
Ulysses without Sails: Trade, Distance, Knowledge and Power in the Early Cyclades

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Ulysses without sails: trade, distance, knowledge and power in the early Cyclades

Cyprian Broodbank

I am especially concerned with the political and ideological context or auras within which long-distance interests and activities may be conducted. Not only exotic materials but also intangible knowledge of distant realms and regions can be politically valuable 'goods' both for those who have endured the perils of travel and for those sedentary home-bodies who are able to acquire such knowledge by indirect means and use it for political advantage.

(*Ulysses' Sail*: 4)

Thus Mary Helms, in the opening passage of an exploration of the motives behind long-range travel in pre-modern societies that should transform our approach to inter-regional contact in antiquity and cast a long shadow over the face of archaeological positivism. Archaeologists, of course, have always been aware that the concept of trade subsumes a vast spectrum of activities and relations, but Helms' point goes rather further. If she is right, and her ethnographic data are not only impressive but also capable of being appraised to an extent that archaeological evidence can never be, the movement of material things in the past is liable to be only one of the many media and strategies through which people accumulated and demonstrated an esoteric knowledge and command of the world for political (i.e. power- and status-oriented) ends. Study of prehistoric trade, based on the material residues that survive, may often address only the tangible remnant of a broader interaction with the distant and the alien.

This is not to suggest that such residues are trivial; on the contrary, as Hodder observes, the more we realize the necessity of penetrating the meanings that inform an interaction, the more we shall appreciate that 'the thing exchanged is not arbitrary, and its associations and symbolism play an active part in the construction of social strategies' (1982: 199). Appadurai reaches a complementary conclusion in his lucid discussion of commodities in cultural perspective (1986). He stresses that objects have no intrinsic commodity status and economic value, but gain them through social transference and physical mobility within the context of exchange. And as this moment of mobility brings together the often uneven desires, demands and knowledge of its participants, it forms a potentially political theatre for the human actors involved, wherein relations of dominance or dependency can be made and unmade – an occasion to establish and practise what Appadurai terms the 'regimes' and 'politics' of value. Trade may represent only one of several conjunctures between power, distance and knowledge, but it provides invaluable insight into a wider discourse.

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This paper explores some of the implications of these ideas for our understanding of prehistoric trade networks in the Aegean islands of the Cyclades during the period of the Keros-Syros culture (c. 2700–2300 cal. BC). Islands, and especially island clusters, with their complex symbiosis of land and sea, are commonly places that amplify and polarize isolation and interaction (Braudel 1972: 150), where the encircling sea may define the threshold of the distant and the ‘other’ closer even than the physical horizon, or alternatively create a highway outwards to a wider and more cosmopolitan world. These extremes make island societies exceptionally rewarding contexts in which to examine interplays of the kind discussed above. For instance, the Siassi island traders of Melanesia (Harding 1967) exploited the different regimes of value of widely separate locations to generate food surplus for conspicuous and politically laden consumption. ‘The dimensions manipulated’, according to Strathern, ‘are space and knowledge, the latter symbolised in the notion of Siassi control over canoe and weather magic’ (1983: 76–7). Cosmology and politics are also an essential element of the well-known *kula* transactions of the Massim region (Munn 1983; Tambiah 1983; Uberoi 1962).

The Cyclades are a promising arena for a study of this kind (Fig. 1). Throughout the Early Bronze Age (the millennium before the emergence of palatial Crete to the south) they formed a cluster neither closed to, nor dependent on, the surrounding world, a place where exotic introductions were absorbed and slotted into local frameworks – a margin rather than a periphery of the Bronze Age ‘world system’, to use the terminology of Schneider (1977) and Sherratt (1992). Inhabited by small-scale farming communities scattered at notably low population densities across an arid Mediterranean landscape, exogamy and aid in adversity must have been types of local interaction essential to survival. From boat representations (amongst the earliest in the world), we know that people moved between islands in paddled canoes of simple and extended dug-out design (Fig. 2). In the Keros-Syros period, interaction increased dramatically. The main objects moving were marble (mainly female) anthropomorphic figurines, a range of marble vessels, pottery (both fine drinking or pouring forms and coarseware containers), metals and obsidian. Cycladic artefacts also appear in quantity for the first time in southern mainland Greece, Crete and the north-east Aegean, an efflorescence of long-range contact that also introduced a range of exotic drinking and pouring shapes to the Cyclades and created a phenomenon christened by Renfrew (1972: 451–5) the ‘international spirit’ – linked, he proposed, to an increasing demand for the metals of the Cyclades. Four years ago I suggested that Keros-Syros maritime trade may have been controlled by a very small number of highly specialized centres, larger communities whose power was based on their ability to manipulate local trade to their advantage and to monopolize longer-range voyages beyond the islands (Broodbank 1989). What I did not then explain was why this means of control might have proved so effective, and where it found its ideological locus. These are the first of the questions to which we shall now turn.

