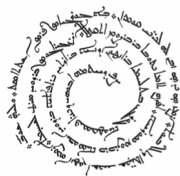


Negotiating Island Identities



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Negotiating Island Identities

The Active Use of Pottery in the Middle and
Late Bronze Age Cyclades

Ina Berg



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In Memory of
Jonathan Leiboff †

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PREFACE

The island as a metaphor for boundedness and isolation either as something to be feared or desired has long been part of everyday speech (Eriksen 1993). Thus, it should come as no surprise that archaeologists and anthropologists have also become fascinated with islands. The author of this book is no exception.

References to islands were common already in antiquity. They experienced a major revival during early colonialism with discoveries of hitherto uncolonized (tropical) lands (Grove 1995; Schulenburg 2003) and subsequently became a widespread motif in popular writings of the late 19th century (Loxley 1990; Peckham 2003). The emotions elicited hereby can either be negative (islands as places of isolation, fear, and danger where primitive people follow primitive practices) or positive (untouched tropical paradise beyond the shackles of modern day urban existence). Both views have found expression in literature, radio, and television. Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) captures the fearful view of islands magnificently by demonstrating how isolation from society's morality and rules transforms a group of British school-boys into savages. In contrast, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), stranded on an uninhabited island, learns to adapt to his isolation without 'succumbing' to primitivism. Modern reality TV shows have made use of the isolation and perceived hardship or danger associated with island living by locating the competitors on remote islands (e.g. *Survivors* on the island of Pulau Tiga near Indonesia and *Castaway* on Taransay in the Outer Hebrides, UK). Isolation as punishment is a major factor in the use of islands as places of imprisonment or exile: Napoleon, for example, was banished to Elba and St Helena, while members of the Italian mafia are still sent to exile on the islands of Linosa and Asinara (King 1993).

At the same time, there “still remains a fascination for islands as tropical paradises, perhaps a Utopian ideal, where one could escape the rigours of urban existence” (Rainbird 1999: 219). The most famous example of this genre is probably de Vere Stacpoole’s *The Blue Lagoon* (1908), closely followed by Alex Garland’s *The Beach* (1996). However, the stories also highlight that such a paradise does not come without great costs. Without doubt, it is this positive image of islands that appeals to so many of us when we are studying holiday brochures which offer a stress-free lifestyle in unpolluted and romantic surroundings on our chosen island paradise (Baum 1997). This allure of the island is maintained even when the island is located in more temperate climates or is only a short ferry drive away; the physical removal from the mainland and all stresses associated with it appears to be sufficient to create the perception of separateness and escape (Baum 1997; King 1993; Lockhart 1997).

Our modern view of islands as insular places is ultimately derived from principles developed in the context of biological studies first formulated by Darwin and by Wallace. Both scholars came independently to the conclusion that islands are advantageous places for the study of general evolutionary and ecological processes as islands were isolated closed systems and enjoyed ‘light natural selection’, resulting in fewer animal or plant species, less competition and, not infrequently, endemic species (Darwin 1859; Wallace 1869, 1892). Founded on Neo-Darwinian approaches, MacArthur and Wilson’s seminal book *The Theory of Island Biogeography* investigates the factors involved in the colonization and subsequent evolutionary development of animal and plant species on islands. The authors argued that the potential of islands lay in their convenient laboratory-like experimental conditions—“a simple microcosm of the seemingly infinite complexity of continental and oceanic biogeography”—such as variation in size or shape, boundedness, and degree of isolation (MacArthur & Wilson 1967: 3). They considered their conclusions not exclusive to island environments, but saw them as models for ecological processes in general as most ecosystems (e.g. forests, streams, caves, tide pools) were surrounded by different types of vegetation. Since publication, the models formulated by MacArthur and Wilson have undergone modification

and elaboration (Diamond & May 1981; Simberloff 1974; Williamson 1981).

