

# **Between Locality and Regionalism: Aspects of Inner Cycladic Networking: a View of the Early Bronze Age Settlement of Koukounaries on Paros**

**Marco Schugk**

Since the end of the last Ice Age and the resulting rise in the sea level, the closely packed islands of the Cyclades within the southern Aegean incorporate a habitat unique in the entire Mediterranean. Its maritime fragmentation not only offered its inhabitants promising opportunities for cultural exchange, but also presented them with logistical challenges.

Although several thousand years passed from the first daring explorations into this archipelago to the establishment of stable settlements, the Cycladic culture achieved its climax in the early Bronze Age II. Their prosperity is often emphasized by the establishment of overseas contacts ranging from the Helladic mainland in the east, to Crete in the south, and to Anatolia in the west.

Apart from the few proto-urban centers of this period, the majority of the Cycladic people organized themselves in countless smaller settlements spreading over the entire seascape. On the basis of the early Cycladic artifacts in the settlement areas of the Koukounaries on Paros, it can be shown exemplarily that active participation in maritime networks, including possible seafaring activities, was only of secondary importance beyond substantial factors.

## **The Settlement Hill of Koukounaries**

Paros is one of the major islands in the center of the Cycladic archipelago. It is dominated by a high central mountain massif sloping down to a maritime plain that often ends in rocky coasts and smaller bays on all sides.<sup>1</sup> As part of a widely desolated ridge, the homonymous settlement hill of Koukounaries is located in the north of the island near the southwestern end of the extensive bay of Naousa (fig. 1). The heavily eroded granite rock is about 75 m high, has steep slopes and is only accessible by two paths running up some narrow gorges. In the upper part, the hillside forms three natural plateaus at different levels as well as several smaller terraces that offer sufficient space for habitation. From the hilltop, the entire bay, including the northern and northeastern sea, as well as the surrounding hinterland are fully visible.<sup>2</sup>

Koukounaries lies in immediate proximity to the potential food-yielding areas of the sea as well as the pastures and farmland on the surrounding hills and in the adjacent valley. Fresh water sources are also nearby: a small river runs through the valley of Kamares into the bay and forms a rich delta wetland. With its prominent location at the

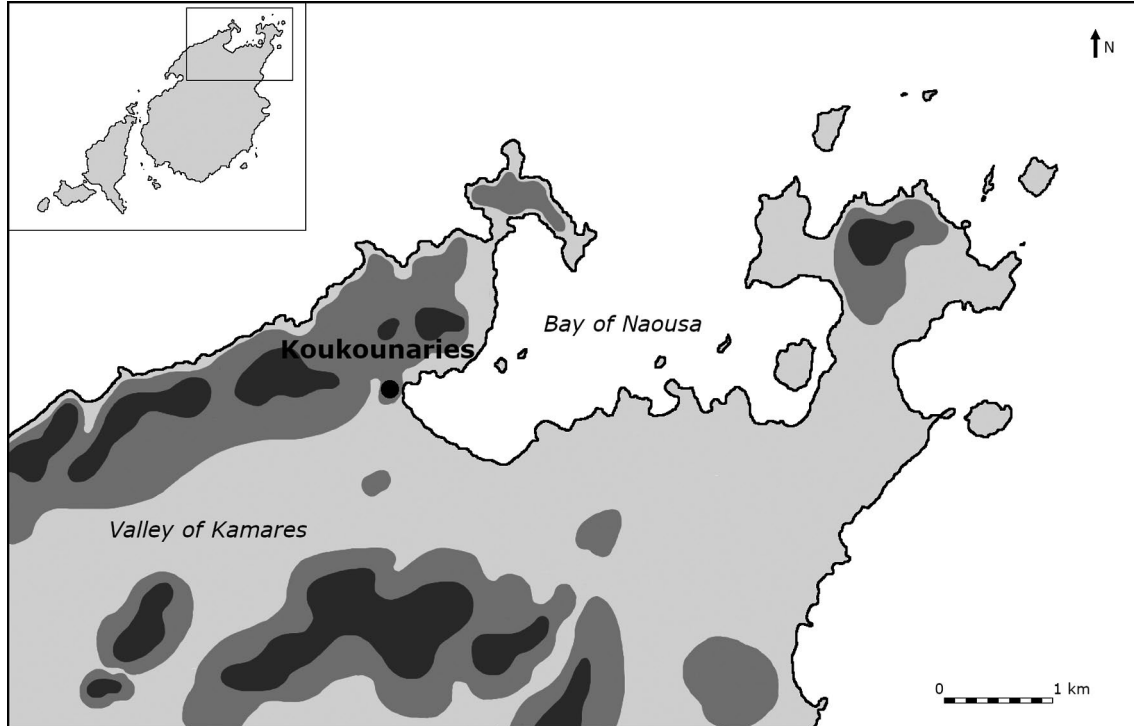


Fig. 1: The location of Koukounaries on Paros.