Locating trade and power

The three trader sites I proposed in 1989 are situated at Chalandriani on Syros, Ayia Irini on Kea and Dhaskalio-Kavos at the tip of the small island of Keros in the Erimonisia

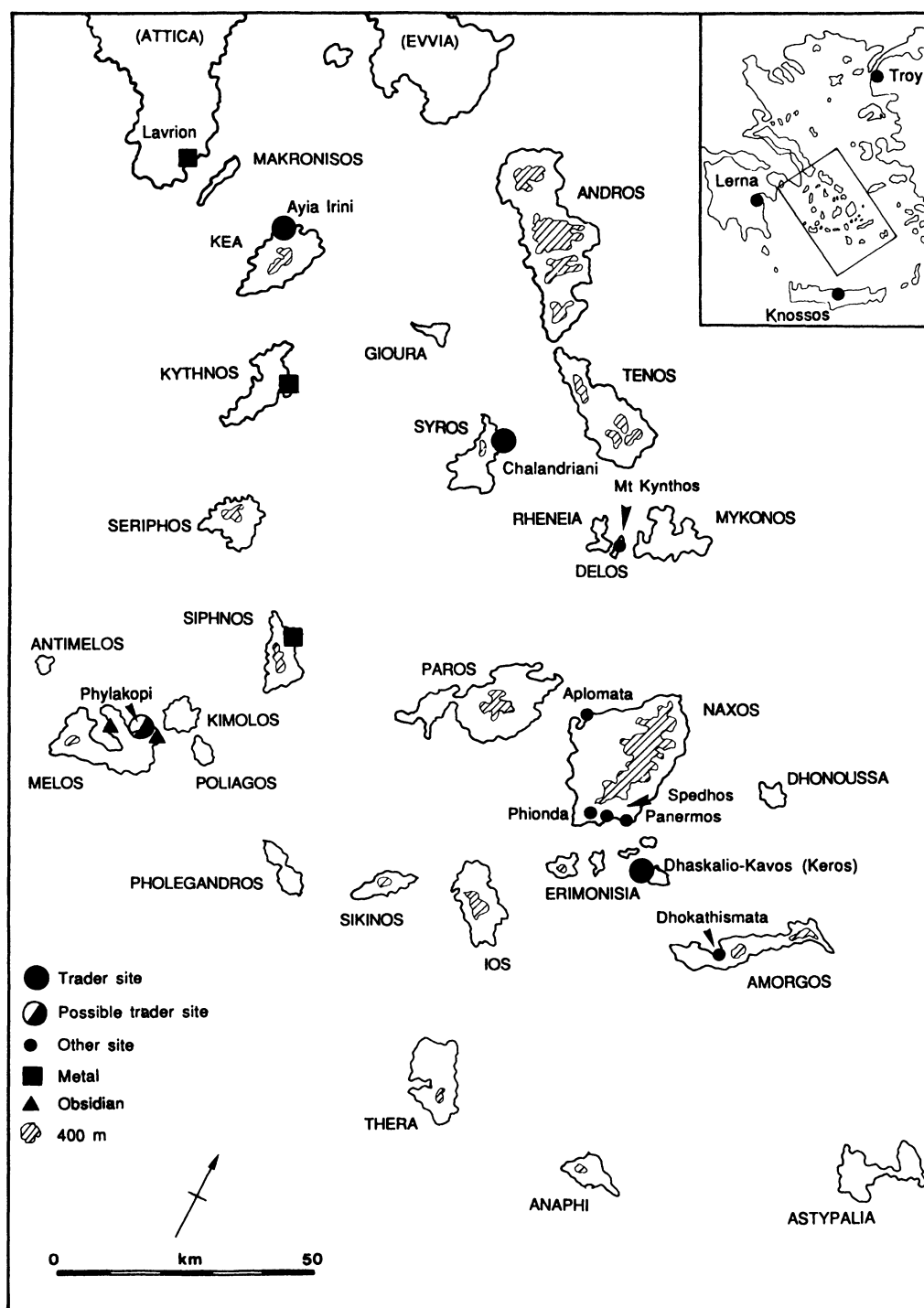


Figure 1 The Cyclades in the Early Bronze Age, showing sites mentioned in the text, metal mines known to have been exploited at this date (Stos-Gale 1989) and obsidian quarries. The present islands of Antiparos and Dhespotikon are linked to south-western Paros, in accordance with bathymetric and eustatic data (Fairbanks 1989; Morrison 1968) and a larger pre-eruption outline is reconstructed for Thera (after Pichler and Friedrich 1980: 17). For the purposes of this paper, the island of Astypalia lying mid-way to the eastern Aegean is included within the Cyclades.

