

INTRODUCTION



Kythnos is one of the westernmost islands of the Cyclades (**figs 1-3**). It lies 52 nautical miles from Piraeus and has an area of 99 sq. km. Its hilly lands form two main mountain ranges with orientation from NE to SE. The highest peak of Kakovolos Mount that traverses the North part of the island is 355 m high, the peaks of the South range, i.e. Prophitis Elias to the NE and Merovigli to the SE, rise to 365 m and 317 m respectively. In the centre of the island, between the two mountain ranges is a large plateau surrounding the present-day capital, Chora (Messaria)¹. The numerous deep valleys that are formed have rich vegetation largely due to the seasonal streams running through most of them. The bays formed at the estuaries of those streams feature alluvial deposits. The island's ground is composed of various types of crystalline slates (metamorphic rock) with intervening marble horizons which have been observed to contain iron, especially in the West of the island. Today, a large part of the island is covered with maquis and phrygana.

The island was unexplored until recently. Only a few of the early travelers were occupied with the description of antiquities, and those who did highlighted the scarcity of material remains from antiquity on the island. In addition, written sources are extremely sparing regarding relevant historical information.

The university excavation at the site of "Vryokastro" of Kythnos (**fig. 4**) began in 2002 and it is still in progress. It followed the systematic survey, conducted from 1990 to 1995 and 2001. The site is identified as the ancient *polis* of Kythnos, of the homonymous Cycladic island, which was continuously inhabited from the beginning of

the first millennium B.C. until the 6th-7th c. A.D. (**figs 5-9**)

This book focuses on the sanctuary excavated at the North extremity of the North Plateau, while a short account of the sanctuaries (**figs 10-12**) and other antiquities both from the ancient town as well from the rest of the island is also included.

The main sanctuary presented here was fully excavated from 2002 to 2006. The finds attest that it was active during the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods. The twin temple (**Building 3**) was found partly un plundered, with all the valuable offerings within the back chamber (*adyton*) *in situ*. Two altars, as well as an extensive deposit containing innumerable votives were explored South of the temple.

Between 2009 and 2010 a monumental terrace (**Terrace 4**) was partly investigated West of the sanctuary and in close relationship with it, possibly representing the new Agora of the Hellenistic town. Nearby, at a lower level, a public building of the Classical-Hellenistic era, perhaps a *Prytaneion* (**Building 5**), was also excavated between 2009 and 2013 (**fig. 12, left**).

In 2015 a survey as well as surface cleanings were conducted in the South part of the Middle Plateau. Excavation of the two well preserved **Buildings 1 and 2 and an ancient cistern** was conducted between 2016 and 2018. The evidence so far confirms that the area was also dedicated to cult practices.

The aim of the book is to present an up to date summary in English of the preliminary results of the above mentioned excavations, taking into account also the individual studies of the numerous collaborators of the project, which are currently under publication in the Kythnos excavation series, mostly



Fig. 1. Map of the islands of the Aegean (VLACHOPOULOS 2006, map. p. 13).



in Greek. The main body of the text is based on the preliminary publications published elsewhere by the author in English (2005, 2017), Greek (2007), French (2009) and German (2010).

The research programme was conducted by the Department of History, Archaeology and Social Anthropology of the University of Thessaly in collaboration with the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Cyclades (former 21st Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities) of the Greek Ministry of

Culture. The author is the director of the University Research Team, while the Ephorate was represented from 2002 by V. Giannouli and since 2012 by D. Papaggelopoulou.

NOTE

1. For the etymology of the toponym “Messaria” see Miliarakis 1892; Hadzidaki 1894.



Fig. 2. Map of the Cyclades (VLACHOPOULOS 2006, p. 204).





Fig. 3. Map of Kythnos, with all important ancient sites indicated (PAPANGELOPOULOU 2017, p. 322, fig. 1).