coast and a nearby fertile hinterland, the naturally fortified highland of Koukounaries represents a typical settlement spot for the EBA in the Aegean.

### **The Acropolis of Koukounaries**

Excavations funded by the Archaeological Society of Athens from 1974 to 1992 uncovered the dense remains of complex structures on the acropolis, illustrating the intensive use of the area as a prosperous domestic, administrative and ritual center between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The first evidence of pre-Mycenaean occupation phases comes from sporadic EC artifacts, which were found between the stone structures on the Upper Plateau and in disturbed contexts on the southeastern hillside. Crucial for the understanding of the local EC period was the discovery of corresponding artifact assemblages in stratified contexts within the so-called Northeast-Building on the hilltop, and in the soil of the Lower Plateau.<sup>3</sup>

The Northeast-Building is located on the northeastern edge of the hilltop, set apart from the late Helladic structures. It consists of several rectangular rooms and long narrow spaces arranged around a central open yard. Its foundation walls are made of small schist and granite slabs available in the geographical surrounding. This building

constitutes the only EC architectural construction on the hill, although its reuse in later centuries ensured its preservation.<sup>4</sup>

The Lower Plateau is a broad flat area of 2500 m<sup>2</sup>, about 20 to 25 m below the southeastern end of the hilltop. At its northern, eastern, and southeastern openings to the seaside, it is well protected by solid rock accumulations that make it nearly invisible from the foothills or the coastline. The deposits of the EC stratum are mostly dark colored, rich in rubble, with sporadic traces of burning and numerous small finds, which indicate a domestic character. The absence of proper stone architecture suggests that the Lower Plateau's potential buildings were constructed of perishable materials such as wood, straw, and clay. Since subsequent exploitation of this area in later periods did not include any intensive building activities, the EC levels are quite well preserved.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, the majority of the EC finds originate from these two areas. However, their extensive dispersion on the Koukounaries implies that the corresponding inhabitants might have used all available plateaus and terraces for habitation or other services. Nevertheless, the settlement still seems to be rather small or average sized by Cycladic standards.

### **Pottery**

The EC contexts of the Northeast-Building contained utilitarian pottery, including some large basins, open bowls with lugs near the rim, deep bowls with plastic and incised decorations, incised horizontal handles, and a fragment of an incised pyxis. The Lower Plateau also yielded a variety of ceramics in forms identical to those previously mentioned. Most characteristic are incurving-rim saucers, biconical pyxides, triangular or T-rims, incised cylindrical handles, and vertically perforated lugs on open or deep bowls. There was also a large concentration of fragments from flat pithoi and a considerable amount of fragments belonging to three- or four-footed vessels. The incised plastic zones, grooved patterns (such as fishbone-motifs) and schematic roped motifs are diagnostic features for an early period of the Keros-Syros-phase within EC II, namely to about 2800–2600 BC.<sup>6</sup>

Functionally, the repertoire comprises vessels of everyday usage such as for the preparation and consumption of food (three- or four-footed vessels, bowls, saucers), for storage (pyxides, pithoi), as well as for transportation purposes (pyxides, vessels with horizontal handles such as collared jars). Finer tableware is not reported yet.