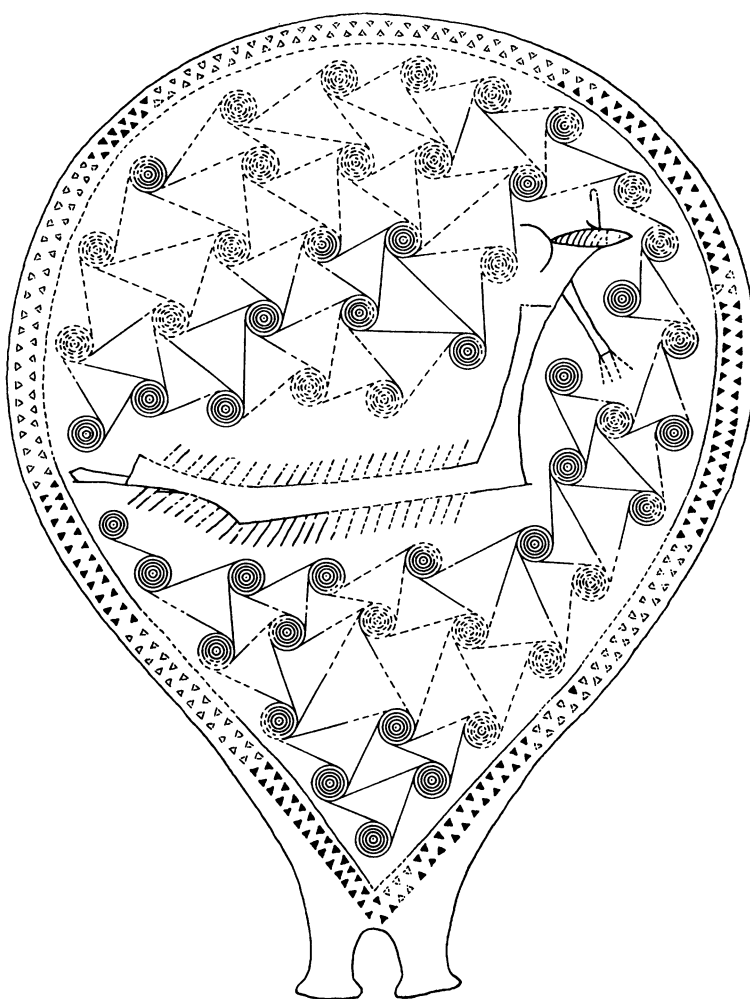


Figure 2 A Cycladic many-paddled long-boat probably of an extended dug-out design incised onto a pottery 'frying-pan' vessel. This example in the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge (GR. 18. 1963) may come from the large cemetery attached to the trader site at Chalandriani on Syros (Broodbank 1989: 331). Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

(*ibid*: 325–7; see Fig. 1), the last a site of unique importance in view of the additional presence of a recently plundered non-domestic deposit that once contained by far the greatest number of marble figurines and vessels ever found in the Cyclades (Plate 1). These sites are not only relatively large in size, but are also unusually rich in marble, pottery and/or metal finds, and possess a quasi-monopoly in the uncommon Keros-Syros painted wares as well as in rare pieces of extra-Cycladic material. They have also provided much of the best evidence for the production of metal objects at this period (Bossert 1967; Wilson 1987: 44–5). Inspection of the ceramic material from early levels at Phylakopi on Melos prompts me to suggest that a fourth trader site may perhaps be hidden beneath the later town, contrary to the excavator's opinion that the role of the settlement at this date was insignificant (Renfrew 1982: 36–7). Our first aim, if we want to explain how these places came to dominate seaborne trade, must be to establish why these sites are where they are. What was so special about these locations? Indeed how can we be sure, in a very unevenly explored island group, how exceptional they actually were?

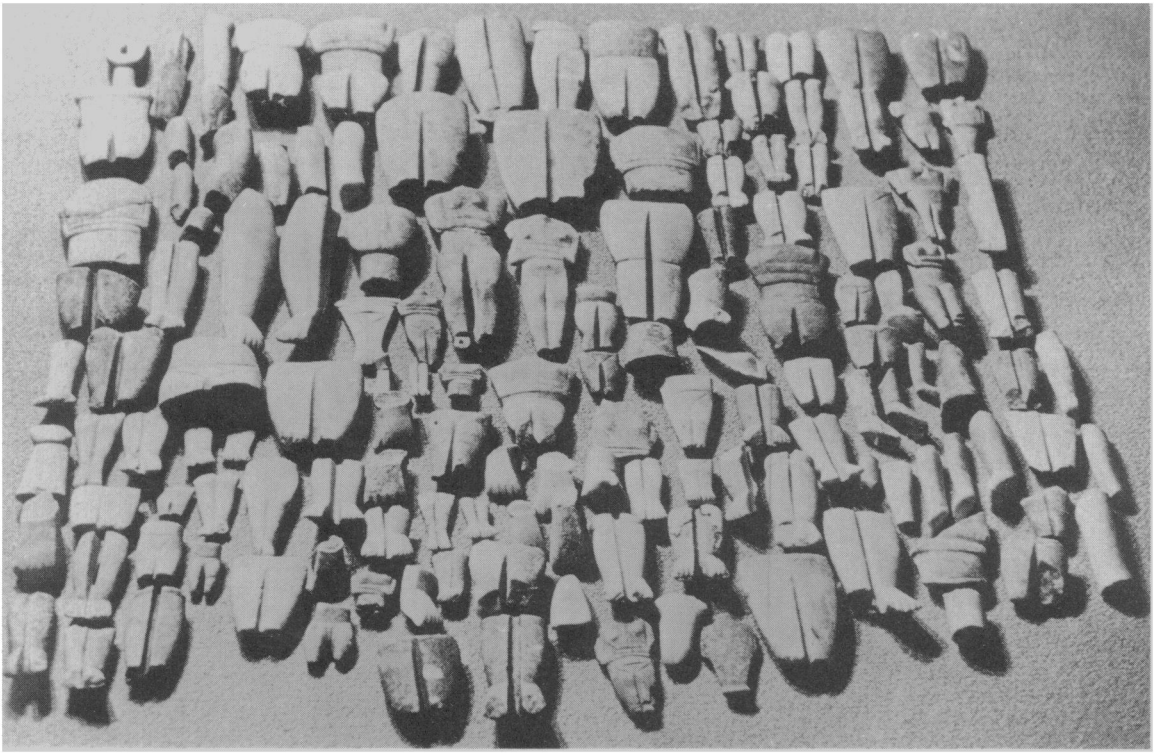


Plate 1 A large collection of broken Keros-Syros marble figurines from the 'Keros Hoard', almost certainly originating from Dhaskalio-Kavos (see Getz-Preziosi 1982). Reproduced by kind permission of the Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe.