On the basis that humans are, ultimately, also animals and are thus subject to similar constraints as other living organisms when establishing themselves on an island (Cherry 1981: 64), many anthropologists had begun to refer to islands as laboratories in the 1950s and 1960s (for a detailed summary see Terrell, Hunt & Gosden 1997: 156–163). However, it was only in the 1970s that Evans introduced the concept of ‘islands as laboratories’ into archaeological discourse (1973, 1977). He argued that islands could function as small-scale experiments for cultural processes in general as they are clearly bounded and relatively isolated entities governed by fewer variables. For example, the limited range of resources available on islands allows imported products to be distinguished easily. Regarding human behaviour, isolation leads to development of endemic traits, such as exaggerated ceremonial rituals. Still, Evans acknowledged the crucial importance of cultural attitudes towards the sea and outside lands in determining the degree of an island’s insularity. The concept of ‘islands as laboratories’ has been influential and long-lasting both in archaeology and anthropology (where it is experiencing a small revival after two decades of critique), and many scholars have perceived island societies as closed and bounded systems (e.g. Clark & Terrell 1978; Fitzhugh 1997; Fitzhugh & Hunt 1997; Fosberg 1963; Friedman 1981; Goldman 1957; Kirch 1980a, 1980b; Mead 1957; Sahlins 1957, 1958; Suggs 1961; Terrell, Miller & Roe 1977; Vayda & Rappaport 1963). Spate captured this approach so poignantly when he asserted that the islands of the Pacific as “so splendidly splittable into Ph.D topics” (quoted in Kirch 1986: 2).

Archaeologists working in the eastern Mediterranean were no different from their contemporaries working on Pacific islands, and several survey designs made explicit use of the concept of ‘islands as laboratories’. The Melos survey, for example, regarded the island as a clearly defined area equipped with limited resources, “facilitating a systemic approach which permits a clear distinction between interactions within the system and those with neighbouring systems operating across its boundaries” (Renfrew & Wagstaff 1982: 1). Indebtedness to Evans was made very apparent also in the publication of the Northern Keos survey where it was argued that “[i]slands have clearly defined

and relatively unchanging boundaries that delimit a natural area which can be expected to behave to some extent as a unified cultural unit. [...] Similarly, islands lend themselves to the relatively objective operational definition of both population and available resources. [...] Many authors have emphasized the laboratory-like conditions of comparative research in insular settings; and where... there exists the possibility of observing the development of discrete yet related polities and of studying the long-term effects of differences among them in size, position, environment, natural resources, and so on" (Cherry, Davis & Mantzourani 1991: 9).

Scholars involved in a recent biogeographical revival, however, have taken on board many of the criticisms levelled at the concept. Islands are no longer viewed as closed, but semi-closed systems. Environmental and ecological variables are still regarded as exerting constraints on societies, but they are regarded as non-deterministic. Finally, the appropriateness of generalizations about different island contexts has been questioned. Biogeography is now looked upon as a heuristic device which allows examination of the relevance of geography, ecology, climate, and biology on human behaviour (Fitzhugh & Hunt 1997; King 1993). Indeed, few scholars would deny the potential of human biogeography in understanding the parameters involved in human *colonization* (but see Bowdler 1995), though its application to *cultural change* is doubtful. However, despite the perceptive persuasiveness and simplicity of the 'island as laboratories' concept, most scholars have come to the conclusion that humans do *not* act like animal or plant populations, and the island model was criticised and rejected in most anthropological and (to a lesser degree) archaeological circles (e.g. Bethel 2002; Bowdler 1995; Broodbank 2000a; Peckham 2003; Spriggs 1997; Terrell 1997; Terrell, Hunt & Gosden 1997).

The reason for the rejection lies in the recognition that no island inhabited by humans is a closed system that exists in isolation. As regards flora and fauna, islands are indeed more closed off than continental habitats. Generally speaking, fewer species live on islands than on an equally sized patch on the continent; more importantly, the species that are represented are those that encounter fewer barriers to dispersal than more land-based types. These differences are based on biological features and thus relatively stable (Diamond 1977; MacArthur & Wil-

son 1967; Whittaker 1998; Williamson 1981). However, there is no reason to assume that humans would make do with the resources available to them locally and the import of foodstuff was probably a more regular practice than commonly imagined as evidenced on the Greek islands of Aigina and Pseira for the classical and prehistoric period respectively (Betancourt & Banou 1991; Figueira 1981; Horden & Purcell 2000: 119). That interaction and contact was key to island living and that 'pristine isolation' probably never existed with regard to human populations is demonstrated by ethnographic, archaeological, and experimental data which point to the existence of regular contacts with neighbouring regions even in remote locales, such as the island of Mauritius, northeast Amazonia, and Australia (Eriksen 1993; summaries by Broodbank 2000a; Kuklick 1999; Patton 1996; Rainbird 1999). The relative ease and confidence with which island communities could interact with one another has been further demonstrated by experimental archaeology and computer modelling in the Pacific and the Mediterranean (Finney 1994; Irwin 1992; Lewis 1972; Tzala 1989).

