

XIII. A MATERIAL HISTORY OF KEPHALLÉNIA (& ITHAKA)

... in the changing light of a long history.

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The material history of Kephallenia (and Ithaka) may take the following form – integrated with other sources illustrating the sequential both long and short term cultural events of the island, substantiated or inferred. In the main, the accurate information is based on recent field-work (1991/1992–1994 with supplements of 1996 etc.), concentrated on the northern, central, eastern, and southeastern parts of the island, with its rich archaeology. However, all available relevant sources are employed below, whatever their origin and techniques of recording.

I. HISTORICAL PHASES

Eleven main phases of the material history of Kephallénia are discerned. Practically all of these can be subdivided, but with only marginal effect at present due to limited knowledge of data, dates, etc.

- (1) The Palaeolithic with, seemingly, mainly finds from the Middle Palaeolithic (Mousterian) period, or of similar traditions. The small finds from the surveys are exclusively stone tools and debitage. No structures (apart from possible caves) are known, but several concentrations of material indicate large hunting sites (in particular on the coast) and one open mining locality (which also may have been in use in later periods).
- (2) The (Late) Neolithic (including a possible Mesolithic phase, which cannot be distinguished, however). The small finds from the surveys are

mainly stone tools and debitage; the artefacts are rather small and include flint arrow-heads. Most likely, also some of the rather uncharacteristic so-called Prehistoric coarse wares (with inclusions) found during the surveys are of the Neolithic period. Houses and other structures are not known, except for natural cave-sites. The sites are in the low country. (Some round hill-top fortresses with rubble walls may have originated in this period, but are more likely of the Bronze Age.)

- (3) The Bronze Age. The architecture comprises round fortified compounds (fortresses), likely of this period, remains of regular stone-walls in large blocks (square fortresses), various house structures, and various specific grave-types: tholos, chamber, etc., equipped with weapons, jewellery – including imported precious stone and amber – ceramic fine wares, etc. The well-dated structures and finds are of the second millennium BC, in particular the Late Bronze Age (III). The small finds from the surveys comprise a few ceramic fine-wares, Prehistoric coarse wares, of which one general variant – with a crimson red slip – can be distinguished. (Early) Bronze Age stone tools are difficult to distinguish, except for obsidian blades (most probably Melian).
- (4) The Iron Age or the Geometric Period is, with certainty, only represented by a very few ceramic fine ware sherds found during the surveys. (It should be noted that cultural phases, especially if without particular features and followed by phases of expansion, tend to be underrepresented in archaeological surveys.) However, these sherds come from respectively ancient Pronnoi (Palaiokastros) and ancient Same, possibly indicating that the central settlement, with adjacent cemeteries, of the later poleis were already founded in the Geometric period. On Pronnoi/Palaiokastros there is also a remarkably

high number of Prehistoric finds, including the Bronze Age. From nearby Ithaka, rich Geometric period sacrifices are known, but such are, at least till now, few on Kephallénia.

- (5) The Archaic and, in particular, the early Classical period are quite richly represented. The latter may (along with the consecutive historical phases) – due to expansion and intensive use of the landscape – be responsible for the rather limited material found from the preceding phases. Clearly, in the Archaic and the early Classical periods, the poleis centres, or, cities, of the island were established (at the close of the phase even fortified, in part). Organization is also evident from temples and cemeteries, minting of coins, indeed, from the many settlements with ceramic sherds emanating from surveying ancient Pronnoi and Same. In the landscapes are further temples and sanctuaries plus a number of unspecified settlement sites. To this come a series of small fortresses, either square or round, built by large blocks, and found in the high plains of the borderlands between the poleis. The small finds, sherds, roof-tiles, etc., concentrate in the cities and on other sites with stone architecture.