Several advantages that we might expect are conspicuous by their absence. Major harbours can be ruled out, given the modest boats in use (only Ayia Irini lies on a large anchorage), and wind direction varies sufficiently to prevent any location becoming dominant (contra McGeehan Liritzis 1988). There is no match with rich arable land, but specialization as a reaction to marginality, suggested by Cherry (1985: 28) and initially attractive in view of the bleak situations of Chalandriani and Dhaskalio-Kavos, also fails on the simple point that it could apply to a considerable proportion of the total area of the Cyclades. A similar indeterminacy of ecological factors is noted by Irwin with regard to the Melanesian trading island of Mailu (1978). Yet perhaps most surprising of all is the stark lack of correlation with the mineral resources of the region (see Fig. 1). Despite their finds of moulds and/or slag, all trader sites are situated far from the mines. Conversely, on metalliferous Siphnos and Kythnos there are so far no known major settlements, and debris from the mine areas testifies to primary ore-smelting rather than artefact production (Hadjianastasiou and MacGillivray 1988; Pernicka et al. 1985; Stos-Gale 1989; Weisgerber 1985). Phylakopi's proximity to the Melian obsidian quarries does not vitiate this point, for here too detailed work by Torrence shows a lack of resource control (1982). This apparent indifference towards the exercise of direct control over mines and quarries is an important feature to which we shall later return.

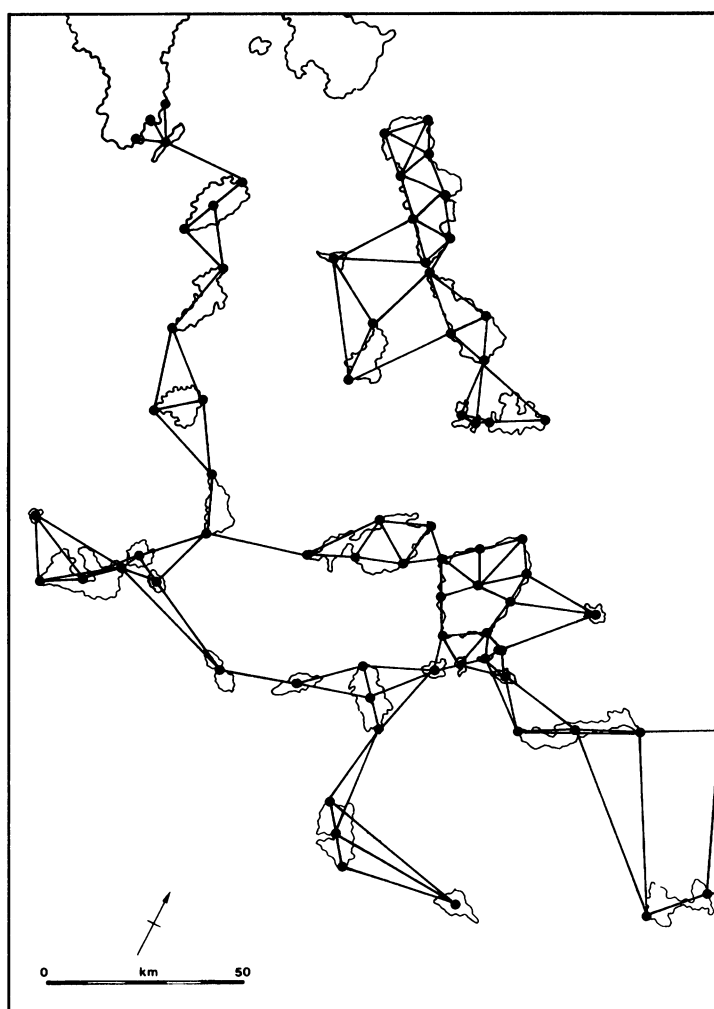


Figure 3 A proximal point graph analysis for the Cyclades, simulating local patterns of interaction within the island group. Note that where a link is double (i.e. passes through a point and then runs parallel to one of the latter's links) only a single line is depicted. The mainland and south-east Aegean are included only if they form the nearest point for a Cycladic link.

In the case of Ayia Irini, at a clear interface between the Cyclades and Attica, it has been argued that the settlement enjoyed an advantage in terms of inter-regional exchange and acted as a gateway en route to the mainland and the metal sources of Lavrion (Wilson 1987). The truth of this is manifest. Yet at a different level, could locational advantage in terms of interaction patterns not account for our other sites too? None are at inter-regional nodes, but might they not be central *within* the Cyclades? At first glance this is not obvious, and Renfrew has objected to the trader site interpretation of Dhaskalio-Kavos on the very grounds that it is unlikely at so ostensibly remote a spot (1984: 28). To test both hypothesis and scepticism, a spatial model able to reveal patterning not immediately and intuitively visible would therefore be extremely useful. Graph analysis has fulfilled precisely this role in Oceania (Brookfield with Hart 1971; Hage and Harary 1991; Hunt 1988; Irwin 1974; 1983; Terrell 1977). What is presented in Figure 3 is a similar graph analysis of the Keros-Syros Cyclades, that attempts to reconstruct interaction from the bottom up.

Without initially postulating the existence of any of our exceptional communities, it asks what patterns will be generated simply by the ways that groups of people in neighbouring areas married, socialized, helped out and traded from place to place and island to island.