While contact was the norm, some islands nevertheless chose to be more isolated than others (e.g. prehistoric Malta and Cyprus: Broodbank 2000a) and we should therefore conceptualise insularity as man-made, relative and in constant flux; as such it can be used as a means to express facets of individual or group identity (Eriksen 1993; Rainbird 1999: 230). In accordance, island communities should not be considered as either connected or isolated, but rather as being placed somewhere along a spectrum ranging from complete isolation (e.g. Easter Island; generally perceived to have been the most isolated island) to complete integration with the outside world (e.g. Manhattan). Movement in either direction is possible and may be slow or rapid, gradual or in jumps, and may not necessarily follow the same direction (Broodbank 2000a: 10).

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is about cultural contact between island communities that lived in the Cyclades during the late Middle and early Late Bronze Age (Figure 1). It advocates a rethinking of long-held beliefs and problematic models in relation to Cycladic island archaeology through an investigation of pottery assemblages from several sites. Static, determinis-

tic models of insularity and contact are contrasted with complex, flexible, and culturally determined perspectives which acknowledge the ability of island communities to consciously fashion their worlds and make choices about the nature and degree of interaction with their neighbours. As a result, material culture will be shown to play an active role in the establishment and negotiation of island identities *vis à vis* other cultural units; for instance, Minoanisation of the Cyclades is no longer viewed as the inevitable outcome of proximity to and contact with a culturally superior Crete but can now be understood as a deliberate strategy; one that differed from community to community and involved local imitations and imports from a variety of regions. This view is given additional support by a reassessment of maritime transport which undermines the common notion of islands as isolated, essentially self-sufficient and consequently peripheral units; isolation as well as interaction can be consciously fashioned by islanders and resultant relations should be understood as cultural constructs. Islanders are thus perceived as actively involved in the creation of their worlds rather than merely reacting to outside influences.

In order to explore interaction, I have chosen to focus my analysis on pottery. Ceramics have been favoured over other finds because of their advantageous deposition, preservation, and excavation conditions in the Aegean. First, they were produced and discarded in abundance on all sites. They are therefore ideally suited for statistically-based, comparative analyses. Secondly, local ceramics can readily be distinguished from imported ones by their clay and by their fabric composition. The distinctiveness of geological profiles in the Aegean enables us to identify the provenance of these imports at least in broad terms (e.g. Cycladic, Dodecanesian, Cretan). Third, both local and imported vases come in a variety of shapes, wares, and decorative features, resulting from different production decisions and consumer choices, thus permitting an in-depth statistical analysis of local preferences.

The selection of pottery assemblages for this comparative study was strongly influenced by the need for broad temporal and geographical coverage—wherever possible, spanning the period of increasing Minoanisation across the Southern Aegean between MC and LC II. While the main emphasis of this study is on ceramic assemblages from the Cyclades and Kythera, evidence from other sites is also drawn

upon to clarify issues. Such a comparative approach provides the analyst with many variables to compare against each other. In the process, similarities and dissimilarities become more easily recognizable. Drawing on several assemblages—each with its particular research design and objectives, different procedures of recovery and discard, as well as different methods of reconstruction, preservation, and storage of the recovered pottery (Berg 2000)—it was important to study one complete assemblage. This assemblage would function as the main reference point for the less well preserved and less fully retained assemblages. Renfrew's 1974 to 1977 excavations at Phylakopi on Melos provided me with such an assemblage. I studied approximately 78,000 complete pots or fragments in total. Of these, 75,036 came from Phylakopi (Melos),¹ 379 from Ayia Irini (Kea), 438 from Mikre Vigla (Naxos), 249 from Paroikia (Paros), and 1,214 from Kastri (Kythera). Material from Kolonna on Aigina was unfortunately inaccessible at the time and analysis is founded on published reports. Due to ongoing work, pottery from Akrotiri on Thera will only be drawn on for comparative purposes. Due to the varying quality of data and the lack of reliable statistics for most of the sites, quantitative results were accorded less significance than the qualitative analysis when making comparisons between different assemblages. Unfortunately, at the time of writing the excavation report of Phylakopi had not yet been published (Renfrew 2007). In some cases, permission had been granted to make reference to the unpublished chapters, though some data remained inaccessible. The imminent publication of the excavations will undoubtedly shed further light on the workings of the settlement.