- (6) The Late Classical and, especially, the Early Hellenistic period see a very rich archaeological material. In this phase, Same was turned into a planned fortified city; indeed, also many other fine and complex city and town walls of the islands, as well as other planned cities or towns – including “New Krane”, a true metropolis – belong in this phase, along with some fortresses. Clearly, this is the period of defensive fortification of the islands. New rich sanctuaries and temples, including a fine tholos round temple, were also erected, especially on the territory of Same. Tentatively, the stone-built harbour-pier of Same may also belong to this phase. In the countryside, traditional less substantially built farm structures were supplemented by complexes with towers and/or rectangular main structures in large stone blocks, sometimes with enclosing long-walls (as well as with adjacent field-terraces). The small finds from the surveys are particularly rich in the cities but also from the

countryside comes very many sherds and other datable material, for instance roof-tiles.

- (7) The Late Hellenistic and the (earlier) Imperial Roman periods have both yielded relatively few archaeological finds. One reason for this is the limited material from the cities. Large farmsteads (on the best soils) with major structures were probably also in use during the Late Hellenistic period, and continue to be used in the Imperial Roman one. Still, it is not until the establishment of a series of Imperial Roman luxury villas (in tile and with mosaics), all on the very coast, and in localities with constantly running water, that there is again a clear focus of settlement. Imperial Roman fine-wares are rare outside the villas, the economic hinterland of which includes various common farmsteads. The old cities must still have been functioning, at least to a degree; at Same a Roman bath was constructed (but perhaps for a coastal luxury villa?).
- (8) The Late Antiquity and Earlier Medieval periods, see rather much archaeological material. The focus of the settlement is now at Phiscardo, in the very North of Kephallénia. Here a rich Imperial Roman villa site at a fine natural harbour is turned into a major settlement with a large basilica church, possibly a bishop's seat for the archipelago. None of the former poleis cities seem to exist any longer, at least not as more than mere settlements. In the countryside several large farmsteads and, perhaps, even villages have been found during surveying.
- (9) The High and Late Middle Ages are difficult to understand from the archaeological perspective alone. Sherds of the period are, seemingly, rare (their chronology also poorly understood). Roof-tiles of, about, the High Middle Ages are, however, wide-spread on Kephallénia. Even marginal lands see many ruins of farm-structures and villages, some of which may date to this phase. In the highlands between ancient Same and Pronnoi a gigantic old irregular field-system, long abandoned, can be seen; also this may be of the Medieval period (Fig. III. 3). At least three of the acropoleis or similar positions of the ancient cities (Same, Pronnoi, and Krane) were fortified during this phase, by Italian/Norman

princes or by the former lords, the Byzantines. In the late eleventh century, if not earlier, the latter held a castle – the Medieval and later capital of the island – at Ag. Georgios (some kilometres to the east of Krane). To judge from the written sources, some of the churches and monasteries also go back to this phase, like, possibly, buildings still standing, at least in part.

(10) The Venetian period (c. 1500–1800). From this phase comes a large number of churches and monasteries. These were constructed in the seventeenth and (in particular) in the eighteenth century, but many are in ruins after the great earthquake in 1953. Around 1600 the majestic Assos fortress was established in the North. Re-fortification of Ag. Georgios also took place. A few still standing major buildings and certainly some ruined ones are also known to date from this phase, including a fine small manor with own chapel and burial ground (early eighteenth century) at Katelios in the southeastern part of Kephallénia. The ruined villages abandoned after 1953 likely have structures going back to the Venetian period, although most are probably of the nineteenth century. The same is the case for the once common wind-mills, now almost all in ruins. In the late eighteenth century the capital was moved to Argostoli, to the West of ancient Krane.

(11) The British (c. 1800–1864) to modern period is only of limited interest in the present context. However, attention should be paid to the building programme of the British period, comprising fine city-structures, including the market-hall in Lixouri (in ruins after 1953 and, unfortunately, not rebuilt). The British road-system includes several small and a few somewhat larger fine bridges as well as the long bridge-like dam across the inner bay at Argostoli, still intact. In remote places, even the roads themselves (of both the British and Venetian phases), on their terraces, with wells for watering the horses and guard-houses, are still to be seen – a rare glimpse of a pre-industrial Europe soon to be bulldozed away by shepherds using the highlands for their flocks and constructing new roads for their pick-up trucks. Also the fine two-storey buildings in neo-classicist style of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century are mostly gone, or in decorative ruins; a few can be seen still standing at Phiscardo.