The technique used is proximal point analysis, a means of assessing the relations between localities by reducing them to points and linking each to its (conventionally) three closest neighbours (cf. Terrell 1977: 34–9). This form of analysis is particularly appropriate in the context of the Keros-Syros Cyclades, for the dispersed nature of settlement means that such reduction should provide a reasonable simulation of the distribution of Cycladic population, with each point acting as a surrogate for the small groups scattered over the locality represented (though uneven research and preservation prevent reliable work at the level of individual sites). Linkage between each point and its most proximate neighbours reflects the simple supposition that populations, still represented by points, will interact most strongly with their closest neighbours (here a reasonable assumption, given the high level of interdependency of small and fragile Cycladic communities); the modest boats and low-bulk cargoes involved justify the initial treatment of local land and sea distances as equivalent. Each point is placed within its island according to a standardized pattern, with one point for every 50 sq. km of area or significant fraction thereof. This density came partially from a desire to weight adequately for island size and achieve decent spatial resolution. But in addition, as Keros-Syros population densities revealed by field survey on Melos lie in the order of 2 per sq. km (Wagstaff and Cherry 1982a: 138), each point can also be seen as roughly equal to a hundred people, and each linked foursome should therefore form a demographic pool broadly comparable in numbers to the lower, minimal, end of the scale for endogamous networks amongst dispersed groups (e.g. Wobst 1974).

The web of constellations seen in Figure 3 provides us with helpful clues as to how actual interactions in the Keros-Syros Cyclades are liable to have occurred. Out of this seemingly homogeneous archipelago emerge a myriad of miniature worlds, overlaid by larger-scale patterns like the break-away sub-cluster in the north-east or the western string of islands running up to Attica. In contrast to the oft-quoted statement of the biogeographers MacArthur and Wilson that ‘the island is the first unit that the mind can pick out and begin to comprehend’ (1967: 3), we see that it is in fact always rather more or rather less than ‘the island’ that forms the key spatial framework. Aside from this, we need to ask two particular questions of this schematic map. Can we detect any centrally placed areas where initially balanced interactions will entail concentrations of activity within a confined location, or in other words where the position of a point provides it with more than the standard three linkages? And who is actually using the sea?

It is clear that the Erimonisia, far from being remote outposts, form the hub of the south-east Cyclades. Our rules of point distribution in fact over-represent these little islands, but the observation that no less than eight surrounding points link into their combined area reassures us as to the reality of their central position. Something also appears to be going on in the south-west corner of the Cyclades. To bring these patterns out more sharply, Figure 4a joins with contours all points of exceptional linkage, revealing one focus on north-east Melos, a line along the Andros-Tenos long-shore and an extensive area round the Erimonisia with a small sub-zone in west-central Naxos. This seems promising, but we can go a stage further and ask how much of this coming and going is

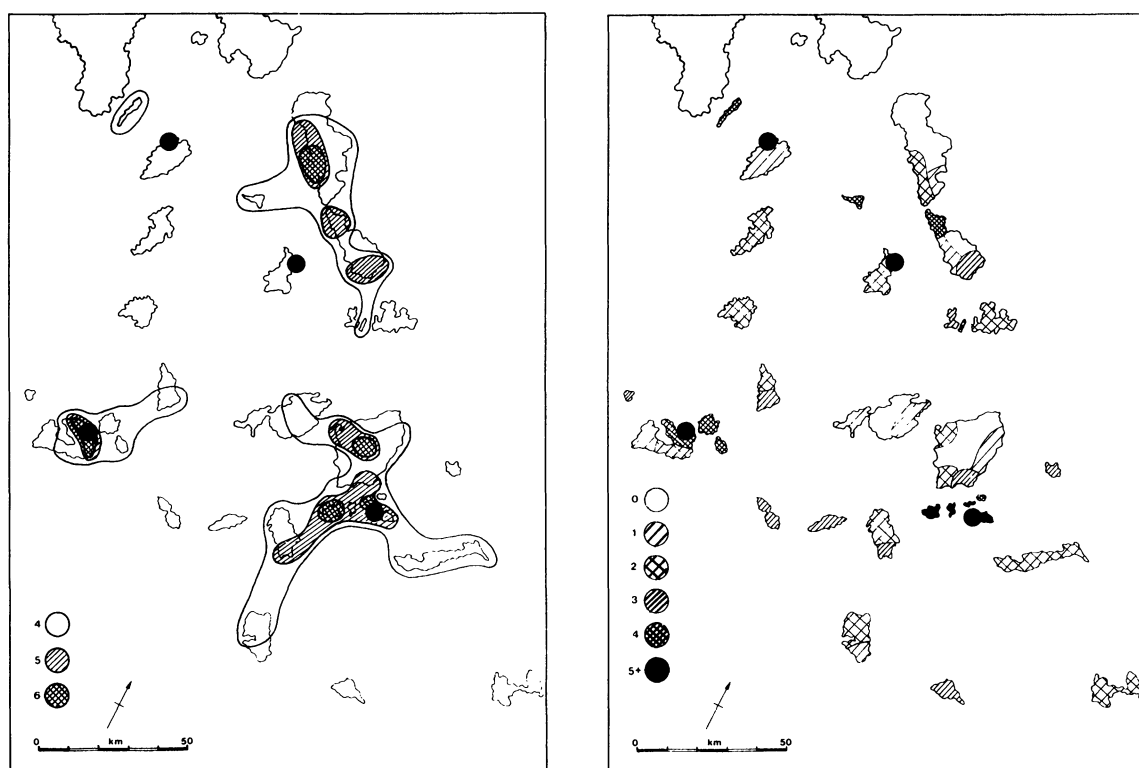


Figure 4 Two interpretations of the results of the proximal point analysis in Figure 3. (a) zones of more than standard linkage joined by contours (four, five and six links) to reveal foci of activity, and (b) the area represented by each point shaded according to the number of its links that necessarily involve overseas travel, revealing a complex patchwork of terrestrial and maritime orientation across the islands. The locations of the four archaeologically identified trader sites are superimposed as dots for comparison.

