep hierarchy to the settlement pattern, it still appears, however, to be a dynamic one with localised cycles of abandonment, expansion and mobility.⁴⁰

Thirdly, the precise distribution of socio-economic power across the landscape is intriguing if ultimately still elusive. Elite groups almost certainly were based at Kastri and the neighbouring coastal zone, and perhaps these directly or indirectly extracted agricultural surplus from the rural sites (in exchange for pottery, metal tools, etc.) arguably also further benefiting from craft activities, off-island trade and exploitation of Kastri’s fertile hinterland.⁴¹

Fourthly, such tiny, closely packed groups, often in shouting range of their neighbours, could not have existed in isolation and a range of localised interactions can be inferred between them, from sharing labour and equipment for agricultural activities, to acquiring tools and pots, intermarriage, and risk-buffering (perhaps as well as larger social gatherings during rituals at funerary locations or peak sanctuaries). All the above only required short- or medium-distance contacts in a variety of contexts (from hailing your next farmstead neighbour or giving a hand at harvest, to participating in larger social gatherings).⁴²

The detailed analysis of the pottery from most of these farmstead sites provides some thought-provoking insights into how such localised networks might have worked. Moreover, the systematic study of KIP’s survey finds (plus review of the publication of the 1960s Kastri excavation’s stratified material), combined with the recent detailed publication of the Ayios Georgios finds,⁴³ provide the rare opportunity to explore in parallel the rural and urban, the mortuary and religious landscapes of the island, each associated with different material culture types. In this way, a more comprehensive approach and a holistic synthesis of the island’s landscape history can be achieved.

Within KIP, the evidence of surface pottery has played a central role, and investment in the study of fabric and technology, supported by petrographic and chemical analysis in association with consideration of stylistic and functional features,⁴⁴ has started to produce rewarding results. Overall, two broad groups of pottery have been distinguished in SPAL Kythera, on the basis of fabric composition and manufacturing technology, each, to some extent, related to different repertoires of shapes.⁴⁵ The first group relates to a calcareous, usually buff- to light brown-firing fabric that appears in two varieties: one fine (untempered) and the second tempered with angular fragments of dark red or brown siliceous mudstone (or, more rarely, rounded sand grains including predominantly siliceous mudstone and carbonates) in various amounts and grain sizes (Fig. 4).

³⁸ Broodbank et al. 2005.

³⁹ Preston 2007, 249.

⁴⁰ Some supporting evidence is already presented in Bevan 2002.

⁴¹ For further supporting evidence for elite groups at Kastri based on the study of funerary remains, see Preston 2007.

⁴² See Bevan 2002, for analogous discussion based on preliminary KIP survey data.

⁴³ Sakellarakis 2011; Sapouna-Sakellarakis et al. 2012; Alexandropoulou et al. 2013; Tournavitou 2014.

⁴⁴ Kiriati 2003.

⁴⁵ Kiriati 2003, 127; Kiriati 2010, 692–693.



Fig. 4: The Mudstone-tempered pottery tradition: fine, untempered (a, c) and tempered versions (b, d) of the main fabric type, associated with small to medium- and large-sized vessels, plain (e) or with painted (LOD or DOL) decoration (f). Images c and d: photomicrographs, PPL, field of view 5.6 mm, by E. Kiriati (D. Nenova; KIP)

This Mudstone-tempered pottery represents the main Minoanising tradition on the island, with a long history since the middle of the 3rd millennium BC.⁴⁶ By SPAL, this pottery is usually wheel-coiled, although there are still cases of larger hand-built vessels, and it is typically dark-on-light painted (apart from plain cups). It covers a wide range of forms, from cups to medium- and large-sized vessels, including pithoi but never cooking pots. It is worth emphasising that the fine painted examples of this fabric include local versions of elaborately decorated Cretan fineware styles. The recurrent use of the tempered and fine version of this clay paste in the same pot has confirmed their common origin and facilitated the provenance investigation of the related pots and their association with central Kythera through petrographic and chemical analysis.⁴⁷ Geological sampling and replication experiments reveal that this Mudstone-tempered pottery was made with fine calcareous clays associated with a series of Neogene sediments located in the central

⁴⁶ Broodbank – Kiriati 2007; Kiriati 2010.