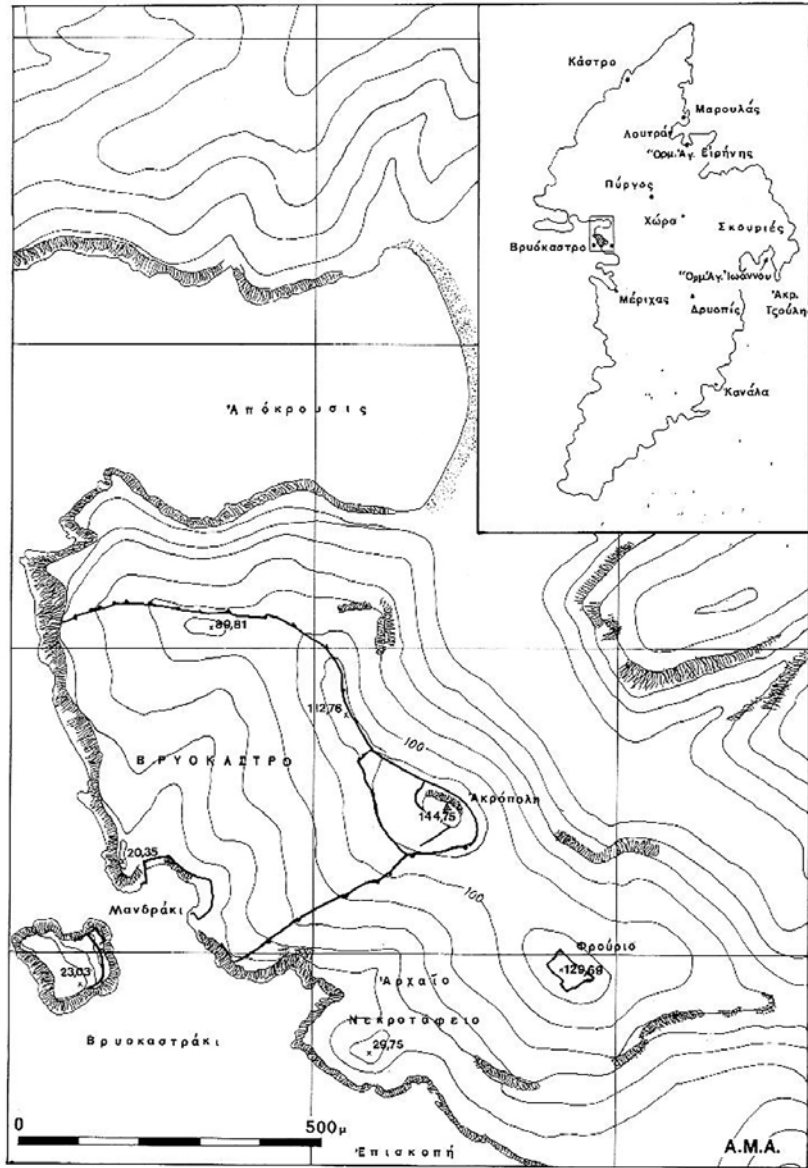


Fig. 4. Map of Kythnos and location of ancient town (Vryokastro) (Drawing A. Mazarakis Ainian).



Fig. 5. View of Vryokastro from the North-West.

Fig. 6. Aerial photograph of Vryokastro, looking towards the North (photo C. Xenikakis, 2016).



Fig. 7. Aerial photograph of Vryokastro (photo C. Xenikakis, 2016).