In general, its fabric is coarse with continuous uniform light brown coloring from the surface to the core. Since it is quite hard and echoes with a metallic sound, it was probably fired at high temperatures. Macroscopically, the ceramics from both the Northeast-Building and Lower Plateau look identical, which may justify their attribution to the same workshop. Furthermore, both of them share obvious macroscopic characteristics with the handmade cooking vessels and pithoi of the local Mycenaean period. This reflects the usage of the same raw materials, possibly collected in the geographical zone

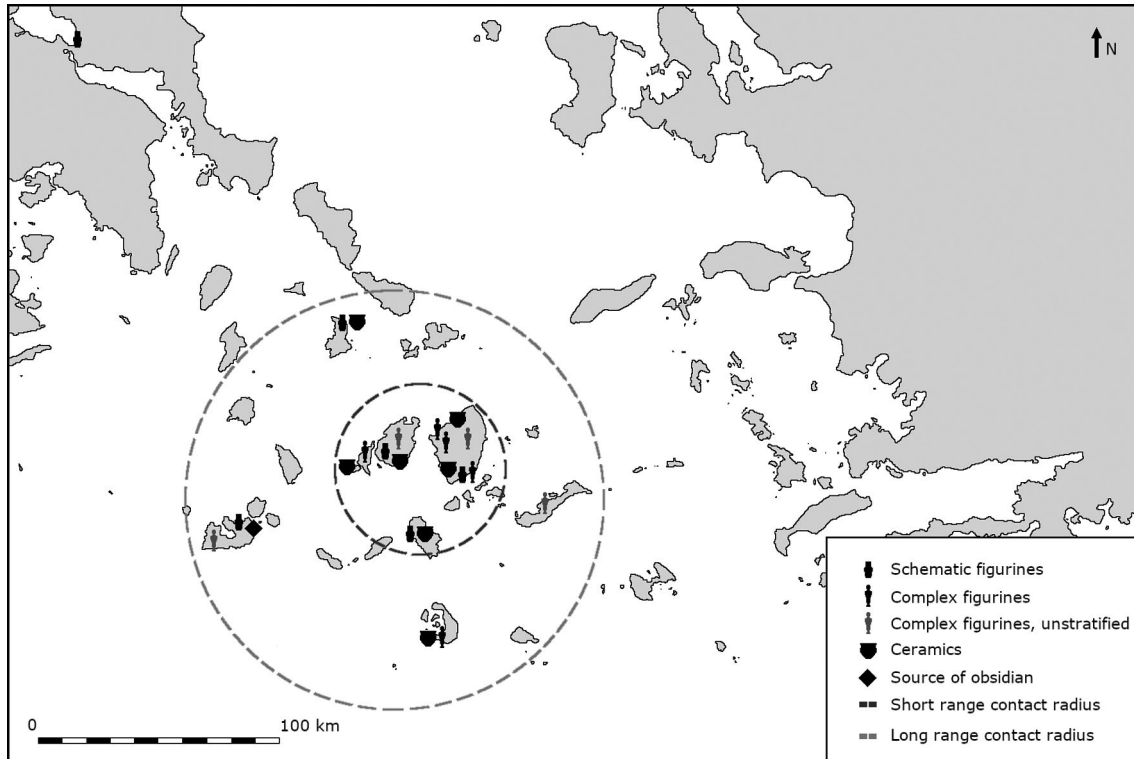


Fig. 2: Mapping similarities of the Koukounarian assemblage in the southern Aegean.

nearby. The grain-sized inclusions of muscovite, quartz, schist and granite also match with the local geology.<sup>7</sup>

In general, the Koukounarian pottery shows relatively strong affinities in form and decoration to the ceramics from other sites on Paros and the islands nearby, especially Naxos and Ios.<sup>8</sup> It also has parallels with some contemporaneous vessels from Akrotiri<sup>9</sup> on Thera, and Chalandriani<sup>10</sup> on Syros.

All in all, the production of the Koukounarian coarse ware seemed to be based on the settlement's local environment. It was manufactured primarily for local needs in order to meet the demands of everyday life. The typological similarities with non-Parian vessels may reflect cross-island contacts, even though the site significantly lacks imported pottery.

### Figurines

The acropolis also yielded at least four marble figurines, respectively figural fragments, which can be placed in EC I-II; these are contemporary to the occupation phase indicated by the ceramic findings. The first three mentioned below were found within the late Helladic structures on the Upper Plateau. The last one came out of a disturbed context on the southern ascent.