⁴⁷ For presentation of the preliminary results of petrographic analysis, see Kiriati 2003, 125; for the combined petrographic and chemical evidence, see Kiriati – Georgakopoulou 2014 (in preparation for publication).

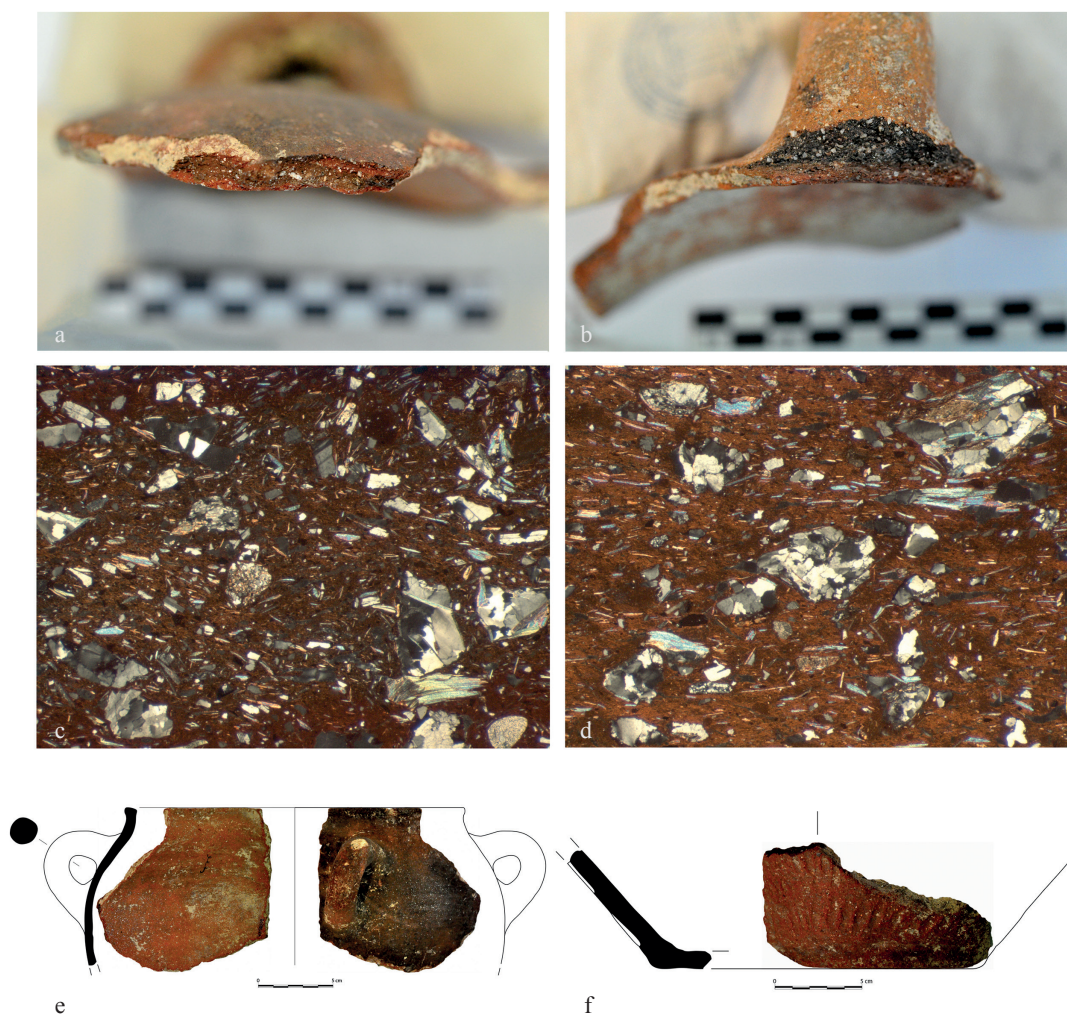


Fig. 5: The Red Micaceous pottery tradition relates to both medium and coarse fabrics (a–d), occasionally coexisting in the same pot (in b, the handle is more heavily tempered than the body); they are mainly associated with cooking pots, predominantly tripod (e) and storage jars (f) of various sizes. Images c and d: photomicrographs, PPL, field of view 5.6 mm, by E. Kiriati (D. Nenova; KIP)

part of the island, tempered with weathering siliceous mudstone or sand grains from different locations within the same general area (see map in Fig. 6). Probable kiln wasters associated with this pottery fabric group have been recovered from sites in the Kastri zone, providing further supporting evidence for the production location of this pottery.

