

Introduction

Aegean archaeology has mainly concentrated on Pre-historic and Greco-Roman times, and has provided relatively little information on human activity and material culture in the medieval period. Historical research concerning the medieval era is sufficiently developed, but archaeological research on the medieval Aegean has mainly focused on matters of art and architecture. The small amount of available information about settlement patterns, land use and material culture is mainly derived from long-term archaeological projects using systematic surface survey as their basic tool, in combination with research into the historical sources and archives. Our information is supplemented by the rescue excavations undertaken by the Archaeological Service and the systematic excavations conducted by foreign and (mainly) Greek universities. In fact, we have an overall picture of the medieval and post-medieval periods for only a few islands of the Aegean, namely Kea, Antikythera, and Kythera (the latter study is in progress), and a more fragmentary one for Crete, Melos and the Cyclades.

This study attempts to fill this gap; it uses the ancient past as background for examining the continuity and change that the island of Skyros experienced from the Late Roman period onwards. In chronological terms, this study is thus clearly inspired by the tradition of Byzantine studies. It brings together two different archaeological ‘schools’, that of long-term survey research (based mainly on material culture), and that of ‘traditional’ Byzantine and Post-Byzantine archaeology (focused on art and architecture), offering new perspectives on settlement patterns, art and architecture, and the material culture of Skyros from Late Roman to Early Modern times. The combination of archaeological data and information from historical sources reconstructs the regional history of Skyros during that time span, which is ultimately the main purpose of this study.

More specifically, this is primarily a surface survey, functioning as an archaeological guide. It focuses on the change between dispersed and nucleated settlement systems which the island underwent from ancient to post-medieval times, and examines the reasons for this phenomenon. An additional fea-

ture of this research is the cataloguing of medieval and post-medieval churches in the island’s capital of Chora and its suburbs, and in general an examination of trends in ecclesiastical architecture on the island. The discussion on architecture extends to residential buildings (in the Late Ottoman and Early Modern periods) and even fortifications (the Post-Roman fortifications of the castle of Chora).

Apart from the focus on topographical and architectural matters, an essential component of this study is the examination of the material culture on the island in Late Roman and Post Roman times. Concerning the later centuries especially, there is a focus on the ceramics, but also an attempt to investigate other material categories, such as furniture or costumes. This treatment might appear unconventional initially, since the norm in archaeological studies is to investigate ‘purely archaeological’ materials, ceramics first and foremost; other items are seen as belonging more properly to the realm of folkloric studies. However, this attitude does not withstand a more thorough examination. Firstly, it must be understood that the focus of post-medieval archaeology on pottery is a legacy of older archaeological research, which focused only on the ancient past. Given that organic materials are rarely found preserved till modern times (at least in the Mediterranean climate), ceramics became *de facto* the principal archaeological evidence of the material culture of ancient societies. If ancient organic materials had been preserved they would of course receive the attention of archaeologists (and they do indeed receive it in the rare instances of such materials surviving). Bearing in mind the principle that archaeology examines the material evidence of the past, and the developments that have encompassed post-medieval archaeology (extending its scope further than art and architecture), this unconscious attitude of post-medieval archaeologists to consider materials like furniture and costumes as being out of context, can be considered erroneous. Thankfully, the last centuries have yielded plenty of materials other than ceramics, which in combination with written sources provide ample information that can enable us to reconstruct daily life in post-medieval societies.

Additionally, such data provide significant evidence for older periods as well; at least they represent the closest testimonies. It is time that post-medieval archaeology overcomes artificial limitations and expands its context horizons.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the investigation of post-medieval material culture categories other than ceramics in this study sufficiently covers this subject. Limited background knowledge did not permit thorough analysis. Nevertheless, apart from the admittedly small step made here, this attempt indicates the direction which relevant future studies could follow, in the opinion of this writer.

The extent of the topics covered by this study corresponds accordingly to a wide span of methodological tools used to address them. Apart from archaeological fieldwork (intensive/extensive surface survey, documentation of architectural structures/monuments etc.), the research was supplemented by visits to households and museums (concerning especially post-medieval material culture), oral interviews, historical archives (mainly published), and of course by previous archaeological and historical research.

In terms of structure, the study is divided into four parts and is supplemented by four appendices. Part 1 provides background archaeological and historical information about the island. It is more or less the starting point for the present study. Part 2 is dedicated to the methodology of the archaeological survey. It is a guide with detailed information on the archaeological methods applied, to support the reliability of the data presented in the following pages, and permit the evaluation of the Skyros survey in the context of the rest

of the Aegean. Part 3 presents the results of the survey concerning the more thoroughly investigated sites of the island, namely the sixteen rural settlement sites selected for the application of intensive survey, and the most prominent among the extensively surveyed sites of the island, namely the long-term urban centre of the island, Chora (see Part 2). Part 4 synthesises the data retrieved by the present and older archaeological research with the data of the historical sources (presented in Part 1). The combined data offers an overall picture of the island in four broad chronological periods: Greco-Roman, Late Roman to early Middle Ages, Mid- to Late Byzantine/Frankish-Venetian, and finally Ottoman to Early Modern. The last chapter of Part 4 offers conclusions regarding two issues on which this study has focused, namely the settlement system and the connections that Skyros maintained with the Aegean and its broader geographical context; both are approached with a long-term perspective.

Appendix A is a list of the archaeological sites (including summaries of the sixteen intensively surveyed sites presented in detail in Part 3). Appendix B is a detailed catalogue of the pottery collected from the fields, and appendix C is a catalogue of the 57 churches of Chora and its suburbs examined in this study. Lastly, appendix D is the synoptic Ottoman tax register (*icmal*) for the year 1670/1 concerning Skyros, which is published here for the first time. It includes a photograph of the original document, transliteration into the Turkish alphabet, and English and Greek translation. Small introductions at the beginning of every Part (and in some cases of chapters), help the reader to navigate.