The first one is a complete figurine, 155 mm in size (fig 3.1). It has a symmetrical oblong shape, two opposing stumps for arms in the upper part, a pair of convex profile lines indicating the neck, a trapezoid head with a rounded top, and a centered knob as nose. Its outline fits well in the quite inhomogeneous Apereianthos sub-category of schematic figurines.<sup>11</sup> Comparable figurines are very rare. In fact, there is only one identical example in a private collection half the size, but without any further context (fig. 3.2).<sup>12</sup> Apart from that, there are a significant number of relatively similar figurines (fig 3.4–3.7) found in the big coastal settlement of Skarkos<sup>13</sup> on Ios. Figurines reported from other sites, such as Kamari (fig. 3.3)<sup>14</sup> on Paros, Chalandriani (fig. 3.8)<sup>15</sup> on Syros, Spedos<sup>16</sup> on Naxos, Phylakopi on Melos (fig.3.10),<sup>17</sup> and even Manika (fig 3.9)<sup>18</sup> on Euboea are less similar. However, they share at least some of its main characteristics, although the range of variety is broader. The Koukounarian figurine is made of soft whitish, coarse-grained marble, presumably Parian.<sup>19</sup>

The second one is a fragmented head, about 38 mm. The slightly fan shaped head has an elaborate nose, a scratched mouth and two small cavities for eyes. It can be placed among the rather limited group of pre-canonical figurines. A few stratified examples came from coastal sites of western Naxos (Spedos, Aplomata and Tsikniades), as well as from Akrotiri<sup>20</sup> on Thera. They are also known from Paros,<sup>21</sup> Melos and Amorgos, mostly unstratified. The Koukounarian figurine is made of fine gray-white marble, presumably Parian.<sup>22</sup>

The third fragment is an almond-shaped head, tilting backwards in profile, with a highly visible nose and a strong neck. It compares well with the early canonical folded arm type (Kapsala), being well known from Naxos and the eastern Cyclades, Paros, Antiparos, and Akrotiri<sup>23</sup> on Thera. The particular figurine is also made of white fine-grained marble, presumably Parian.<sup>24</sup>

The last fragment is about 60 mm long and preserves the thighs of a female body. The sex is denoted by the slightly incised pubic triangle. The thighs have a regular outline and are rather flat in profile. The relatively unspecific figurine fragment belongs to the canonical group of folded-arm figures, which is quite common within the Cyclades, in particular on Paros.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, the Koukounarian figurine and figurine fragments listed here were all recovered in contexts that are not identical with their production date. Therefore, the actual figural equipment of the EC settlers on the Koukounaries has to remain controversial. Nevertheless, their macroscopic characteristics match the island's geology, which points to a Parian or even local workshop.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the Apeiranthos figurine and its counterpart of unknown provenance seem to reflect a relatively unique shape within the Cycladic repertoire, although they show strong affinities to the ones found in Skarkos on Ios. The other Koukounarian examples refer to rather common shapes known from lots of Cycladic islands. Like the pottery, the production of the figurines might be based on the local environment, while its shaping features similarities with artifacts produced elsewhere.