Red Micaceous, the second group of SPAL pottery on Kythera, is characterised by a low calcareous, red- to brown-firing fabric, rich in silver mica and schist fragments in varied amounts (Fig. 5).⁴⁸ This fabric is massively attested in SPAL levels at Kastri, and rises steadily in popularity there through the subphases of SPAL.⁴⁹ It is also a major component of the surface survey pottery, slightly earlier finds from which moreover hint that its production started to a limited degree in FPAL (as also claimed for Ayios Georgios).⁵⁰ This pottery is usually handmade and only in late SPAL (mainly LM IB on the basis of stratified excavation material at Kastri) do some, but not all, vessels appear to be wheel-coiled; one can therefore see a delayed adoption of the potter's wheel in this pottery, relative to the Mudstone-tempered tradition. It seems that production initially

⁴⁸ Kiriati 2003, 127; Kiriati 2010, 693.

⁴⁹ Coldstream – Huxley 1972, 282.

⁵⁰ Tournavitou 2014, 79.

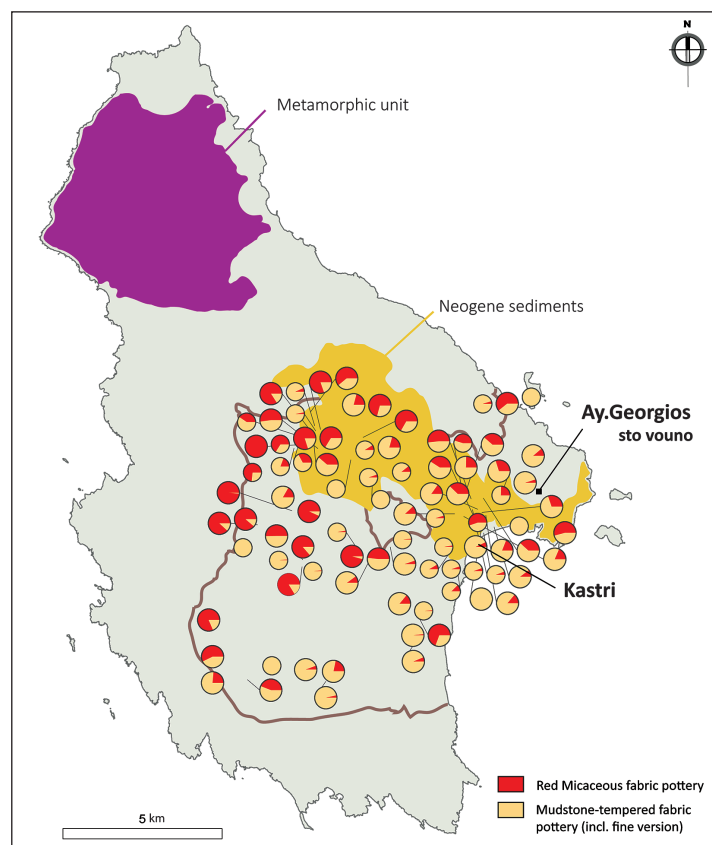


Fig. 6: Distribution and relative frequency (%) of the two main categories of locally produced pottery, the Mudstone-tempered and the Red Micaceous, in SPAL sites across the area covered by the KIP survey (only SPAL sites with gridded collection of surface finds; frequencies based on weight of all period sherds from vacuumed grid squares). The mapping of the Metamorphic and the Neogene units, related to the sources of the two local pottery types, is based on Petrocheilos 1966 (D. Nenova; KIP)

focused almost exclusively on tripod cooking pots but, by mid-to late SPAL, large amounts of the pithoi were also made in this fabric, and the repertoire also expanded to include jars and jugs, and occasionally even conical cups. This pottery is, with a few exceptions, unpainted and various types of plastic/impressed/incised decoration were commonly used for pithoi. Its raw materials have been associated with metamorphic rock outcrops in northern Kythera, outside the KIP survey area (Fig. 6).⁵¹ Unsurprisingly, no potential kiln wasters associated with Red Micaceous pottery have been recovered from the survey area.