Qualitative comparisons become particularly important once the analysis moves beyond ceramics to incorporate other materials, such as stone, metal, and exotica, which are not present in large enough numbers to permit statistical analysis.

The book is divided into two broad sections: the first section, encompassing Chapters 1 to 3, examines the historical, physical, and

¹ The chronological sequence was obtained by means of correspondence and cluster analysis (see Berg 2000: Chapter 4; cf. Davis & Cherry 1984, who used multidimensional scaling).

theoretical background and approaches to interaction between and beyond the Cyclades, in particular the vexing question of 'Minoanisation'. Founded on the analysis of pottery assemblages—most prominently that of Phylakopi—Chapters 4 to 6 provide new perspectives on cultural interaction patterns in the Bronze Age Aegean. To achieve this, the last three chapters move progressively from the local context to the wider regional picture.

A brief history of the Cycladic islands and their pattern of interaction are provided in Chapter 1. Given current evidence, the Cyclades were first exploited in the Upper Palaeolithic; however, substantial colonization initially occurred in the Late Neolithic with most islands settled by the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. Throughout their history, people travelled and built up exchange networks that reached beyond individual islands. It was only with the emergence of the Minoan palaces in the early Middle Bronze Age and increasing evidence for Minoan cultural influence on many of the islands that some scholars have postulated a loss of independence.

The key environmental and technological factors of island life are the topic of Chapter 2. Sea-level changes, seafaring, climate, soils, water and erosion, agriculture and husbandry, and health factors are investigated in order to understand their impact on island communities and contextualise the choices they made. While these factors set the boundaries within which life takes place, none of them could be shown to be environmentally deterministic for life on a Bronze Age island.

Culture change in the Cyclades has conventionally been considered with reference to Minoan Crete, and the escalating presence of Minoan objects and local imitations has been called 'Minoanisation'. Chapter 3 traces the history of approaches to Minoanisation and critiques popular models, such as Davis and Cherry's 'Western String', Wiener's 'Versailles effect', and Branigan's colony classifications, for promoting a unicausal, unidirectional, and undifferentiated view of cultural interaction. To remedy this situation, it is important to acknowledge the active involvement of the islanders in the acculturation process. By rejecting and accepting non-local features each community negotiated its own degree of Minoanisation.