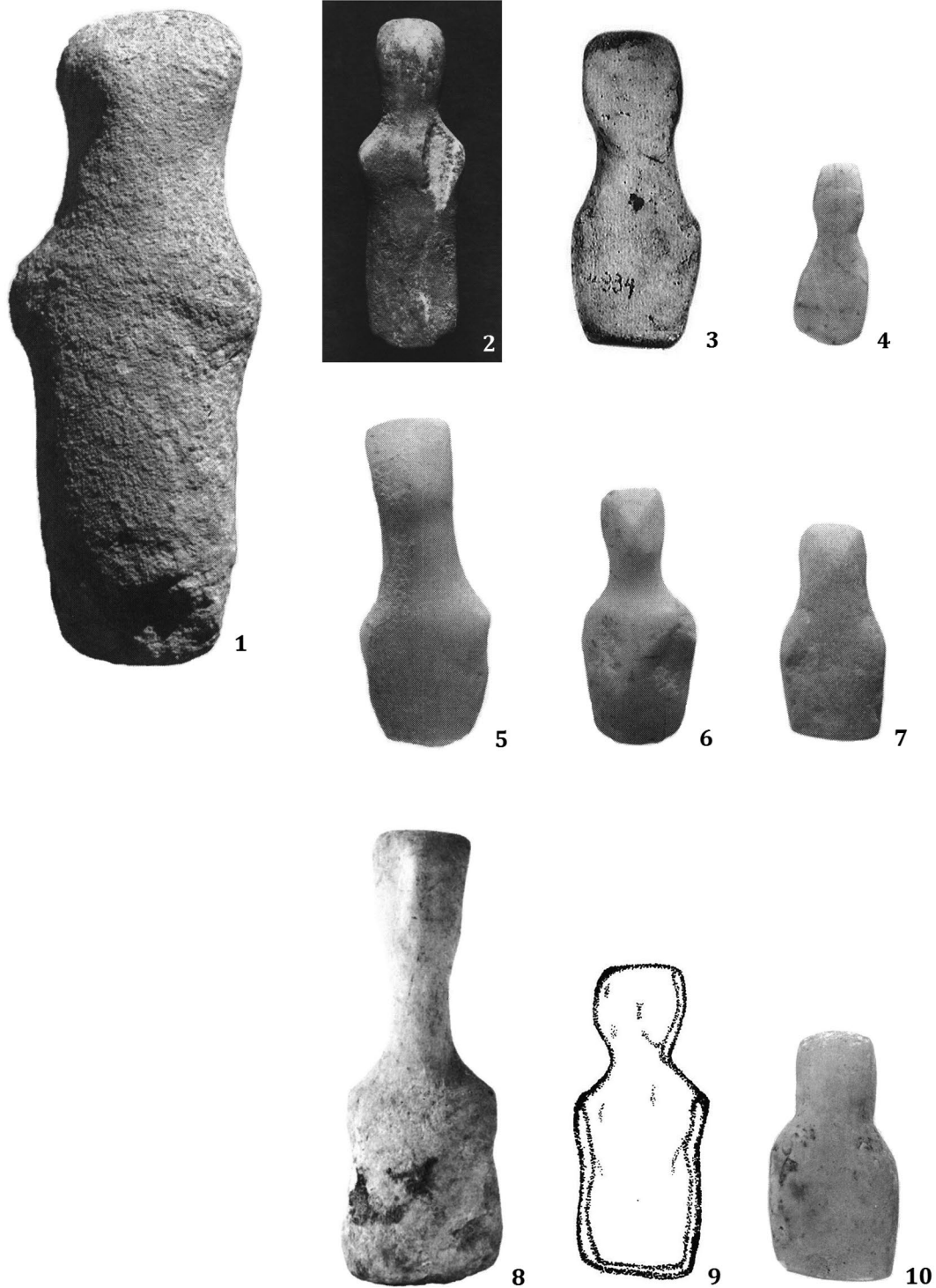


Fig. 3: Schematic figurines of the Apeiranthos type from different sites (not to scale):  
 1 Koukounaries on Paros; 2 unknown; 3 Kamari on Paros; 4-7 Skarkos on Ios;  
 8 Chalandriani on Syros; 9 Manika on Eubea; 10 Phylakopi on Melos.

### **Stone Tools**

Stone tools were found in the Northeast-Building and on the Lower Plateau. In the former, a small selection of chipped obsidian, marble stone grinders and food remains suggest a domestic use. On the latter, the intense processing of chipped stone tools became visible due to the presence of finished cores and myriad debitage. It is based predominantly on obsidian from Melos and marginally on local flint.<sup>27</sup>

Apparently, the obsidian sources of Antiparos nearby were not used at all. Therefore, the favored raw material was possibly imported to Koukounaries in the form of roughly decorticated pieces.

### **Dietary Remains**

Along with ceramics and lithic artifacts, the site also yielded significant quantities of dietary remains consisting mainly of sheep and goat bones as well as some sea shells.<sup>28</sup> The bone findings appear to have belonged to small mammals, which cope with the sparse Mediterranean vegetation. Referring to livestock, they were kept for meat, leather, and wool. The seashells were collected in the adjacent coastal regions. They could have been eaten and/or processed for jewelry.

Surprisingly, no fish bones were found within the EC strata, although the Parian coast is nearby. Apart from the fact that the soil was not sieved, corresponding fishing tools like hooks or net weights were also not found. It appears as though the Koukounarian people were not significantly interested in fishing in the EBA.

### **Characterizing the Early Cycladic Inhabitants of Koukounaries**

By the data accumulated so far, the settlement of Koukounaries consisted of only one stone structure on the hilltop and several provisional huts on the Lower Plateau. It remains unclear what function the different building types had, and to what extent the differences in construction were the result of economic or social variety, or to what extent administrative reasons played a role.