These two pottery types, both local to Kythera, although clearly internally introduced to the majority of the survey sites through some as yet uncertain distribution mechanism, represent two coexisting potting traditions, complementary to each other and displaying variably close links, direct or indirect, with Crete. Not only do they use raw materials located in different parts of the island but they also deploy different forming techniques and when they produce vessels of similar generic type (e.g. pithoi), these display different morphological characteristics. The delayed adoption of the potter's wheel, as well as other stylistic trends, in the Red Micaceous pottery tradition may indicate less direct or more sporadic links with Crete, and perhaps even ultimately descent from indigenous potting traditions (where earlier micaceous fabrics are prominent in the Early

⁵¹ Kiriati 2003, 126; Kiriati 2010, 693.

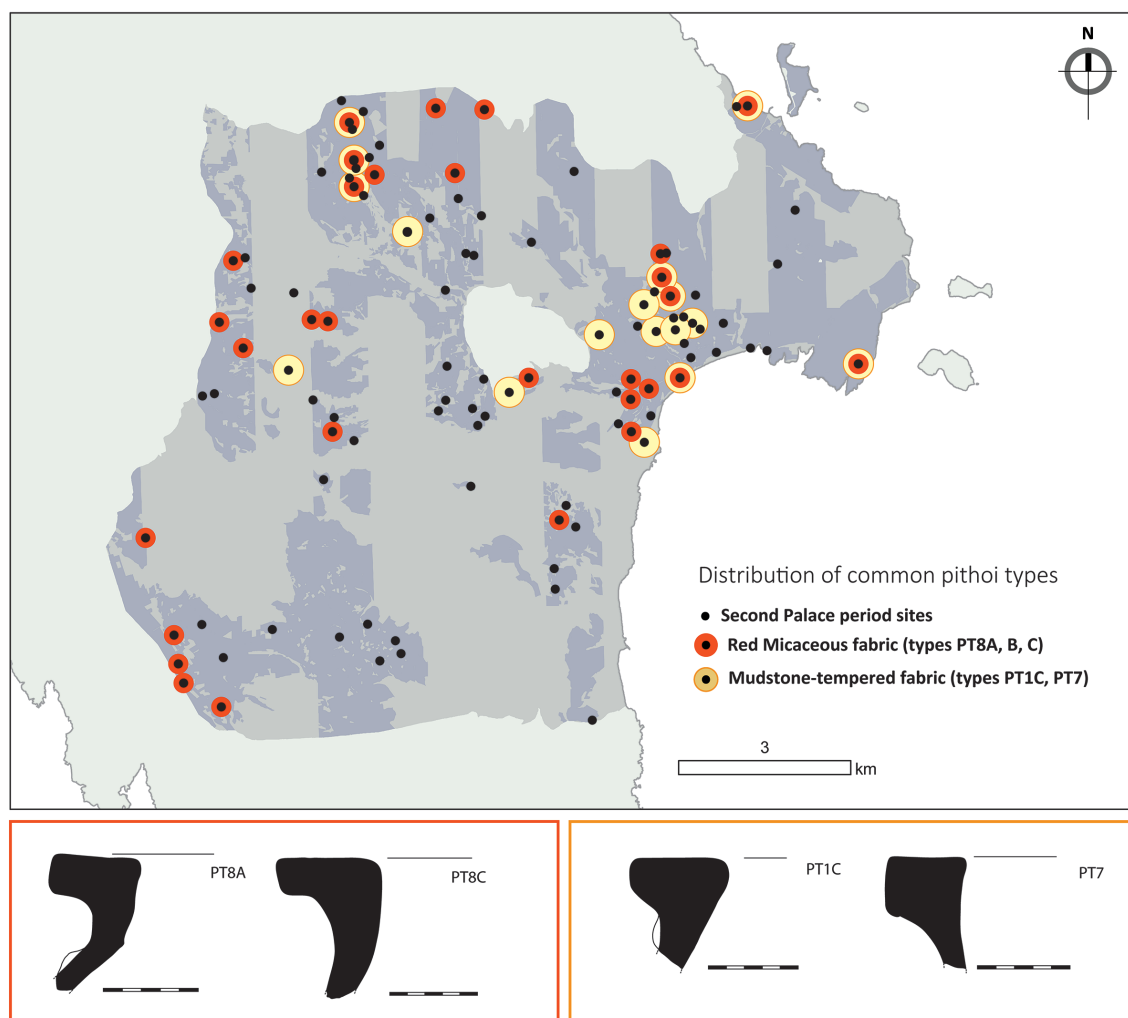


Fig. 7: Distribution of the most common pithoi (rim) types in both local fabrics (Mudstone-tempered and the Red Micaceous) in SPAL sites across the area covered by the KIP survey (D. Nenova; KIP)

