

Bronze Age Harbours in the Aegean

Towards another theoretical approach

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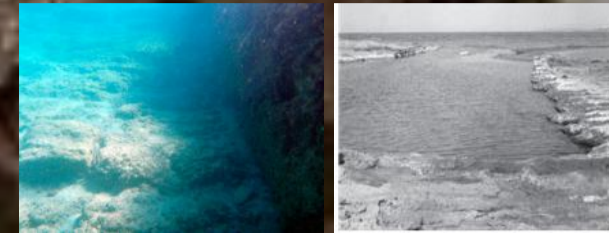
Introduction

During the Aegean Bronze Age a number of factors demonstrate the significance and the necessity of harbours and ports (Dickinson 1994):

Legend:

- EBA sites with continuity in the LBA
- LBA coastal sites or with significant evidence of maritime communication
- EBA shipwrecks
- MBA shipwrecks
- LBA shipwrecks

- ❖ Coastal settlements of EBA and LBA
- ❖ New sailing methods
- ❖ Rise of trade; bulk and fine commodities
- ❖ High mobility of people and goods



The Minoan shipyard (?) in Nirou Chani, a) underwater view and b) view from the shore in 1926 (after ANA-MPA and Blackman 2011, fig.12)



Restored view of the Building P (shipsheds) in Kommos (<http://www.fineart.utoronto.ca/kommos/>) Model with a general view of the "double harbour" in Kommos (after *Inseln der Winde*, fig.255)



The "double harbour"; the Flotilla Fresco (detail), "West House", Akrotiri. (after Dumas 1992: 68, image 35; courtesy of the Thera Foundation).



Aerial view of the archaeological site of Kommos <http://www.interkriti.org/crete/iraklion/kommos.html>

The evidence

- The "Flotilla Fresco" from Akrotiri depicts ships moored on the one side of a promontory while smaller boats lie on the beach on the other side.
- This pattern, also called "double harbour arrangement" (Shaw 1990), is found in Homeric epics, too (*Odyssey*, VII).
- Theoretical models to detect prehistoric harbours have also been developed (See *Kalamianos; Tartaron et al. 2003*).



The shipsheds in Poros-Katsambas (after Blackman 2011, fig.7)



The "Shore House" in Gournia, excavated by Boyd in 1901. (Courtesy Chronis Papanikolopoulos)

Criticism

Some scholars maintain that prehistoric ships did not need any harbours; they were just dragged on the shore or were either loaded or unloaded with dinghies.

However, archaeologists still look for anchorages or safe places to moor with emphasis on the harbour constructions *per se*, while natural scientists focus on the geological and the environmental information (Morhange *et al.* 2016).

Another approach

The basic problem in the study of the harbours in the antiquity and prehistory is the tendency to focus on the harbour constructions, which are, in many cases, hardly discernible. An alternative way to think about harbours is to perceive them as a landscape, or better, a seascape. The perception of a whole town as a "harbour town" goes towards the understanding of the harbour as a cultural seascape; this is also manifested on the terrestrial compounds of the harbour.

Installations on land may show the sociopolitical connections and cultural interactions that took place in those areas. The natural environment also plays an integral role in shaping the idea of a harbour. Thus, under the notion of the dynamic seascape, the architectural and urban development of the settlement and the contextual archaeological evidence, a prehistoric harbour can be holistically understood.

- In Nirou Chani, S. Marinatos (1926) found what he believed to be an anchorage or a shipyard of the Knossian navy.
- In Poros-Katsambas Adonis Vasilakis argues on the discovery of a shipyard (Vasilakis 2010).
- Vance L. Watrous in Gournia has investigated a submerged structure that he interpreted as wharf and, in addition, long walls going towards the sea, which he interpreted as LM II shipsheds (Watrous 2012).
- Kommos is also considered as a Minoan harbour-town with shipsheds on the shore and possibly the "double harbour arrangement" (Shaw and Shaw 2006).

References cited

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