Apart from that, the repertoire of small finds infers that the settlers produced the needed equipment exclusively on their own by exploiting the resources of their directly adjacent environment as far as possible. In socio-economic terms they can be characterized as an agro-pastoral population relying mainly on farming and herding, with less dependence on the surrounding sea.<sup>29</sup> The simply decorated pottery and the potential existence of complex figurines indicate a rudimental specialization in craftsmanship, which was benefited by a sufficient dietary surplus.

Since no extraordinary imports such as elaborate fine ware or metal objects are recorded, their common wealth seems not to be based on trade. Nevertheless, the intense usage of Melian obsidian as an essential raw material for cutting tools, as well as common styles in pottery decoration and figurine shaping imply the participation in exchange networks connecting islanders with each other separated by greater maritime distances.

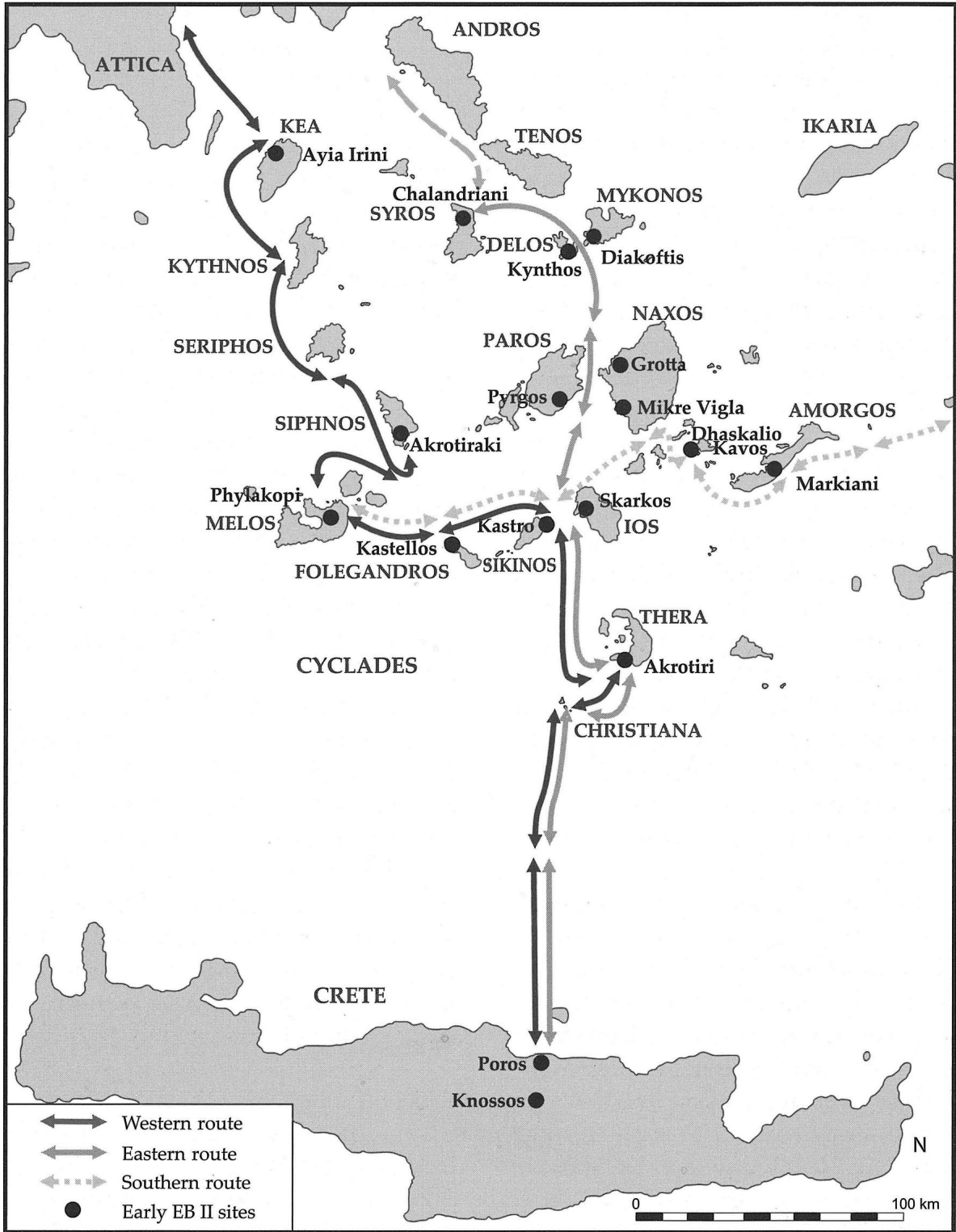


Fig. 4: Potential exchange routes in the southern Aegean during EBA II.