Bronze Age).⁵² Whatever the truth of this last speculation, and returning to the networks of SPAL farmsteads, micro-differences can be traced in the choices made by each farm in terms of its pottery selection from either production area (Fig. 6). This is illustrated clearly in the distribution of pithos types (Fig. 7). Red Micaceous pithoi predominate mainly in the inland rural settlements, whereas Mudstone-tempered ones are common mainly in the coastal zone of Kastri. Each type also has a distinctive appearance, both in terms of vessel form and decoration; the former usually with purely plastic decoration while the latter always with painted designs, often in combination with plastic decoration. Moreover, there are suggestive micro-patterns in the way different types of plastic decoration are distributed in sites across the survey area. These observations help us to understand developments through time (for example Mudstone-tempered pithoi often seem to be earlier in date [within SPAL] than Red Micaceous ones) and furthermore cast some intriguing light on issues of individual preferences, group affiliations and circulation patterns within Kythera at this time.

Such new insights prompt further observations about SPAL Kythera's landscapes of death and the sacred. The 1960s excavations at Kastri identified a series of SPAL multi-chambered tombs.⁵³

⁵² Broodbank – Kiriati 2007.

⁵³ Coldstream – Huxley 1972, 220–258.

These succeeded an earlier, thinly documented tradition of pithos burial and therefore introduced new burial customs to the island, ones most closely paralleled in the Knossos Valley of central Crete. Laura Preston's study of these, and further examples of such tombs clustered around Kastri, concluded reasonably that they related to a minority, probably high-status, subgroup of the Kastri community.⁵⁴ Interestingly, in hinterland areas with suitably soft bedrock, clearly derivative single- or occasionally multi-chambered versions of these tombs have now also been found, closely associated with individual farmsteads, most notably on the inland Mitata plateau. Rock-cut chamber tombs of similar type are also known, from outside the KIP survey area, both in the southern part of the island, at Lioni,⁵⁵ and also in the northern part, at Kambia;⁵⁶ in the latter case the two-chamber tomb was dug into the local schist. It is suggested that these tombs proclaimed a commitment to land, group cohesion and cultural identity by small groups of farmers as they became established in hitherto empty zones, distinct from, but in relation to, the major demographic focus on the coast at and around Kastri.

A similar local, rural adaptation of an elite-introduced practice may explain the differences between the rich finds and cosmopolitan connotations of the Ayios Georgios peak sanctuary,⁵⁷ with its manifestly close elite links to Kastri, and the much simpler and less diverse material from the recently discovered peak sanctuary at Leska,⁵⁸ whose westerly location is out of visual contact with Kastri and better placed to serve a localised, inland network of small farmsteads, many of which, in turn, had no sight of the Ayios Georgios peak. In this sense, both sacred sites served to Minoanise the island's landscapes, but while the one did so in a clearly knowingly Crete-related and high-status manner, the other represents a more refracted and, in a sense, 'glocalising' phenomenon.

Beyond Kythera

Kythera has long been considered to have played a key role in enabling interaction between Crete and the mainland, especially the southern Peloponnese, and the adoption of Cretan styles, practices and material culture by a number of mainland communities.⁵⁹ Speculation as to the goods produced or handled by Kastri has been rife since the site's excavation. Textiles, possibly purple-dyed and band-woven, have been offered as one option,⁶⁰ and while Kythera possesses no metal ores, save some iron,⁶¹ the implied amount of metal consumed on the island is impressive.⁶² Processed agricultural produce such as oil and wine are a distinct possibility, given the dense farming pattern on the island at this time, and if so, such products were presumably transported in pottery vessels.⁶³ But regardless of its original relative primacy, it is pottery, and in particular its technological and provenance-oriented investigation, that today acts as the best tracer of Kythera's off-island connections in time and space.

During the Middle Bronze Age and early Late Bronze Age on the mainland there is evidence of importation and use of Cretan and Minoanising pottery at a growing number of sites in the

⁵⁴ Preston 2007, 255–257.

