

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

BEVAN (A.) and CONOLLY (J.) **Mediterranean Islands, Fragile Communities and Persistent Landscapes. Antikythera in Long-Term Perspective.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Cambridge. Pp. 280. £69.99. 9781107033450.
doi:10.1017/S007542691600077X

This book is an exploration of Antikythera, a small island (*ca.* 20km²) situated between Kythera to the north and Crete to the south. It is based on data collected as part of the Antikythera Survey Project whose cornerstone is the intensive archaeological survey of the entire island conducted by Andrew Bevan, James Conolly and Aris Tsaravopoulos between 2005 and 2008.

As the authors themselves acknowledge, this book is a rather unusual venture. Being based on an archaeological fieldwork project, one would expect to see the conventional multi-author format with specialists reporting on their areas of expertise and the project directors offering a synthesis at the end. Instead, the book *is* the synthesis. While specialists are referenced as appropriate, their voices, conclusions and insights are filtered through the authors' view. This has the advantage of giving the book great coherence and allowing one narrative to be developed throughout. A disadvantage is that it is more difficult for the reader to judge how far he or she would agree or disagree with the argument put forward as the raw data and specialists' interpretations are less easily accessible (principal datasets have been permanently archived by the Archaeological Data Service).

At the very heart of the narrative is the recognition that small islands, despite offering people many opportunities as refuges, hunting spots, exiles, pirate retreats and regular homes, are potentially more fragile than large islands or mainland regions – environmentally, politically and economically. Having set out their perspective in chapter 1, the authors provide an overview of their survey methodology in chapter 2. Innovative and thorough in equal measure, the survey is unique in having covered virtually the entire

island. With 90% of the island walked at an intensive 10m grid, followed by vacuum circle samples where required, the island offers an unrivalled and detailed dataset. Alongside the survey, other investigations took place, such as artefact, ethnographic, geological and ecological studies. A concise discussion of the geology, climate, sea and wind patterns, natural island resources, plant and animal life is the topic of chapter 3.

However, it is in chapters 4–8 where the expertise, clear logical thinking and meticulous data analysis of the authors offers exciting new insights which future survey projects would be wise to incorporate into their own design. Chapter 4 concerns itself with the artefacts collected during the survey. Here, it is reassuring to see how carefully the authors have scrutinized the material and how acutely aware they are of the limitations inherent in the dataset, such as visibility, variability and diagnosticity. I thought that the authors' procedure of assigning probabilities to artefact assemblages, to understand how far they fit a unique period or present more generic trends that may apply to two or more periods, demonstrates excellent practice. Moving towards an interpretation, the authors explore the themes of consumption, transport, conflict, production and recycling. As regards consumption, Minoan-style tripod cooking vessels, trays, braziers and deep bowls indicate that communities on Antikythera were part of the Aegean Bronze Age cuisine and tradition. Similarly, in the Hellenistic period, their liking for cereal pastes, pulses, olive oil and fish was shared among the wider Greek world. Scrutinizing artefacts for insights into reuse poignantly reveals that islanders were masters at recycling on an island with only sparse resources and, at times, infrequent access to trade networks. All materials, from clay to metal to glass to masonry, were reused. It is even possible that lithics were broken up and added as a tempering material to clay.

Chapters 5 and 6 investigate the long-term history of the island. Three trends stand out: first, in order to adapt to changing circumstances, the islanders regularly had to shift their strategies; second, the size of the island and the quality of the

available land necessitated the sharing of agricultural installations; third, the fate of the island waxed and waned at regular intervals. A GIS analysis of artefact assemblage locations, activity zones and their relationship to the landscape – springs, sea, agricultural land, harbour sites, etc. – lays the groundwork for elucidating changing priorities through time: Late Neolithic visitation (with a preference for well-positioned places along paths with good views of the surrounding landscape) turned into seasonal camp habitation by hunters in the Early Bronze I (small scatters located away from the coast, with good short-distance visibility and not located near good agricultural land). In the Late Roman period, settlers preferred to be near flat land with fertile soils. In contrast, the Hellenistic period was a time when Antikythera was involved in piracy, with good access to springs and harbours.

Chapter 7 explores the importance of inter- and off-island communication. Here, the authors distinguish five levels of interaction, from the intimate local navigational space to the global scale from the 16th century AD onwards. Generally speaking, Antikytheran communities remained relatively isolated and disconnected throughout their existence, but most prominently so over the last two centuries; the two exceptions being migration movements to Chile and Australia, and recent attempts to ready the island for tourism through long-term investments in infrastructure.

Given its size, location and agricultural limitations, the island has attracted a particular set of inhabitants. Chapter 8 divides them into short-term and long-term specialists, ranging from pirates to cash croppers, hunters/herders, monastics/retirees and tourists. Of these, only those staying over longer periods of time or involved in large-scale ventures are archaeologically visible. Lacking a good harbour, offering only basic agriculture and few other resources, it comes as little surprise that most specialists only stayed for short periods of time, often seasonally or merely for a few years. Long-term habitation has been comparatively rare over the lifetime of the island. This, the authors conclude in chapter 9, is a direct result of the island's size and location, which made it an inherently fragile place.

While there is no doubt that biogeographical limitations play a major role in island environments, with small islands recognized as particularly fragile, I cannot help but feel that Bevan and

Conolly's biogeographic outlook has prevented the authors from investigating in more detail how Antikytherans failed or succeeded in overcoming these environmental obstacles. For example, all islands in the Mediterranean, regardless of their size and location, have experienced long periods of abandonment between phases of habitation. As H. Dawson has demonstrated with a sample of 20 islands ('A question of life or death? Seafaring and abandonment in the Mediterranean and Pacific Islands', in A. Anderson, J.H. Barrett and K.V. Boyle (eds), *The Global Origins and Development of Seafaring*, Cambridge 2010, 203–12), abandonment periods were frequent and could last between 200 and 2,500 years. Only islands with an important raw-material source experienced drastically shorter abandonment periods. As regards small islands, Dawson has demonstrated that islands smaller than 10km² experienced slightly longer abandonment periods, but disadvantages could be negated by stronger links with neighbouring islands and deliberate economic strategies. Interesting comparanda are the islands of Pseira, 2km off the coast of Crete, and Aegina, in the Saronic Gulf. Both islands were able to thrive above and beyond their environmental potential and are exemplars of how communities can overcome supposed limitations. Pseira, despite its tiny size (ca. 3km²) and a distinct lack of resources, including water, supported a thriving Bronze Age community (see the various excavation and survey volumes by P.P. Betancourt and C. Davaras). Similarly, Aegina with an estimated agricultural production able to support 5,000 inhabitants was able to provide for 35,000 around 500 BC (T.J. Figueira, *Aegina: Society and Politics*, New York 1981; P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, Oxford 2000, 119). Thus, instead of invoking biogeography, I would have liked the book to explore in more depth why Antikytherans were not able or willing to capitalize on their close connections with Crete and Kythera.

All in all, I found the book not only clear and logical, but truly innovative in its data analysis and far-reaching in the questions it poses and themes it covers. And while I do not agree with all the authors' arguments, their ideas and interpretations have been greatly inspiring.

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