maritime. Figure 4b suggests an answer to this question by showing the number of linkages per point that join overseas. As there is no evidence that deep-sea fishing played a major part in Keros-Syros subsistence (Gamble 1979: 125–7), this should tell us about relative degrees of maritime orientation in the lives of people in different areas. The result is startling. Contrary to the assumption that seafaring was endemic to Cycladic life (e.g. Barber 1987: 18), what we see is a richly variegated mosaic of landlubbers and sailors that criss-crosses islands as frequently as it jumps straits and on several occasions confronts polar opposites within close geographical confines.

Combining the information in Figures 4a and 4b, we can in fact isolate just three compact areas in the entire Cyclades with peak linkage of a maritime nature: one in the Erimonisia, another on north-east Melos and a third on northern Tenos. In relation to the location of our trade sites, this equates to two direct hits (Dhaskalio-Kavos and Phylakopi) and one near miss (Chalandriani), suggesting that the proposed link between these sites and intra-Cycladic centrality is indeed close. Ayia Irini, which we hypothesized might be an inter-regional node, is conspicuously not predicted by this local analysis and therefore

forms the exception that proves the rule – perhaps indeed more of a passive gateway community than an active seafaring centre. Many and varied factors may, of course, have determined exact location. Phylakopi (about whose trader status our suspicions are incidentally now fortified) lies close to virtually the only spring in eastern Melos (Wagstaff and Cherry 1982b: 248); Dhaskalio-Kavos, although not literally the peak point in the Erimonisia according to Figure 4a, is visually highly prominent and central within these islands. The near miss is itself of interest. Maybe an unknown trader site does await discovery on Tenos; but from the point of view of the north-east sub-cluster as whole, the alternative position of Chalandriani on the opposite side of the strait makes excellent sense, as it is precisely placed on a convex coastline that offers a panorama of the entire cluster unmatched by any location on the Andros-Tenos long-shore. If this explanation of Chalandriani is correct, and our predicted centres are all accounted for, the surprising corollary is that we may possibly have already identified archaeologically all the major maritime trader sites that ever existed in the Keros-Syros Cyclades. It is also of interest to note that a secondary phenomenon like the extremely wealthy cemetery at Aplomata on Naxos (finds illustrated in Marangou 1990) lies in one of the remaining zones of high linkage that are markedly less maritime in nature (cf. Figs 1 and 4). Here, the apparent absence of a full-blown trading site may be explained by the fact that local land-based pre-eminence did not translate so easily into wider dominance of maritime trade.

Explaining the *physical* location of these trader sites can bring us some way towards understanding where the *ideological* locus of power lay in the Keros-Syros Cyclades. We have seen that the Cyclades were indeed places of extremes – unequal in linkage and displaying variable, localized maritime orientations that placed landlubbers and mariners in close proximity. Conditions such as these would surely render cultural perceptions of distance, geography and ‘the maritime’ highly relative – to take an example from Figure 4b, it may not be too speculative to suggest that Naxos and Amorgos seemed worlds apart to most of their respective inhabitants, but a short boat-trip away for a trader from the Erimonisia (the total distance is slightly less than 30km). The very infrequency with which many people used the sea would also only serve to increase their dependency when things not available within the ambit of the terrestrial world were eventually required; that the maritime trading centres reinforced their natural advantages culturally is clearly evident from their size and wealth. *Given these circumstances, I suggest that the sources of power in the Keros-Syros Cyclades lay primarily in the very activity and practice of maritime movement itself.*

Movement, like distance, would possess a variable value. It would in effect become a species of commodity in its own right – something to be made available or denied, and something profoundly affecting cultural perceptions of the object moved. Besides, what flowed in and out of these centres were not just artefacts, but knowledge, both of the meaning and worth of material things and of the places and people forming the world at whose heart the trading community lay. *It is small wonder that boats (the means of seaborne mobility and control) enjoyed some prominence in Keros-Syros iconography (Broodbank 1989: 334–7). This perspective may also explain the lack of direct control over the metal resources of the Cyclades, for in conditions where maritime movement was at a premium, it would be sufficient to be the only people who could travel to and from the mines. That the inhabitants of Siphnos or Kythnos apparently did not think to exercise a*

monopoly over these resources in their own vicinity may not only highlight the difference between their conceptual world and ours but also serve as a further hint that power lay less in possession than in seaborne movement over distance. Indeed, we could go a step beyond and suggest that the value of metal for most people in the early Cyclades lay not just in its properties but also in its exotic and invisible origins; Renfrew (1978) and Lechtmann (1984) have both urged that the value of metals in prehistoric societies be seen as culturally constructed. In short, if we are to understand the power of these early Cycladic trading communities, we must try to envisage each as the *axis mundi* of its surrounding cluster: a nexus not just of things and people but also of knowledge and experience of the island world.