⁵⁵ Stais 1915; Broodbank et al. 2005, 73, 88–89.

⁵⁶ Tsaravopoulos 2009, 565, figs. 5–6.

⁵⁷ Sakellarakis 1996; Sakellarakis 2011; Sapouna-Sakellarakis et al. 2012; Tournavitou 2014.

⁵⁸ Georgiadis 2012; Georgiadis 2014.

⁵⁹ Dickinson 1977; Rutter – Rutter 1976, 58; Rutter – Zerner 1984; Zerner 1993, 45–47; Dickinson 2014.

⁶⁰ For relevant references and discussion, see Broodbank – Kiriati 2007, 266.

⁶¹ Georgakopoulou 2014, 69–70.

⁶² Broodbank et al. 2007; Sapouna-Sakellarakis et al. 2012, 1–247; Kiriati et al. 2012, 297–298.

⁶³ There is some evidence for production of coarse stirrup jars on Kythera, and also for palatial jars produced on the island and exported to Peloponnesian sites (for stirrup jars, see Broodbank et al. 2005, 81; Haskell et al. 2011, 112; for palatial jars, see Huber et al., this volume).

southern, eastern and western Peloponnese.⁶⁴ Carol Zerner and Jeremy Rutter long ago defined the characteristics of this pottery based on studies of such material at Lerna and Ayios Stephanos, respectively.⁶⁵ They both identified pottery classes that are directly equivalent to the two main types of pottery on SPAL Kythera (Mudstone-tempered and Red Micaceous) and they argued for the production of this pottery either on Kythera or in the southern Peloponnese (Lakonia?) by ‘Minoan’ potters.⁶⁶ It is worth stressing that throughout this long period and across this mainland zone, the changes seen in this pottery consistently track major technological and stylistic developments seen in Crete and Kythera.⁶⁷ Equally intriguing is the enduring consistency of the two Red Micaceous and Mudstone-tempered pottery groups, which seem to reflect two distinct potting traditions associated with Minoanising ceramic vessels across the Peloponnese.

Demonstrating the Kytheran origin of the Red Micaceous pottery found on sites across the Peloponnese is fairly straightforward, as such raw materials are rare or simply not present elsewhere in this part of the Aegean and southern mainland.⁶⁸ The provenance of vessels in Mudstone-tempered fabrics found on the mainland is, however, more enigmatic. This pottery shows consistent generic characteristics, namely the use of a fine, buff-firing clay base tempered with inclusions, mainly of mudstone, chert but occasionally limited amounts of other rocks or minerals. Yet the internal micro-variability is too high to support a single origin, and production at a number of locations, certainly including Kythera, is instead inferred,⁶⁹ by potters trained in a particularly Kytheran Minoanising tradition, and who therefore sought and found similar types of raw materials in different landscapes. As already argued by Evangelia Kiriati, ⁷⁰ this evidence is considered indicative of potters’ mobility and/or relocation – temporary or periodic in some cases, perhaps permanent in others – in certain places in the Peloponnese.

This Kythera-mainland ceramic interaction and the inferred mobility of potters was a long-lasting phenomenon. It was surely through the local adaptation, or better appropriation,⁷¹ of this ultimately Kythera-centric Minoanising pottery tradition by southern mainland communities that a number of local, now called ‘early Mycenaean’ potting traditions, emerged, incorporating local and regional pre-existing elements but equally adapting to new social needs and individual preferences. To complement this process, those Peloponnesian sites with Minoanising pottery, whether from Kythera or potentially also mainland locations, usually also received direct Cretan imports,⁷² implying a wider picture of goods and craftspeople moving between Crete, Kythera and the Peloponnese. It can plausibly be argued that pots and potters did not move on their own but together with other goods and craftspeople, as technological transfer can be traced in other significant aspects of mainland life.⁷³

These movements could have been orchestrated by palatial or other elite groups in Crete, the Peloponnese and even Kythera itself. Even if their main focus was the exchange/circulation/acquisition of raw materials, craft products and technical knowledge, they would have presumably also involved the cultivation of human relations, kinships and inter-marriages at various social levels. Interestingly enough, Minoanising pottery in the Peloponnese does not only appear

⁶⁴ Kiriati 2010, 685–690.

⁶⁵ Rutter – Rutter 1976; Zerner 1986; Zerner 1988.