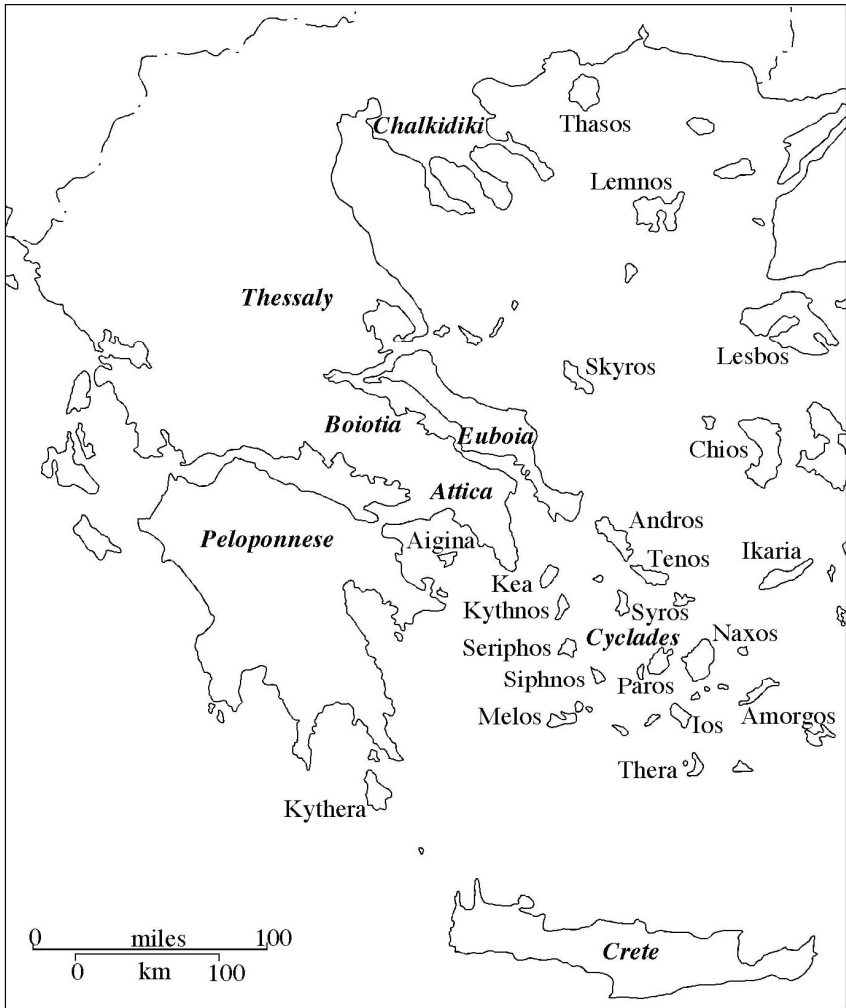


Figure 1. The Aegean, showing the main regions and islands

Anchored in the belief that interpretations of contact situations need to be founded on comprehensive analysis of local contexts rather than universal models, Chapter 4 thus presents an examination of the pottery production at Phylakopi and the impact Minoan shapes, forming techniques and decorative styles exerted upon it.

In addition to Minoan vessels, imports from other regions also reached Phylakopi, Ayia Irini on Kea, Paroikia on Paros, Mikre Vigla

on Naxos, Kolonna on Aigina, and Kastri on Kythera (Chapter 5). However, the choices made with regard to type and range of imports as well as technologies were diverse and complex. It will be argued that the observed patterns most likely reflect underlying socio-political attitudes and customs, or possibly even conscious strategies. The reason that pottery is a useful medium of communication lies in its ability to function as a sub-elite object. Imports and imitations thereby allow societies that cannot gain access to the elite sphere of exchange to participate in the consumption of objects and foods that are associated with exotic lands and knowledge. In this context, Minoanisation, just like subsequent Mycenaeanization and preceding Middle Helladic influence, is considered merely a phase within long-standing and ever-changing acquisition patterns of Cycladic communities.

That Cycladic settlements were, generally speaking, unable to access the elite sphere of exchange is argued in Chapter 6. An analysis of ceramic, metal, and exotic imports indicates that most settlements had a wide range of contacts but were unable to attract exotic imports. Thus, this work highlights the great divide between local Cycladic and regional Aegean-wide patterns of exchange. Despite their inability to tap into the sphere of international elite exchange, communities were nevertheless able to participate effectively in local exchange. While affected by Minoan influence, this influence was not overwhelming and homogenous but selective and diverse—and ultimately determined by settlements' socio-political preferences.

With so many themes being touched upon, this book can be read in many ways: for those interested in island archaeology, it can provide a case study in socially negotiated interaction and seclusion. For those interested in material culture, the analysis of the pottery production at Phylakopi will provide a detailed analysis of a unique site which is hoped to complement the excavation report. For those interested in issues of cultural influence, Minoanisation or the 'Minoan thalassocracy', this book offers a critique of earlier approaches and proposes a new perspective on contact situations. In the end, however, the book is an attempt to write a history of interaction between Cycladic communities and Crete from the late Middle Bronze Age to Late Bronze II periods which acknowledges that the Cycladic people were ultimately in charge of their own destiny.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The doctoral dissertation from which this book derives was researched under the supervision of Todd Whitelaw and Sophia Voutsaki. I thank them for their guidance and assistance. Further I thank my examiners, Colin Renfrew and the late Elizabeth Schofield, both for a stimulating discussion and for permitting access to their material (Phylakopi and Ayia Irini respectively). The following scholars also gave kind permission to access their material and/or discussed the results with me: Robin Barber (Melos, Naxos), Nicolas Coldstream (Kythera), Jack Davis (Kea, Melos), Olga Hadjianastasiou (Naxos), Stephan Hiller (Aigina), George Huxley (Kythera), Imme Kilian-Dirlmeier (Aigina), Wolf-Dietrich and Barbara Niemeier (Miletus), Toulia Marketou (Rhodes, Kos), Marisa Marthari (Thera), John Overbeck (Paros, Kea).