Dhaskalio-Kavos as *axis mundi*

What light do these ideas and arguments shed on the way we look at the archaeological remains of the trading communities and other settlements in their vicinity? Dhaskalio-Kavos, the most spectacular of such centres according to this interpretation of its role, is also the only example where a markedly different explanation of site function has been proposed. The site combines the remains of domestic structures and an adjacent robbed deposit astonishingly rich in smashed fragments of marble figurines and vessels (Plate 1), together with pottery, obsidian and fragments of human bone (Doulas 1964; Renfrew 1972: 531–2; Zapheirou 1967; 1968). Most of the published artefacts from the special deposit are compatible with those from Cycladic cemeteries, but three features have given pause for thought in terms of site interpretation. First, this would be by far the richest cemetery ever found in the Cyclades. Second, despite the bone, no securely documented graves of typical Cycladic form are reported. Third, the degree of breakage amongst marble objects is unparalleled amongst Cycladic burial assemblages – and may arguably be more than can be explained by the attested geological faulting and robbing (Renfrew 1984: 25–6, 28). The special deposit, if it was a cemetery, therefore appears to have been a somewhat unusual one.

Combined with its apparently (but, as we have seen, deceptively) remote location, these peculiarities have prompted an alternative view of the site's role. Renfrew (*ibid.*) argues that the smashed deposit reflects ritual, possibly cult, activity at the site, and that Dhaskalio-Kavos is to be interpreted as a pan-Cycladic sanctuary. My aim is not so much to deny or substantiate this hypothesis, but rather to suggest that if we now begin from the premise that Dhaskalio-Kavos was a veritable hub of interaction, the question can be changed from 'What peculiar activities might account for this strange site in this odd location?' to 'Why, if it is the remains of a trader community, does Dhaskalio-Kavos seem different from other such places and possibly hints of forms of behaviour not witnessed elsewhere?' Thus rephrased, we have a question which may help us to appreciate how control of value was effected by the island traders of the early Cyclades.

Figure 1 reveals that of all our trading centres, Dhaskalio-Kavos and its surrounding region is the furthest from the extra-Cycladic world and the mineral deposits of the islands. If our association between maritime movement, distance and power is correct, it would

Differentials
of knowledge

therefore be here that the extremes of knowledge and ignorance would be maximal and the opportunities for exploiting such differentials would be greatest. This may, I think, go some way to explain the prominence of Dhaskalio-Kavos. It may also shed light on a further striking feature of the region, namely the zone of rich cemeteries found across southern Naxos and Amorgos, at sites such as Spedhos, Phionda and Dhokathismata (Papathanasopoulos 1962; Renfrew 1972: 519; Tsountas 1898: 154–5), which creates a distinct penumbra around Keros. This ‘Keros penumbra’ has always been hard to explain, for although there is some high local linkage (cf. Fig. 4a), the area is far from the metal sources, not exclusively endowed in terms of marble (why does it not extend, for instance, to marble-rich Paros and northern Naxos?) and agriculturally mediocre. It makes little sense to regard its wealth as the cause of the Dhaskalio-Kavos phenomenon. But might it be a consequence? What I suggest we may be seeing in this closed world of wealthy graves are the material relics of the politics of value, of a contest for prestige centred on and heavily manipulated by Dhaskalio-Kavos, that spiralled upward in lavish consumption through burial. This somewhat grim picture may be supported by the fortification of Dhaskalio islet and southern Naxian sites, apparently late in the Keros-Syros phase – one of the latter, at Panermos, being found on excavation to have been burnt out, with weaponry caught in the debris (Doulas 1964; 1972). It seems plausible that the region with Dhaskalio-Kavos at its head was caught in a boom-and-bust cycle of the type that Allen (1984) has proposed for the big-man trading systems of Melanesia. Similar late fortifications on the Kastri hill at Chalandriani (Bossert 1967) may reflect a comparable process.

If this picture is broadly right, there was one major problem for the traders of Dhaskalio-Kavos. Access to the exotic could be controlled, but many of the prestige objects in the Cyclades were carved in marble and this material is ubiquitous in the islands around Keros. Moreover, although ever more elaborate and ambitious carving could increase the ‘added value’ of marble objects (and it is notable that very complex forms such as the famous Keros harpists and the large ‘dove bowls’ are linked to the site), experimental work demonstrates that the basic figurine types can be made quite quickly and without great expertise (Oustinoff 1984). In these circumstances, where Dhaskalio-Kavos could control the flow of objects but not their production, the most efficacious way of maintaining its hold on regimes of value would be by removal from circulation. Within Cycladic cultural norms, burial presented the most obvious occasion, and the rich graves of Chalandriani probably reflect just this. Dhaskalio-Kavos, at the centre of the marble carving region of the Cyclades and operating in a perhaps more overtly competitive environment, may have gone a stage further in deliberately smashing the hundreds of marble figurines and vessels found in its extraordinary special deposit. The degree to which what has been found are the remains of destruction ceremonies associated with burial, and the extent to which further ritual or cult had evolved in the same area (this itself a potential form of ascendancy over neighbouring communities), remains obscure. A certain ambivalence is imposed by the modern devastation of the deposit, and no clear or final interpretation of the site can presently be offered. Yet whether we visualize any such activity as funerary or cultic, or both, is in a sense secondary; the central point is that it must be understood in terms of the messages about value and power emanating from Dhaskalio-Kavos.

Expanding horizons: the international spirit revisited

We have seen that for most people in the Cyclades, the distant probably began close to home. But what of voyages to the wider world beyond the islands, the kind of interaction that created the ‘international spirit’ and that comes closer to our usual conception of long-range contact? These, it should be stressed, must have been operations on a scale entirely distinct from the one-day hops that would suffice for most journeys within the Cyclades. The minimum crossing to Crete from Thera is over 100km, the routes up to and along the Greek coast are comparable, if less exposed, and the voyage east crosses the notoriously stormy Ikarian sea. At paddle speed the Cretan crossing would require nights at sea out of sight of land, and in all cases the land, when made, would be profoundly foreign. Long journeys would in addition be hard to fit within a farming calendar and summer sailing season (Broodbank 1989: 333). For all these reasons, such voyages can be seen as a preserve of the specialist trading communities.