The rest is Mediterranean concrete and other necessities of modern life. The concerns about the protection of nature and the cultural resources are usually losing to personal and economic gain, in particular with regards to tourism, which – ironically – ought to feed on landscapes and heritage. Energies concentrate on preserving the few localities and sites of national importance.

II. INTERPRETATIONS

The material history of Kephallénia is thus a miniature edition of European, in particular southern European cultural and other development. The below processes are suggested to explain this development, with particular attention paid to regional and general history, theory of culture, etc.

In the Middle Palaeolithic, when Kephallénia was first settled, seals and giant turtles (*Caretta Caretta*) were no doubt the resources of particular attraction. The coastal settlements of the island are among the indeed very few of the epoch, although paralleled in the Levant. Some deep stretches of sea must have been crossed before the first inhabitants reached the island. This certainly raises the interesting question of Neanderthal navigation (supposing that the geological findings about the depth of the World Sea during the cold phases of the last Glacial are correct).

In the (Late) Neolithic, with a novel population, the settlement concentrated in sheltered areas a short distance from the coast; seemingly hills were preferred, perhaps for protective reasons, perhaps for their less humid micro-climate (and slightly more wind), possibly to avoid malaria which is recorded on the island even in recent times.

The Bronze Age settlement clearly concentrates in the main agricultural areas of the island. In the Mycenaean period, especially Late Bronze Age III (late), many graves, both of the chamber and the tholos type, are known from the same areas, testifying to well-established aristocratic families. Homer would indicate the existence of petty kingdoms.

The remains from the early first millennium BC are very few, but a continuation of settlement and society is nevertheless suggested, since the four poleis of Kephallénia, Pale (far West), Krane (Southwest), Same (East) and Pronnoi (Southeast), plus off-shore Ithaka (Northeast) also concentrate in the abovementioned main agricultural zones. Ancient Pronnoi, in particular, has many small finds both from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age. To judge from the small finds, there is evidence of continuing and increasing settlement in the city centres, most probably from the Geometric period, but at least from the Archaic one, onwards.

Cemeteries at the cities at first show various cremations; after c. 300 BC sarcophagi, likely with inhumations, appear. Incidentally, burials on the main cemetery at Pronnoi come to a halt at c. 300 BC (or slightly earlier), possibly indicating an expansion of the settled area of the city – as at Same during the same phase.

At Same, the development is particularly instructive. Across a stream to the South of the first city, dating back to the Geometric period, a new planned city was built in the early fourth century BC, at the time when the Athenians intervened on the island. At the same time, the first phase of the city-walls of Same was constructed. The final phase of these walls were constructed around 300 BC, likely at a Macedonian intervention, as at Krane and perhaps other sites. The curtain is dated by typological/chronological means, as well as a cemetery of (inhumation) cist-graves abandoned to the walls. In spite of its defenses, Same fell to the Romans in 189/188 BC, after a prolonged siege.

The rural, or rather extra-urban settlement of the poleis, superceding the scattered traces of the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods etc., is not particularly well known, the main settlement and point of reference no doubt being the city. From the Late Classical-Early Hellenistic period on, however, stone-built constructions, towers and main structures, appear at the farmsteads, indicating, in part the rise of wealth, also reflected in the monumental and other buildings in the cities, in part the beginnings of an estate culture. The latter culminates in the coastal Roman luxury villas of the Imperial period.

The Archaic to early Classical landscape is also de-

fined by several extra urban sanctuaries, some even temples, and the small borderland fortresses in the highlands for guarding the territories (including the timber resources) and aiding the shepherds protecting their flocks. Indeed – although it would have been possible to “walk home” to the city every day for many inhabitants – the animals (as well as the fields) would have been left unprotected over the night. For this reason alone, we reckon with the existence of farmsteads also in the early period of the polis (which is certainly the case in Pronnoi), even though the scattered common fine-wares and roof-tiles theoretically may belong to shrines in some cases.

