

The Minoan Thalassocracy

Entanglements



Minoan Thalassocracy

- New Palace Period
 - 1700-1500/1425 BC
- Minoan cultural & economic influence in the southern Aegean
- Possible evidence for the establishment of Minoan colonies in the Cyclades & southeast Anatolia?
- Key issues: identity, colonisation & hybridisation



Aegean Sea

Maritime Technology

- Sailing technology = major innovation
- Brought Aegean islands closer together economically & culturally
- Possible Minoan trading colonies established in the western Cyclades & as far as south-east Anatolia



Sealstone: Minoan ship

Minoan Thalassocracy

- Minoan Crete economically & culturally predominant in the southern Aegean
- Later Greek sources refer to the sea power of the Cretan rulers of Knossos:
 - Thucydides referred to Minos as the first *oikistes* (founder of colonies)
- Arthur Evans: Minoan empire which even incorporated Greek mainland



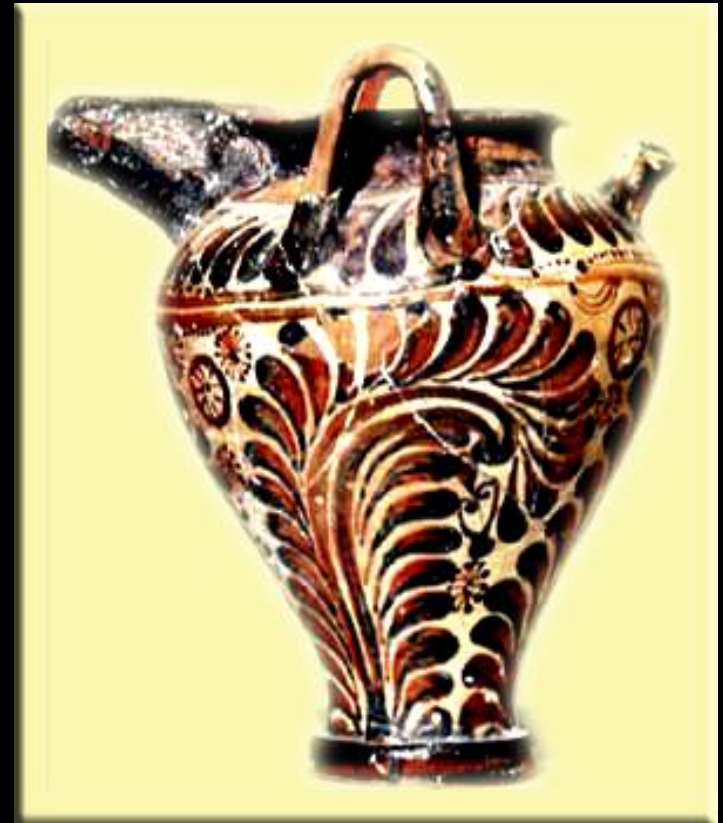
Seal impression

Modern Scholarship

- “Later-day Minoan imperialists have shown themselves anxious to claim for King Minos rather more territory than... Minos ever claimed for himself” (Schofield 1983)
- Tendency to assume **imperial colonialism**
 - A colony might represent only a few settlers or the settlement of an entire population on virgin ground (settlement colony)
 - It might entail the wholesale transferral of lifestyle modes & forms of government
 - Equally the colonising population might ‘**go native**’ & not be identifiable archaeologically

Minoanisation of Southern Aegean

- Economic diffusion:
 - Use of Minoan writing & weight systems
- Cultural diffusion:
 - Art forms especially wall paintings
 - "Versailles effect"
- Religious influence
- Daily life (habitus):
 - Domestic space
 - Minoan architectural forms (polythyron & lustral basin)
- Pottery imports:
 - Trade, style, diet



LM IA pot, Akrotiri

Identifying a Minoan Colony?

- Warren 1975:
 - Coastal location of settlement
 - Irregular plan of settlement, paved streets, blocks of houses etc.
 - Minoan architectural features
 - Minoan tombs
 - Minoan religious ritual
 - Minoan writing system
 - Use of Minoan pottery



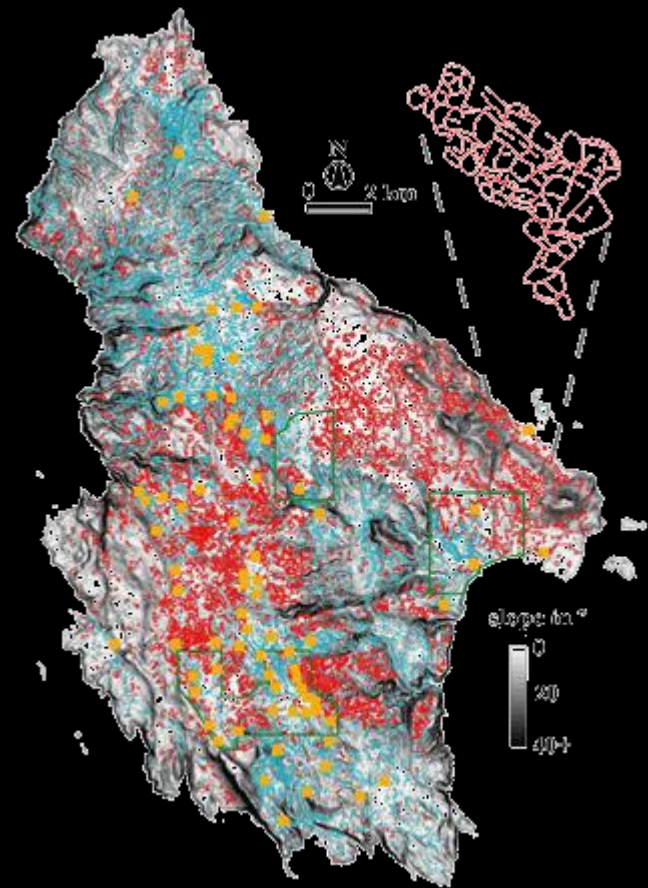
Minoans Colonies?