Yet there is something extremely odd about the international spirit. Vermeule long ago noted that the Cycladic traders’ ‘balance of payments must have been very sound, since they exported in quantity and imported practically nothing’ (1964: 46). One may fault the terminology, but the observation remains true: Keros-Syros figurines and pottery are found all over the Aegean, but very little appears to have come back in return. This is all the more striking given the Cycladic custom of placing prestige artefacts in graves, of which several thousand have now been opened. It is also only exacerbated by adding the outward movement of Melian obsidian and Cycladic metals, for long-distance traders carrying metals must have been ideally placed to manipulate regimes of value (analyses of early Cretan metal objects shows a Kythnian source for much of their copper (Stos-Gale 1989) and confirm Renfrew’s suggestion that Cycladic metals flowed with the marble and pottery). Certainly there is now slightly more evidence of reciprocity than when Vermeule wrote, and analysis of late Keros-Syros metal artefacts from within the Kastri fortifications at Chalandriani has revealed the presence of exotic tin-bronzes, a new factor in the Cyclades (Stos-Gale, Gale and Gilmore 1984). There is, however, still little enough material to cover a period of some four centuries, and we continue to lack, for example, a single Cretan import from a secure Keros-Syros context.

It is possible that perishable materials flowed into the Cyclades. A long-range trade in bulk subsistence goods comparable to the *hiri* of the Papuan Motu (Dutton 1982) seems unlikely, given the modest capacity of paddled dug-outs in rough seas, but textiles may have moved. However, it is worth considering that the main centrifugal force that drove Cycladic traders outwards was the challenge and potential power that lay in long-range travel itself. This is not just to say that the voyage was the thing, so Westward Ho! – though there may be more than a grain of truth in this in terms of the status accruing to those who returned. Rather, I suggest that one of the invisible commodities exchanged for Cycladic goods may have been esoteric and exotic knowledge from, and of, distant Early Bronze Age centres far more physically impressive than the Cycladic settlements and themselves portals to still wider worlds – places like Knossos, Troy and Lerna whose names, indeed, have to this day lost none of their resonance. This is not mere speculation. For an emphasis on customs learned rather than objects obtained would certainly help to explain the inflow of exotic social practices, witnessed in the drinking and pouring shapes of Greek mainland

and Anatolian styles made from local fabrics within the islands – the great stylistic *koine* that forms the second cultural manifestation of the international spirit. Here we may discern a paradox. For if this coming together of the Aegean was indeed driven in part by the wish of Cycladic traders to gain in social status back home, the cosmopolitanism of the archaeological record may disguise the intensification of differentiation, exclusion and power within the Cyclades.

* * *

Elsewhere, I have argued that the many-paddled longboats incised on pottery from Chalandriani (see Fig. 2) depict the Cycladic craft used not for trade so much as for coercion and raiding (Broodbank 1989: 332–7). With regard to local patterns this remains plausible; these boats do seem a very labour-intensive way of shuttling between islands, and smaller, less iconographically visible craft probably acted as the principal short-distance carriers. This conclusion may not, however, apply to the longer-range voyages trading beyond the Cyclades or exploiting non-local metal sources. Here the duration, danger and prestige might well favour larger longboats and substantial groups of people. Yet there is a further reason for amending my original argument. For the long-distance *kula* traders of Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), the meeting of the sea and sky at the horizon created a conceptual link between long-range maritime journeys and sky-travel, symbolized in the myth of the flying canoe (Montague 1980; Tambiah 1983). Helms emphasizes that insular conditions readily suggest such cosmological beliefs (1988: 24). And this may in turn illuminate an intriguing equivalence in Cycladic iconography. For the alternative symbol placed in the space otherwise occupied by the longboat is a sun or star motif (a nautical association that re-emerges in the Cycladic Late Bronze Age on the wallpaintings of Thera (Morgan 1984: 171–2)). This substitution may perhaps be read as stating that the distant voyages of boats and of celestial bodies were in some sense conceived as comparable. If this is correct, there can surely be few more eloquent testimonies to the need to look both at, and beyond, the material when we attempt to comprehend the nature and meaning of trade in the early Cyclades.

Acknowledgements

The interpretation of Dhaskalio-Kavos offered in this paper is based entirely on published material and hypotheses concerning this unique and enigmatic site. I wish to stress that further study of material from the site may, of course, substantially modify the views expressed here.

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Abstract

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Ulysses without sails: trade, distance, knowledge and power in the early Cyclades

Pre-modern trade must be situated within the context of the wider social significance of the exotic. Unequal knowledge creates uneven values for non-local goods, and superior knowledge forms an avenue to power. This study explores maritime trade in the Cycladic islands (c. 2700–2300 cal. BC) in this light. It expands on earlier identification of specialized trading communities, using graph analysis to show that their position (spatial and political) was based on control of local seaborne movement and greater experience of the wider maritime world. Possible ritual destruction of prestige marble artefacts at one such site on Keros is seen as a means of manipulating regimes of value. Finally, it is suggested that long-distance voyages beyond the Cyclades were as much exercises in the gathering of esoteric knowledge to enhance social prestige within the islands as they were expeditions concerned with trade in material goods.