While the Late Hellenistic and Imperial Roman settlement have a number of recognizable foci, the Late Antique one is difficult to define, although the material of this period, as studied from the landscapes of Kephallénia is richer than that of the preceding period. Kephallénia thus conforms to the Aegean model of a relatively limited settlement during the “Roman” period proper and a phase of economic growth and expansion of settlement after that.

Kephallénia was also taking part in the southern Aegean growth during the Archaic and Classical periods. In the Hellenistic phase, in fact the later part of the period, the same region sees rural decline upon the rise of Macedonia and the ensuing phase of civil wars followed by the Celtic invasion of the late third century BC and the Roman conquest in the early second century. The settlement of Kephallénia during the Late Classical and, in particular, the Early Hellenistic period is rich, probably reflecting that the island is readily adapting to the growth of the northern regions of the Aegean.

While the urban culture is easy to define during the haydays of the Greek polis on Kephallénia (& Ithaka), with the existence of several monumental buildings – in particular sanctuaries – and even planned urban landscapes, city life of the Roman Imperial period ought to have been relatively limited to judge by the modest building activities. One suspects that by Late Antiquity only Phiscardo, in the far North, may have seen something resembling urban life. This site, with a rich Roman villa of the Imperial period and a cemetery of sculptured sarcophagi, was, as mentioned, most probably a bishop's seat with a large basilica around 500 AD.

During the Byzantine and Italian/Norman (after 1185) periods, and until Venetian rule at 1500, the settlement is even more difficult to describe. A small number of fortified sites exist, doubtless aristocratic estate centres, three of which are re-fortifications (probably by the Normans) of the acropoleis or another similar feature of the ancient cities of Krane, Same and Pronnoi, the fourth is a new fortification (sometime before 1085, and thus of the Byzantine period) of the Ag. Georgios rock (to the east of Krane), capital of the island until the late eighteenth century. In addition, a few monasteries are known from the Norman phase, at Krane and Same (either indicating some continuity after all, or simply due to the excellent natural harbours), above Poros, the late Classical-Early Hellenistic fortified town, and in distant borderlands between ancient Krane and Pronnoi. Other settlements are named in the written documents, but no systematic overall survey is provided.

During the Venetian period a marked expansion of the settlement took place, in part due to the general economic growth during this phase, in part probably due to the settling of refugees from the former Venetian possessions that had recently fallen to the Ottomans, for instance Crete (1645–1669). Thus, new aristocratic and other estates were founded on Kephallénia, and marginal areas incorporated, as indicated by the marginal “-ata” place-names of the period.

MODELS. The idea is proposed of the existence of two different basic kinds of cultural contact, respectively (1) communication and (2) information flow. The first one entails the production and distribution of material culture and is direct (only indirect in the secondary setting), it is also slow. The second one is always direct and potentially very fast, being oral and visual, being materially independent, it is also the one with the potentially farthest reach (though not always positively accepted). The former cultural contact entails communication between partners, but temporal delays, even of several generations or more, indeed much more occur. As to the latter, the parties are rarely in direct contact with one another.

Today, the two systems have more or less merged and little conceptual distinction is being made be-

tween the indirect and the direct, the former often being the result of a direct contact at an earlier stage. Only the material/non-material dichotomy still exists, though often forgotten in the IT-society, as in academic circles. Indeed, today the geographical parameter of distance, crucial in the past, is easily surmounted across a broad spectrum.

Thus, the overall historical development involving Kephallénia should at first depict the island as a partner in the larger past cultural systems of, respectively, the Old World, the Mediterranean and in the light of regional information flows, generated during the Stone and Bronze Ages (for instance, Middle Palaeolithic tool-types, Neolithic and Bronze Age ceramics and types of arrow-heads, etc.).