### Capability of Seafaring

The distribution of corresponding features similar to the Parian finds within the southern Aegean may reflect the potential interaction radius of the Koukounarian people with other island communities (fig. 2). These maintained interactions can be divided into short range contacts clustering around the neighboring islands of Paros and singular long-distant spots within the Cycladic archipelago.

Based on the maritime distance of these islands from Paros, the reason might be found in the available EC seafaring technologies. Since no EBA shipwreck is currently known in the Aegean, boats can only be reconstructed by stone depictions, pottery decoration and miniatures.

From these sources two archetypes of rowing boats can be derived. The first one, based on the rock art from Strofilas<sup>30</sup> on Andros and Korfi t'Arioniou<sup>31</sup> on Naxos, is a vessel with a low hull and a relatively high stern, the latter possibly acting as an aerodynamic feature to keep the boat steady in the wind. It may represent a small simple dugout or dugout-derived vessel, which requires only a small crew. Having in mind that such a small canoe-like sea craft is very limited in terms of navigation and speed, it seems to be suitable for short distance transfers of bulky cargo such as animals or big containers. The second archetype, often seen on so-called frying pans<sup>32</sup> (and as tiny boat models made of clay or metal)<sup>33</sup>, is the so-called longboat. It consists of an angled hull, combined with a slightly raised prow and a tall stern. The overall lack of a mast and a tiller or steering board indicates a narrow ship body much like a modern canoe. The large number of short lines next to the hull within these decorations is interpreted commonly as paddles. The sheer length of the narrow hull, combined with 20 to 40 paddlers, results in a high-speed vehicle with less space for cargo, and is suitable for long distances.<sup>34</sup>

Considering the demands of the agricultural calendar as well as the construction and manning of longboats, especially the day-long rowing on long-distance tours, which requires a physical fitness possibly accomplished only by a moderate amount of young and mid-aged adults, the deployment of such boats would have been significantly beyond the manpower resources of small or medium sized settlements like Koukounaries.<sup>35</sup> Collaboration efforts with neighboring settlements might be a logical consequence, but such contemporaneous settlements are not sufficiently attested in the archaeological record of northern Paros so far. Consequently, the Koukounarian people may have used small boats for keeping in touch with their insular surrounding, but they did not seem capable of long-range seafaring on their own. The latter must be a privilege of bigger communities.

### Maritime Networking

In fact, the artifact assemblages at farther maritime distance from Koukounaries, which have decent features in common, were often found in large settlement sites or

their corresponding cemeteries. Keeping in mind that the rocky nature of most of the Cycladic islands does not provide enough arable land to feed populous communities like Chalandriani on Syros, there must have been an ongoing demand for imported agricultural products. In return, the material findings of Koukounaries – in relation to its fertile hinterland – suggest the capability of its settlers to create such a surplus as needed. The latter could be traded for desirable raw materials not existing in their local environment, such as Melian obsidian.

On the basis of the outstanding artifact assemblage of Skarkos on Ios (including imported raw materials, highly decorated fine wares and semi-fine wares of known provenience), Martha Marthari was able to visualize the trading network maintained by Skarkos<sup>36</sup> within the Southern Aegean. She linked its harbor with Chalandriani on Syros in the north, Thera on Akrotiri in the south, and Phylakopi on Melos in the west (fig. 4). Accordingly, the Koukounarian people could have had access to this network through the eastern central route between Chalandriani and Skarkos. In fact, the eastern route is expected to be the main food supply route since it passes by Naxos and Paros, the two most fertile islands of the Cyclades.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether they participated in an active way by deploying their own boats or they participated in a passive way by being visited regularly by seafarers from elsewhere.