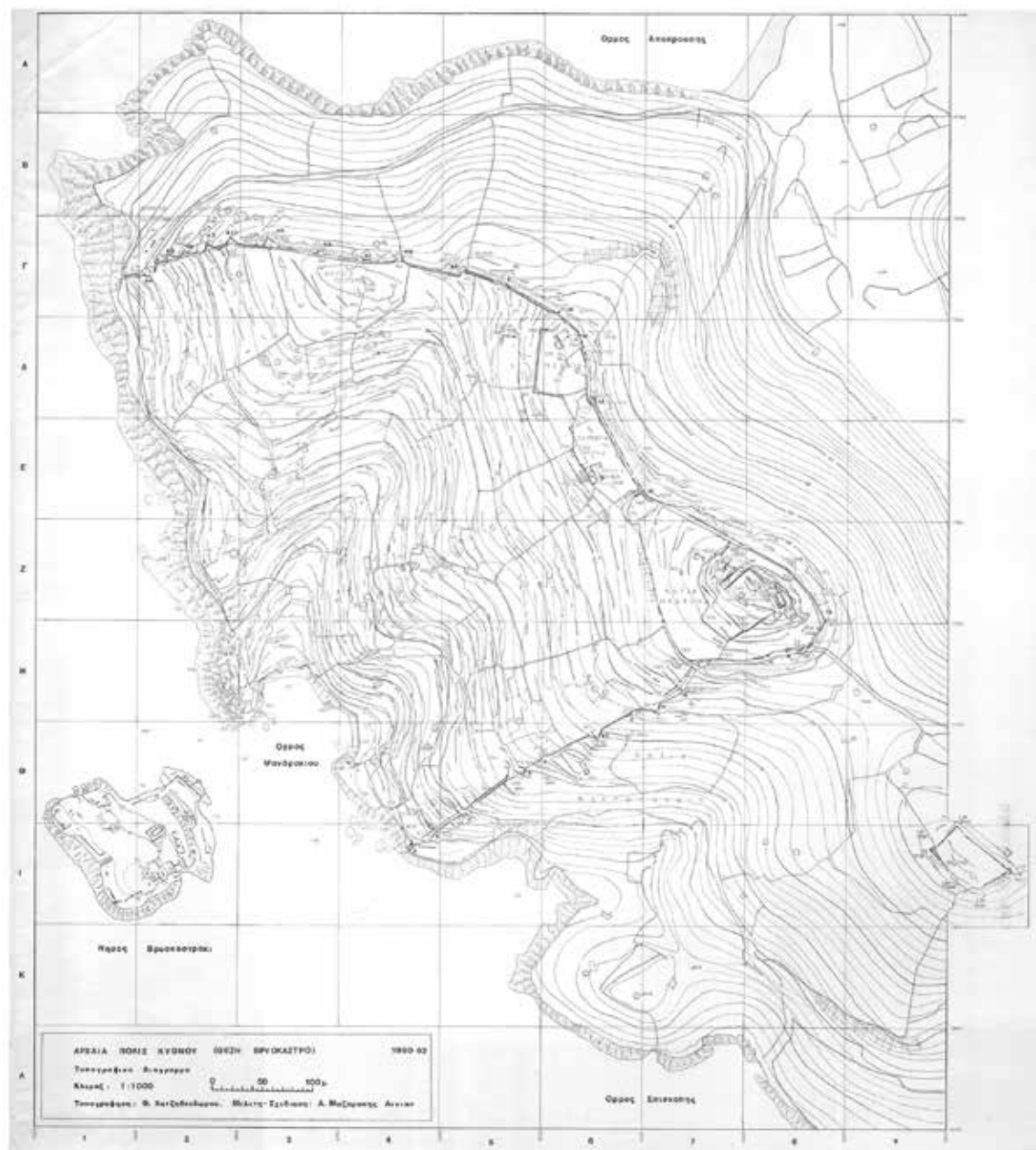


Fig. 8. Detailed plan of Vryokastro (A. Mazarakis Ainian & Th. Chatzitheodorou).

Fig. 9. Simplified plan of Vryokastro – only ancient remains shown (A. Gounaris, based on A. Mazarakis Ainian & Th. Chatzitheodorou).

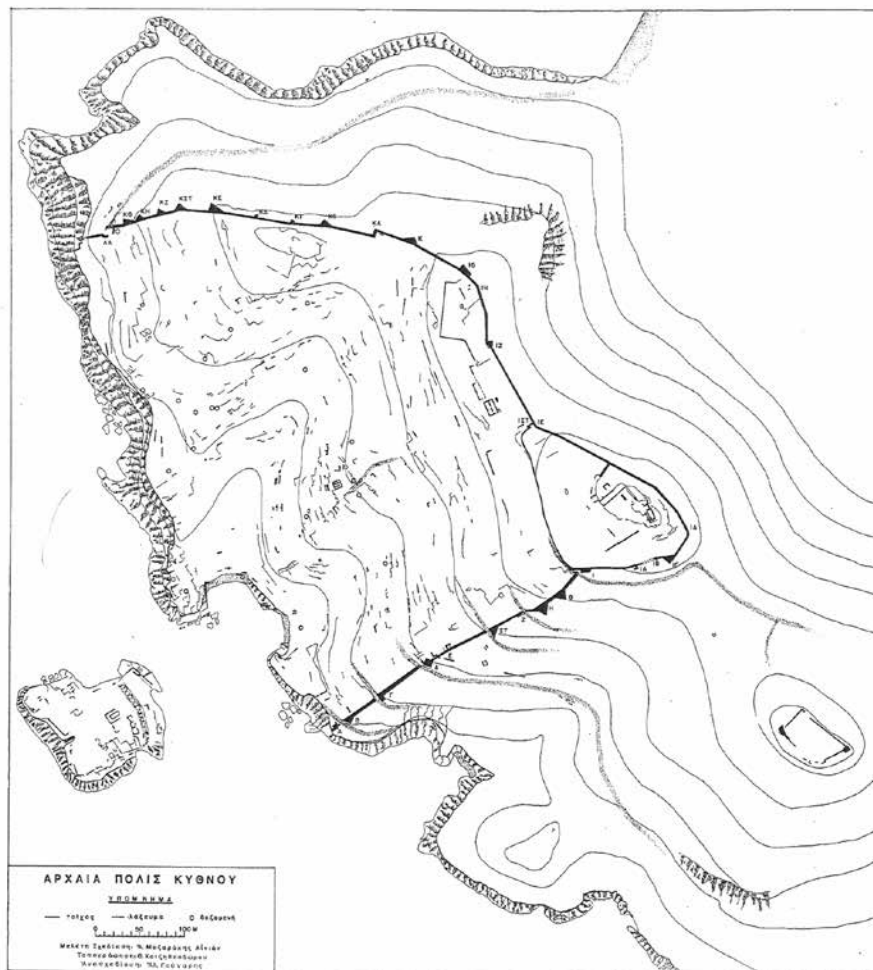


Fig. 10. Vryokastro. The sanctuaries of the Middle Plateau of the Upper Town (aerial photo from the South, C. Xenikakis, 2017).





Fig. 11. Vryokastro. The sanctuary of the South extremity of the Middle Plateau, from the North, the Acropolis in the background (aerial photo C. Xenikakis, 2017).

Fig. 12. Vryokastro. Aerial photograph of the Acropolis and Middle Plateau from the West (C. Xenikakis, 2016).