In the Bronze Age of Kephallenia, the first clearly traded items occur (obsidian, most probably from Melos in the Cyclades), thus denoting a period and a field, however limited, of communication, as defined above. Homer's picture (seventh century BC) of, on the one hand, some regional integration (Odysseus' leadership in war), on the other, of several smaller regions or areas in the realm, reflects a Bronze Age reality pertaining to short range information flows (and no doubt longer range ones as well, when considering the entire Greek koine against Troy and especially the geographical knowledge housed in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*).

In Classical Antiquity, Kephallenia was very much a part of the Mediterranean and regional systems of information flows as well as exchange of communication, thus material items (including trading goods). The latter were in the Archaic period reflections of Corinth's westward expansion and, during the Classical period, of the commercial interests of Athens, e.g., seen in the common Athenian pottery from the archaeological survey. Nonetheless, political independence was still the ideal of the Kephallenian poleis, however forced to act more and more in unison, thus, perhaps, creating a novel all-island identity on the level of information flows.

This certainly changed during the Early Hellenistic period, when, in a last attempt to preserve the freedom of the island, Kephallénia entered both anti-Macedonian and anti-Roman alliances. The latter was fatal, as the power of Rome was supreme after the Second Punic War (around 200 BC). Same fell, and



Fig. XIII. 1. Pronnoi/Palaiokastro. Agricultural terraces with the vegetation burned off, likely intentionally, to provide grass for goats supported by the European Union, but hardly eaten.

the island no doubt experienced deep-going changes in the political and social set-up, resulting in new cultural contacts, thus partaking in new both material communication and information flows.

Although certainly a part of Imperial Roman culture, and deeply integrated into the Late Roman Empire, a measure of self-governing returned, however, in Late Antiquity, when the Eastern Mediterranean experienced marked growth, in the vague of the cessation of the Western Empire (cf. the supposed bishop's seat at Phiskardo). During the Early Middle Ages, the formation of the Byzantine Theme, or military district, of Kephallénia in the eighth century AD, comprising all the Ionian Islands, even Korfu, must be seen in this light.

From around 1100, with the Italian/Norman conquest of Byzantine Southern Italy (and Arab Sicily), Kephallénia found itself on a new political, military and cultural boundary between east and west, and thus in a new flow of information, possibly even com-

munication involving material items, although the latter cannot be traced. This particular position was underlined by the western Norman/Italian conquest of the island from the eastern Byzantine emperor, and not least by Ottoman conquest of mainland Greece, just opposite Kephallénia, as well the status of Kephallénia as a part of Britain's small Ionian Empire, till 1864.

The integration of Kephallénia into the Kingdom of Greece negated the island's particular position between East and West, which, in fact, had also given the island a measure of freedom, otherwise lost after the siege of Same and only partly won in terms of administrative prerogatives from Late Antiquity onwards.

Still, the feeling that the island had a particular position (like Korfu) was maintained – both in terms of information flows and material communications – not least by the internationally orientated bourgeois elite of Kephallénia until the great earthquake of

