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# South by southeast: the history and archaeology of southeast Crete from Myrtos to Kato Zakros

Emilia Oddo, Konstantinos Chalikias, *South by southeast: the history and archaeology of southeast Crete from Myrtos to Kato Zakros*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2022. Pp. 160. ISBN 9781803271309

## Review by

Luca Girella, Università Telematica Internazionale Uninettuno. [luca.girella@uninettunouniversity.net](mailto:luca.girella@uninettunouniversity.net)

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## Preview

[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

Regional studies in archaeology are always welcome, since they encourage the reconsideration of archaeological evidence collected over the decades and draw attention to matters and questions that need more research and methodological improvements. This important volume fulfills these expectations. It publishes the papers presented at the conference held in Pacheia Ammos (Crete) from July 1–2, 2017, and was conceived as a complement to a preceding volume (*Exploring a Terra Incognita*).<sup>[1]</sup> *South by Southeast* aims to embrace a more diachronic perspective, add settlement patterns and maritime connectivity, and to provide a larger pool of presentations. The 2017 conference hosted 18 presentations, supplemented by a keynote lecture (pp. 149–50), but, unfortunately, eight contributions have not been published in the book, although one paper not derived from the original conference (Gallimore) has

been included. The published volume opens with an exhaustive introduction by Metaxia Tsipopoulou and closes with final remarks by the two editors. Although the specific topics embraced by the missing papers are not represented (e.g., pottery production, seals, peak sanctuaries), the volume is a blessing, for it focuses on matters that have inspired archaeological discussions and symposia in the last years. I would like to draw attention to three issues that appear throughout the book and to which future research may be directed.

I begin with the concept of 'region', which is appropriately addressed in the introduction and conclusions (pp. 139–40) and is the most frequently mentioned subject of the book. As a collection of case studies limited to southeastern Crete, the volume is an opportunity to explore how geographical and cultural patterns changed and developed from the EBA to Roman periods in a specific area. Several papers force us to re-evaluate the geographical notion of 'region' through a more fluid and flexible approach. Whether they are from a multi-scale perspective (Knappett) or comprise predictive models (Spencer and Whitelaw), the contributions allow us to consider shifts in settlement patterns more dynamic and unpredictable than the data can document.

This leads us to a second major subject of the book: the wider temporal perspective, adopted by many papers (despite the absence of the conference contribution on the Late Roman and Byzantine periods) brings out aspects of local developments in the archaeological analysis. Various authors (Tsipopoulou, Knappett, Kalantzopoulou, Platon, Vokotopoulos, Fragkopoulou) stress that Bronze Age settlement trajectories in this area show a more hierarchical, connected territory in the Neopalatial period and that this epochal passage can be justified by the existence of an administrative center in the southeast or a leading site in charge of trade, mobilization of goods, and redistribution of products (alas not yet identified and only hypothesized in the area of Ierapetra) or, alternatively, spurred by the growing of the Kato Zakros palatial site. The data from several excavations suggest territorial expansion and economic intensification, but the sole case of Chryssi island (a recently excavated and not yet fully published settlement that must have relied on the opposite shore

on Crete for supplies) allows us to consider a more advanced or alternative narrative. At Chryssi, signs of growth or more interconnected societies were not (or not only) necessarily driven by economic and political authorities, since local decisions and the independence of settlements might have created a more independent society. This also explains the perennial instability of Bronze Age Cretan economic and societal networks and emphasizes highs and lows in various periods that might not necessarily be due to the lack of academic attention. For instance, although we know almost nothing about LM II and LM III settlements in this region, the area must have undergone a long period of instability and degradation, but, with the lack of data, one cannot rule out some form of continuity in habitation. Within the diachronic perspective adopted by many papers, the authors are in fact very comfortable with punctuated histories, but we are sure that future research will enlighten aspects of continuity, as well as inter-site and inter-regional variations.

The major feeling in reading this book is that the instability of this very fragmented region must have been linked with several environmental and ecological shifts. What do we know about this ecological relation and adaptation? Almost nothing, unfortunately. A poignant example of how it is possible to measure site resilience after a natural disaster comes from a single paper (Platon, p. 71), whose chronological time period is recent history.