### Conclusion

All in all, the case study of Koukounaries shows that the active participation of small and medium sized settlements situated within the Cycladic archipelago were rather limited to small scale seafaring, if it took place at all. The production of goods in demand, such as agricultural products, enabled them to participate in more extensive exchange networks maintained predominantly by a handful of significantly larger island communities.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that this case study is a preliminary report based on macroscopic observations of a scarce material basis. Additional microscopic analyses of the ceramics and the figurines may shed further light on this topic.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Since the Cyclades are the former peaks of bigger islands sunken into the sea, their overall outlines have altered little in the last seven millennia, save for localized shoreline shifts, vegetation changes, and the denudation of hillslopes and the consequent deepening soil on the valley floors. The only two significant exceptions were the land bridge between Paros, Antiparos and Despotikon, as well as the appearance of the Thera volcano before its heavy eruption in the mid-second millennium BC (Broodbank 2000, 70 f.).

- <sup>2</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 25 f.; Katsarou-Tzeveleki – Schilardi 2008, 61 f.
- <sup>3</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 26 f.
- <sup>4</sup> Schilardi 1991, 233; Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 30–33; Katsarou-Tzeveleki – Schilardi 2008, 63 f.
- <sup>5</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 33 f.; Katsarou-Tzeveleki – Schilardi 2008, 65 f.
- <sup>6</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 35; Katsarou-Tzeveleki – Schilardi 2008, 64–67.
- <sup>7</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 35 f., 44.
- <sup>8</sup> Panagia on Paros: Rambach 2000, pl. 105 no 5; Soumbaria on Despotiko: *ibid.* pl. 102, no. 6; Akrotiri on Naxos: *ibid.* pl. 111 no. 4; Lakoudes on Naxos: *ibid.* pl. 115 no 4. 5.
- <sup>9</sup> Sotirakopoulou 1999, 500 f., A-A 1α (drawing 5 no. Ε39), A-A 2α (drawing 10b no. A3/12), A-A 4 (drawing 16β no. B56 and no. Ε180); see also Katsarou-Tzeveleki – Schilardi 2008, 64. 67 for further references.
- <sup>10</sup> Rambach 2000, pl. 135 no. 4. 5; pl. 137 no. 4 and 9; pl. 138 no. 6–11; pl. 139, 1–6.
- <sup>11</sup> See also: Renfrew 1969, 6; Sotirakopoulou 2005, 54.
- <sup>12</sup> Thimme 1976, 434, no. 60.
- <sup>13</sup> Marthari 2017, 138–160, especially nos. 3945. 1064. 3860.
- <sup>14</sup> Rambach 2000, pl. 166 no. 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Rambach 2000, pl. 65 no. 14; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2017, 313. 317 no. 11, fig. 21.15.
- <sup>16</sup> Marangou 1990, 88 no. 87; Renfrew 1969, 14 VI.9.
- <sup>17</sup> Renfrew – Boyd 2017, 441 fig. 30.9.
- <sup>18</sup> Sampson 1988, ill. 87 no. 168.5803
- <sup>19</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2017, 411.
- <sup>20</sup> Sotirakopoulou 1998, 134–138.
- <sup>21</sup> Thimme 1976, 449 no. 116.
- <sup>22</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2017, 413; see also Sotirakopoulou 2005, 55 f. with references.
- <sup>23</sup> Sotirakopoulou 1998, 138–140.
- <sup>24</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2017, 413; see also Renfrew 1969, 15; Sotirakopoulou 2005, 56 f.
- <sup>25</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2017, 414.
- <sup>26</sup> Well-rounded marble pebbles, suitable for schematic figurines, are available in the coastal areas nearby. Larger marble deposits of greater variety outcrop naturally in the center of Paros; see also Tambakopoulos – Maniatis 2017, 473 f.; Higgins – Higgins 1996, 180–182.
- <sup>27</sup> Katsarou-Tzeveleki – Schilardi 2008, 64–67; Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 40 f.
- <sup>28</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 41 f.
- <sup>29</sup> Katsarou – Schilardi 2004, 44.
- <sup>30</sup> Televantou 2008, 43–47.
- <sup>31</sup> Dumas 1965, 49 fig. 4; 54 fig 7.
- <sup>32</sup> Coleman 1985, 199, ill. 5, pls. 33–35; Rambach 2000, pls. 133–135.
- <sup>33</sup> Sherratt 2000, 101–109 (cat. no. III 5.2, 5.3, 5.4); the authenticity of the lead miniatures is in question.
- <sup>34</sup> Broodbank 2000, 99–101.
- <sup>35</sup> Broodbank 1989, 330 f.
- <sup>36</sup> Marthari 2008; for potential sea routes and navigation see also: Agouridis 1997.

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