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With this book substantially modified from its original doctoral source, I wish to express my gratitude to the following scholars for advice, information and creative discussion on specific issues: Robert Arnott, Cyprian Broodbank, Ian Lilley, Jennifer Moody, and Cemal Pulak. In particular, I wish to thank Robin Barber, Stuart Campbell, Chris Fowler and Oliver Rackham, for extensive comments and suggestions on advanced drafts. A thanks goes also to Caroline Wilkinson

who prepared many of the figures and proofread several of the chapters.

Since the completion of the original thesis, some of the data and argument have been presented in journals and conference proceedings. An earlier draft of the 'Organization of the Melian pottery production' section in Chapter 4 has appeared in the journal *Antiquity* under the title 'The Meanings of Standardization: Conical Cups in the Late Bronze Age Aegean' (Berg 2004) and a summary of the findings of Chapter 4 entitled 'Meaning in the Making: The Potter's Wheel at Phylakopi, Melos (Greece)' has been presented in the *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* (2007a). An extended version of 'The sea' section in Chapter 2 will appear in the Proceedings of the Mediterranean Crossroads Conference under the title 'Aegean Bronze Age Seascapes—A Case Study in Maritime Movement, Contact and Interaction' (2007b).

Friends and family supported me during the gestation of this book. Tragically, Jonathan Leiboff, a dear friend, meticulous proof-reader, and insightful critic of the original PhD thesis, has since passed away; this book is therefore dedicated to him.

ABBREVIATIONS AND DATING CONVENTIONS

The following abbreviations are used (see also Figure 2):

Aegean-wide periods:

LN	Late Neolithic
FN	Final Neolithic
EBA	Early Bronze Age
MBA	Middle Bronze Age
LBA	Late Bronze Age

Regionally specific:

Cyclades:

EC	Early Cycladic
MC	Middle Cycladic
LC	Late Cycladic

Crete:

EM	Early Minoan
MM	Middle Minoan
LM	Late Minoan

Southern Greek mainland:

EH	Early Helladic
MH	Middle Helladic
LH	Late Helladic

Dates, centuries, millennia and other time-spans are given in calendar years BC or AD unless otherwise specified.

Chronological sequences of Phylakopi (Melos):

Mackenzie	Renfrew	Phases	Dating
Pre-City	Phylakopi O	Phase A (A1 + A2)	EC
First City	Phylakopi I	Phase B	
Second City	Phylakopi II	Phase C	MC
early Third City	Phylakopi III	Phase D	early LC
late Third City	Phylakopi IV	Phase E	late LC

Table 1. Concordance for phases at Phylakopi

Years BC	Cycladic sequence	Cycladic settlement phases	Minoan sequence	Southern Greek mainland sequence	Major Aegean processes & events
1200	LC III (late)	Ayia Irini VIII (M)	LM IIIC	LH IIIC	post-palatial
1300	LC III (middle)	Ayia Irini VIII (L)	LM IIIB	LH IIIB	Mycenaean palaces
1400	LC III (early)	Ayia Irini VIII (K) Phylakopi III - iii Ayia Irini VIII (J)	LM IIIA	LH IIIA	
1500	LC II	Ayia Irini VII (H) Phylakopi III - ii	LM II LM IB	LH IIB LH IIA	
1600	LC I	Phylakopi III - i Ayia Irini VI (G)	LM IA	LH I	New palaces Crete
1700	MC (late)	Phylakopi II - iii Ayia Irini V (F)	MM IIIA MM IIB	MH (late)	Old palaces Crete
1800	MC (early)	Ayia Irini IV (D) Phylakopi II - ii Phylakopi I - iii	MM IIA MM IB	MH (middle)	
1900			MM IA	MH (early)	
2000	EC III (Phylakopi I)	Phylakopi I - ii	EM III	Lerna IV	Formation of palatial Crete
2100		Ayia Irini III (C)			
2200					
2300	EC II (Keros - Syros)	Phylakopi I - i & Phase A 2 Ayia Irini II (B)	EM IIB	Lefkandi I	“international spirit”
2400					
2500			EM IIA	Lerna III	
2600					Talioi & Eutresis
2700			EM IB		
2800	FN to EC I (Grotta - Pelos)	Phylakopi 0 (A1)	EM IA		
2900					
3000					

Figure 2. Suggested chronology and synchronism for the Bronze Age Aegean (adapted from Barber 1987; Manning 1999; Warren & Hankey 1989)