This leads us to the third important issue of this volume, i.e., the interlinked and crucial collaboration between fieldwork and site excavation (the paper by Vokotopoulos is a good example). Despite Crete being one of the most surveyed regions in Greece (Whitelaw, p. 39, fig. 1), we know almost nothing, for example, of coastal Bronze Age settlements between Myrtos Pyrgos and Zakros, nor of settlement structures and social organization. Erickson also addresses the marginalization of Crete in the discipline of Classical archaeology. In the Bronze Age palatial period, the landscape in a palatial territory would have been transformed, but we know almost nothing in this region about land use practices, pastoral boundaries, ritual reinforcements, burial practices, patterns of production and exchange (with the sole exception of pottery), village and household storage, nor

anything about the imposition of symbolic codes (the editors note the spread of a 'villa culture' in LM I). Any Knossian influence or hegemony in this region is far from proven. These are not faults in this volume; on the contrary, they emphasize how we deal with a *Terra Incognita* and how much needs to be done in the future to understand a cultural landscape from a diachronic perspective.

Lily Bonga's contribution contextualizes problems of the Cretan Neolithic within the wider picture of Aegean Neolithic cultures, with particular attention to the reconsideration of absolute and relative chronologies; she presents the preliminary work on the ceramic assemblages from Pelekita cave, near Kato Zakros, currently the oldest Neolithic site in SE Crete. This paper contains hostile notes toward present and past research on Neolithic Crete (but archaeological advances are necessarily made in stops and starts!), but it rightly stresses problems raised over the years that need solutions: identification of Neolithic pottery and site locations, publication of valid ceramic sequences, and synchronization with other Neolithic Aegean sequences.

Tina Kalantzopoulou presents important results on habitation in the mountains of east Crete. Kalantzopoulou also points to another methodological matter: analysis of habitation and exploitation in the mountains cannot rely only on extensive survey evidence, however important it might be, but needs to be coupled with site excavations. The analysis presented from the uplands of Zakros and the SE slopes of Dikti shows a well-known feature of settlement habitation in Bronze Age Crete: settlement strategies are more structured in the Neopalatial period. Some important questions are raised and need future consideration, e.g., issues of settlement seasonality and the role of ritual and palatial sites in catalyzing and controlling the expansion of settlements.

By using predictive models based on the data derived from surveys of the Mirabello region, Christine Spencer and Todd Whitelaw explore simulated occupation densities in the Ierapetra region (an area characterized by little survey investigation compared to the northern isthmus) and show widespread occupation in the Protopalatial period followed by a nucleated lowland occupation along the coastal plain in the Neopalatial.

Spatial shifts are interpreted as result of a hierarchically integrated settlement system with the integration of this region “into larger demographic and economic networks” (p. 51).

In a similar way, Carl Knappett draws two opposing pictures for the Protopalatial and Neopalatial period by addressing different scales of maritime networks. He suggests that the southeast coast did not play a significant role within inter-regional maritime interaction in the Protopalatial period, whereas archaeological and settlement patterns show a coastal orientation in the Neopalatial period.

The two following contributions focus their analyses on single sites. Lefteris Platon provides a valuable overview of the Kato Zakros district, from the rising and flourishing of the palatial settlement to its abandonment after the LM IIIC period.

Environmental catastrophes are considered by the author to be the reasonable explanation for the significant degradation of the site that affected the economy of the area, which was unable to recover after the Late Bronze Age.

Leonidas Vokotopoulos offers a thorough overview of Choiromandres, one of the few extensively investigated sites that are usually classified as farm or guard houses. The history of Choiromandres, in the far east of Crete and a few kilometers south of Kato Zakros, is characterized by significant shifts after the Protopalatial period, the result of — according to the author — the transformation of Zakros into a palatial center in LM I, and its ultimate demise, which caused a severe recession after LM IIIA.