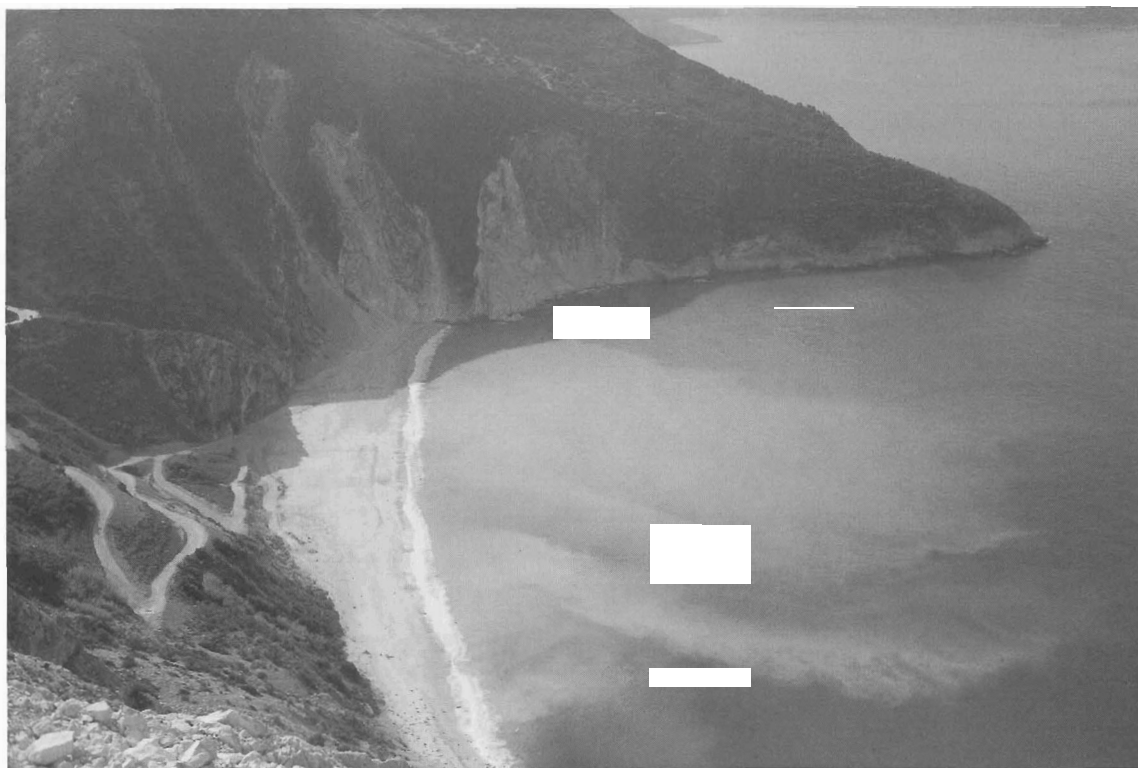


Fig. XIII. 2. Myrthos Bay, a natural wonder and turistic beach.

1953. This earthquake happened to take place at a time when a massive population movement from the countryside into the large cities (in Greece) was in the making. Thus, rather than the earthquake itself, although forcing very many to leave the island (including the elites), it was post-World War II modernization, expanding petty industrialism and, not least, trade, thus material communication by the present definition, in southern Greece centered on the Athens-Piraeus area, which wrote up a new and marginal cultural role for Kephallénia, in terms both of information and material communication.

The island, heavily de-populated after 1953, was almost forgotten, certainly ignored, almost like something shameful had happened. Settlements were given up in great numbers, while it was attempted to concentrate the remaining population in the relatively safe areas along the main roads, usually following level ground. This was also a reflection of the new needs of cultural and other contact, indeed transportation, rather than the usual adaptation to the re-

quirements of the subsistence economy in terms of settlement.

Only recently has the number of population begun to creep back up, supported by rising tourism and a measure of old but limited wealth. Tourism, and the strange regional economics of the European Union, are, however, creating new challenges for the island, indeed new information flows and new material realities of communication (almost all food-stuffs now being imported into the green island, for example). The challenges are particularly momentous if Kephallénia desires to maintain an identity of its own. Perhaps it is time to invest in the rich resources of the material history of this spellbound island, including the overlooked last one millennium and a half. Kephallénia, having seen history pass, having itself been very much a part of it, is certainly more than its magnificent beaches, like Myrthos, and landscapes burned by shepherds to provide greenery for goats supported by the European Union, but usually never eaten (Figs. XIII. 1 & 2).

A quick pace of changes is particularly noticeable at Argostoli, the capital, but also elsewhere on Kephallénia, like in the rest of Greece, striving to modernize in face of the international challenges at the start of the third millennium. Indeed, may the present

brief and limited work serve as a memory of the position in history of this beautiful and beloved island, and as a gesture of respect for its people and their numerous accomplishments. May it also remind of the rôle of foreigners in history.