- All sites are very Minoanised
- Some long established settlements:
 - Fusion of Minoan & indigenous elements
- Some new settlements established on virgin ground
 - Appear entirely 'Minoan'
- Schofield (1983): the western islands acted as ports of call in Minoan maritime network:
 - Were these Minoan colonies?

Kastri, Kythera

- Founded in EM II
- Close cultural parallels with Crete
- Minoan settlement & evidence for early Minoan trading activity in southern Aegean?



Kastri, Kythera

- MM IIIB-LM IA/B: settlement = Minoan town (but no monumental buildings)
- Locally produced Minoan pottery
- Minoan lentoid loomweights
- Minoan spiritual life:
 - Burial practices (eg. pithos burials)
 - Peak sanctuary (Ayios Georgios)



Loomweights

Kastri, Kythera

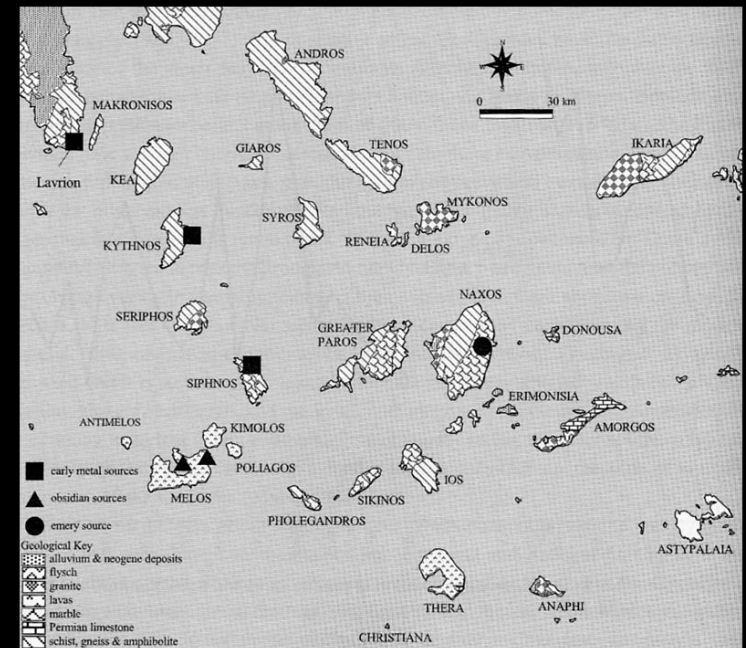
- LM IB: imported Minoan pottery
- Numerous imported serpentine bowls
- Local imitations of blossom bowls in clay
- Minoan type clay weight inscribed with Linear A sign



Serpentine blossom bowl

Cyclades

- Minoan features vary between the islands
 - Hybridisation?
- Pottery: imports & local production
- Architecture (& concept of urbanisation)
- Imports & local production of Cretan stone vases
- Wall-paintings
- Religious practices



Aegean islands

Akrotiri, Thera

- Settlement hierarchy: densely populated with rural farmsteads
- To what extent was the island community minoanised/hybridised?
 - Use of Minoan 'palatial' architectural features
 - The wall paintings



Thera (Santorini)

Settlements

- Urbanised communities
- Layout recalls Minoan towns



Ayia Irini



Phylakopi



Akrotiri

Architecture

- Half timbered, multi-storeyed houses
- Sophisticated sanitation system
- Use of domestic space
- Appearance of large villas:
 - Akrotiri: Xeste3, House of the Ladies, West House
 - Ayia Irini: House A
- Use of Minoan palatial elements:
 - Lustral basin, polythyron, ashlar masonry



