The Sacred Landscape at Leska and Minoan Kythera

Mercourios Georgiadis

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View of the Leska peak from the south; photo M. Georgiadis.

Back cover
View of the *baetyl* at the highest point of Leska peak, from the west; photo M. Georgiadis. Portrait of the author; photo G. Apostolou. Satellite view of the island of Kythera; Google Earth, accessed October 26, 2022, https://earth.google.com/web/@36.24135585,23.06259416,122.41382555a,67269.48362217d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=CkoaSBJCCi-UweDE0OWRlNzYwOGI5ZmQyOGQ6MHgxNTg5OTAwNzFlOWEzMWE3GaQFHs6yIUJAIeuUovA0-jZAKgdLeXRoZXJhGAIgAQ. View of the Leska peak from the south; photo M. Georgiadis.

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To Antonis and Litsa

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List of Abbreviations

APKAS	Australian Paliochora-Kythera Archaeological Survey
ca.	circa
Ch	chert
cm	centimeter(s)
CSPS	Centre for Spartan and Peloponnesian Studies
d.	diameter
EB	Early Bronze
EBA	Early Bronze Age
EC	Early Cycladic
EH	Early Helladic
EM	Early Minoan
EPCA	Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities
ext.	external
F	figurine
FN	Final Neolithic
g	gram(s)
INSTAP	Institute for Aegean Prehistory
int.	internal
KIP	Kythera Island Project
km	kilometer(s)
L.	length
LB	Late Bronze
LBA	Late Bronze Age
LC	Late Cycladic
LH	Late Helladic
LM	Late Minoan
m	meter(s)
M	metal
m asl	meters above sea level
MAT	Mediterranean Archaeological Trust
MB	Middle Bronze
MC	Middle Cycladic
MH	Middle Helladic
MM	Middle Minoan
mm	millimeter(s)
mya	million years ago
P	pottery
Pb	pebble
PG	Protogeometric
ST	stone tool
SV	stone vessel
T.1, etc.	Trench 1, etc.
th.	thickness
w.	width

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Introduction

Kythera

The island of Kythera is situated southeast of the Peloponnese and northwest of Crete, forming the southwest edge of the Aegean Sea. It has a roughly oblong shape and is 278 km² in size (Ill. 1; Bevan 2002, 217; Bevan, Frederick, and Krachtopoulou 2003, 217; Bevan and Conolly 2003–2004, 123; Broodbank and Kiriatzi 2007, 259). The geographical position of the island makes it a nexus for voyages between the Peloponnese and Crete, as well as between the Aegean and Ionian Seas (Bevan 2002, 217; Sakellarakis 2003, 23).

The research conducted on the island of Kythera has revealed a unique, insular sacred landscape, which was active during the Middle and early Late Bronze Age—roughly the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C. (ca. 2000–1500/1450 B.C.). This landscape included a number of cult sites that have been studied to greater or lesser extents. They seem to be part of a broader sacred narrative, which was meaningful to the whole island, interconnecting various beliefs and practices and encompassing different cultic and ritual expressions. The sacred sites included the peak sanctuary at Hagios Georgios sto Vouno (Sakellarakis 1996; 2011; 2012; 2013; Sakellarakis, ed., 2013; Tournavitou 2014), the possibly cult-related Hagia Sofia Cave (Benton 1931–1932, 245; Waterhouse and Hope Simpson 1961, 151; Coldstream and Huxley 1984, 108), the Katafygadi Cave (Leonhard 1899, 15; Petrocheilos 1984, 63–64; Bartsiokas 1998, 33, figs. 70, 71; Tsaravopoulos 2009, 564; Trantalidou 2013, 492 n. 118; Trandalidou et al. 2013–2015), and the peak of Mt. Drymonas (G. Fragkou and A. Tsaravopoulos, pers. comm., 17 July 2014), as well as the numerous contemporary burials found at Kastri and throughout the island (Coldstream and Huxley, eds., 1972; Petrocheilos 1984; Bevan et al. 2002; Preston 2007). The discovery of another sacred site on the summit of Leska has provided richer data that allow a wider analysis and more substantial discussion of the sacred landscape on Kythera (Georgiadis 2012).

The focus on Leska in this volume allows a better understanding of this particular site and the symbolic interactions and connections it had with