Eleni Nodarou uses her extensive experience studying ceramics to survey the EBA to Hellenistic ‘south coast fabrics’ based on excavated sites from Myrtos to Zakros. The contribution points out the existence of a *mélange* related to the geological ophiolitic sequence and *flysch*, the difficulty in identifying an origin for various southeastern Cretan fabrics, and the possible existence of local ceramic production in the LBA (Myrtos Pyrgos and Bramiana). However, the existence of several variables in the fabric composition are stressed, as well as the inadequacy of the blanket term south coast fabric. Multi-disciplinary analysis, correct clay sampling and well-dated contexts are proposed as the ways to overcome intrinsic difficulties.

With the following three contributions we enter the historical period. Brice Erickson points out that southeastern Crete remains almost unknown in the historical periods due to the lack of excavation projects and surface surveys. Erickson's discussion of the Praisos territory provides a model of the political development of the region from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period — he claims that Cretan poleis emerged around 600 BC and suggests that social relationships were rearranged from kinship groups to communal activities, as shown by the standardization and simplification of drinking cups (expression of a kind of *andreion*-style feasting) and changes in burial practices. [2] By the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the region enters a wider maritime network; here Erickson proposes Stelai as a major port of southeastern Crete. Finally, traces of Cretan involvement in a Mediterranean network are represented by transport amphoras exported to the Levant and Egypt (considered by Erickson a proto-Hadra phenomenon), with Knossos, Gortyn, Azoria, and Priniatikos Pyrgos as production centers.

By combining historical sources, excavation and survey data Scott Gallimore provides a useful portrait of the economic role of Hierapytna within the economic network of the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean. In this context, Chrysa Sofianou discusses a female marble head (dated to the first half of 2nd century AD) acquired by the Archaeological Collection of Ierapetra in 2017.

Finally, the short synthesis of Tatiana Fragkopoulou draws attention to the complexity of the southeastern coast landscape between Myrtos and Xerokambos bay, with particular attention being paid to the analysis of marine resources and exploitation of sea transportation from prehistoric times to the Roman period.

In sum, this is a stimulating book, a delight to read, and well-illustrated, and leaves us with a series of puzzles and important questions for the future.[3]

### **Authors and Titles**

Preface and Acknowledgements, Emilia Oddo and Konstantinos Chalikias

Introduction, Metaxia Tsipopoulou

1. Southeast Crete Before the Bronze Age, Lily Bonga
2. Living on the Edge: Habitation on the Uplands of East Crete – Preliminary Results from an Extensive Survey, Tina Kalantzopoulou
3. Simulating Prehistoric Settlement in the Ierapetra Region: Extrapolations from the Northern Isthmus, Christine Spencer and Todd Whitelaw
4. From Coastscapes to Small Worlds: The Changing Face of Maritime Interaction in Southeast Crete, Carl Knappett
5. The Kato Zakros Valley in the Kaleidoscope of History, Lefteris Platon
6. Choiromandres: Periods of Use and Character of the Occupation. An Overview, Leonidas Vokotopoulos
7. ‘Ἐδῶ στο Νότο’: South Coast Fabrics and Patterns of Pottery Production in South-Southeast Crete, Eleni Nodarou
8. Conceptualizing Southeastern Crete in the Archaic Through Hellenistic Periods, Brice Erickson
9. Γυναικεία κεφαλή από την Ιεράπυτνα (The Discovery of a Roman, Marble Female Head from Ancient Hierapytna), Chrysa Sofianou
10. Southeast Crete Goes International: Hierapytna in the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods, Scott Gallimore
11. The Role of the Sea for the Southeastern Coast of Crete as Seen through the Archaeological Evidence, From the Early Minoan to the Roman Period, Tatiana Fragkopoulou

Conclusion. Navigating a World of Mountains, Coasts and Islands. Diachronic Evidence for a Connected Southeast Crete, Emilia Oddo and Konstantinos Chalikias

## Notes

[1] Chalikias K. and E. Oddo (eds), *Exploring a Terra Incognita on Crete: Recent Research on Bronze Age Habitation in the Southern Ierapetra Isthmus*, INSTAP Academic Press, Philadelphia 2019.

[2] *Contra* see, S. Wallace, *Ancient Crete: from Successful Collapse to Democracy’s Alternatives, Twelfth to Fifth Centuries BC*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

[3] There are a few typographical errors (pp. 12–13, 18–19) and one site mistakenly labelled (Ayia Gala instead of Ayios Gala, p. 18).