West House, Akrotiri

Economic Links

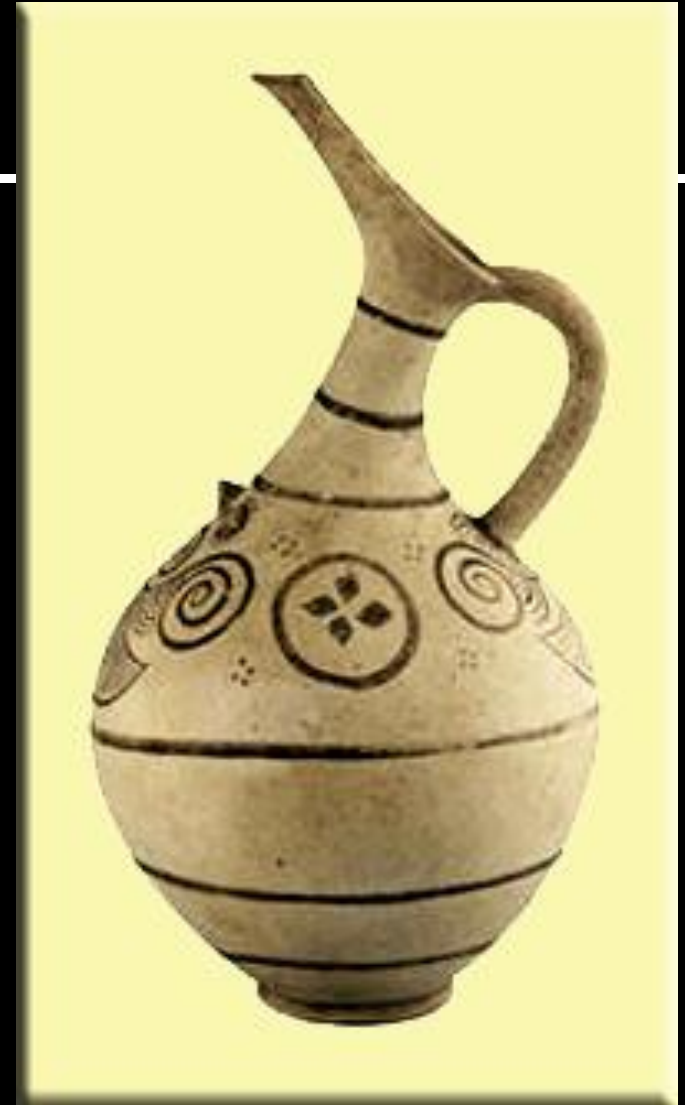
- Minoan lead discoid weights (basic unit of just over 60g):
- Linear A tablets: Ayia Irini & Phylakopi
- Linear A signs used to mark ceramic vessels
- Minoan sealstones
 - Adoption of Minoan palace bureaucracy on the islands?
 - Facilitate trade?
 - Illustrate economic ties
 - Are Minoans controlling trade?



Lead weights

Pottery

- Local pottery:
 - Almost all of the undecorated wares
 - At least 90% of the decorated wares:
- Beaked jug & holemouth jar
- What does this tell us about the Cycladic communities?



LC I beak-spouted jug

Pottery

- LC I: clear horizon of LM IA & LM IB shapes
- Stylistic influence:
 - Adaptation of Minoan forms, decorative motifs



LC I vase



LM IA import

Wall Paintings

- “Minoan” art form
- Represented at all three “colonies” – best preserved at Akrotiri
- Technologically & stylistically Minoan
- Some shared themes:
- Evidence for a Cycladic “school” distinct from Minoan production?



Monkey wall painting Akrotiri



Swallows & crocus flowers

Religion

- Ayia Irini, Kea: syncretic practices?
- Urban sanctuary:
- Hearths, drinking cups & containers
- 55+ terracotta figures in Minoan dress (painted yellow)
- Correlation of yellow clothing with females in Cycladic cult practices?

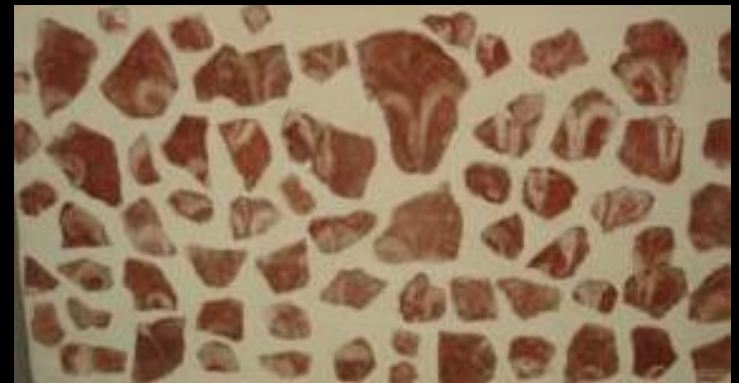
Statuette,
Ayia Irini



Sanctuary, Ayia Irini

Miletus

- Possible Minoan colony in LM IA/B?
- Intrusive pottery:
 - Domestic wares & kitchen utensils
 - Less than 5% of the pottery is local
- Minoan disc-shaped loom weights
- Ashlar masonry
- Minoan style wall painting fragments
- Minoan stone vases
- Clay vase with 3 Linear A signs



Fresco fragments, Miletus

Summary

- Widespread Minoan economic & cultural influence in the Neopalatial period
- Increasing Minoan dominance of maritime trade within the Cyclades
- Minoan Crete was the cultural referent in the construction of local identities by the local elite in the Cyclades
- Is there also a Minoan element to the population?
- More convincing evidence for Minoan colonies at Kythera & Miletus?