⁶⁶ Jones – Rutter 1977; Dickinson 1992, 110–111; Zerner 1993, 46–47; Zerner 2008, 212–214, 256, 298; Whitbread – Jones 2008.

⁶⁷ Kiriati 2010, 693–694.

⁶⁸ See Kiriati 2010.

⁶⁹ Kiriati 2010, 695–698; see also Huber et al., this volume, for relevant data and discussion in relation to pottery from Kakovatos.

⁷⁰ Kiriati 2010, 696.

⁷¹ Gosselain 2011.

⁷² See e.g. the case of Kakovatos (Huber et al., this volume).

⁷³ Graziadio 1991; Rutter 1993, 139–140, 144–146; Broodbank 2004; for evidence concerning elite architecture and building techniques, see Nelson 2007a and Nelson 2007b; for a discussion on contemporary mobility of Minoanising technologies in central south and southeast Aegean, see Nikolakopoulou – Knappett 2016.

in high-ranked elite consumption contexts and so, in many cases, cannot be directly associated with the most powerful elements in the community. On the contrary, it often comprises a relatively wide range of vessels associated with eating, drinking and serving food but also cooking (potentially introducing new culinary traditions or recipes) as well as transportation of foodstuff or aromatics. This pottery is found in Peloponnesian sites of different socio-political status, in varied frequency and diverse contexts, implying a potentially varied social meaning or role for these pots across the region, and access to them by a rather wider range of people. Taking into consideration the long duration of this overall phenomenon and its origins back to the Middle Bronze Age, when socio-political realities were very different, one might further propose that not only elite groups but a larger section of the population also became familiar with other, non-material aspects of this cultural tradition, such as everyday-life practices and perhaps language. So, beyond the more visible ‘Minoan’ influence on elites, the impact appears to have reached lower social levels, too, and wider aspects of everyday life, in what is likely to have been a highly dynamic and multi-dimensional process.

This brief interpretative synthesis has shown the complexity of the construction of social space on a landscape scale within Kythera, and how different kinds of actors were involved in its negotiation. Only a minority of these probably engaged directly with the projection of a more ‘distributed’ Kythera beyond the island itself, but even this subset assuredly comprised very different kinds of people: men, but also women; potters, and potentially other craftspeople; perhaps priests and traders, in addition to the undoubted but still quite interpretatively shadowy elites gathered at Kastri.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Map of Kythera showing the borders of the study area and the transects covered by the KIP survey (the darker grey zones), with SPAL sites (black squares) and FPAL sites (white squares), as well as other locations mentioned in the text (D. Nenova; KIP)

Fig. 2: Distribution of SPAL diagnostic pottery across the Kastri (Site 064) collection grid, also showing the distribution of SPAL cooking pot sherds (D. Nenova; KIP)

Fig. 3: Distribution of Cretan style discoid loom weights in SPAL sites across the area covered by the KIP survey (D. Nenova; KIP)

Fig. 4: The Mudstone-tempered pottery tradition: fine, untempered (a, c) and tempered versions (b, d) of the main fabric type, associated with small to medium- and large-sized vessels, plain (e) or with painted (LOD or DOL) decoration (f). Images c and d: photomicrographs, PPL, field of view 5.6 mm, by E. Kiriati (D. Nenova; KIP)

Fig. 5: The Red Micaceous pottery tradition relates to both medium and coarse fabrics (a–d), occasionally coexisting in the same pot (in b, the handle is more heavily tempered than the body); they are mainly associated with cooking pots, predominantly tripod (e) and storage jars (f) of various sizes. Images c and d: photomicrographs, PPL, field of view 5.6 mm, by E. Kiriati (D. Nenova; KIP)

Fig. 6: Distribution and relative frequency (%) of the two main categories of locally produced pottery, the Mudstone-tempered and the Red Micaceous, in SPAL sites across the area covered by the KIP survey (only SPAL sites with gridded collection of surface finds; frequencies based on weight of all period sherds from vacuumed grid squares). The mapping of the Metamorphic and the Neogene units, related to the sources of the two local pottery types, is based on Petrocheilos 1966 (D. Nenova; KIP)

Fig. 7: Distribution of the most common pithoi (rim) types in both local fabrics (Mudstone-tempered and the Red Micaceous) in SPAL sites across the area covered by the KIP survey (D. Nenova; KIP)