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# **Change and Resilience**

## **The Occupation of Mediterranean Islands in Late Antiquity**

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## Islands and Resilience: Christianization Processes in the Cyclades

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*Commonly perceived as pawns in wider imperial machinations, the Cyclades have often been side-lined as peripheral due to their assumed seclusion. Conversely, even a brief analysis of the archaeological evidence indicates that these islands had groups of resident Christian communities, and experienced the monumentalized manifestation of Christianity, much earlier than their mainland counterparts to the west. To establish why this is the case, it is necessary to shed the bias of preconceived notions of insularity. In so doing, this allows identification of the significant variety of communication networks that the islands had. Evidence of Christianization is seen in the spread of churches throughout the islands. The earliest churches were founded through strategic or organic processes; that is to say as a consequence of, for example, imperial or ecclesiastical intentionality, or as indirect results of contact through movement of people for purposes such as trade or craft. As such, it represents processes of complexity. Furthermore, it is suggested that a natural resilience of the islands meant that the impact of Christianity was minimal on daily life.*

### Introduction

For millennia, writers and historians have dismissed the Roman and Late Antique Cyclades as isolated and peripheral—for example, Catullus (*Carmen* 4): “And [the boat] denies that the shore of the menacing Adriatic denies this, or the Cyclades awkward [to navigate], or noble Rhodes”. When they are mentioned, it is largely in terms of their insularity—as havens for pirates, places of exile, or targets for invasions. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Cyclades have become a trope for danger: “This year has been to me like steering through the Cyclades in a storm without a rudder; I hope to have a less dangerous and more open sea the next ...” *Thomas Sheridan to his friend Dean Jonathon Swift (1735–36)* (Swift 1768: 153). It is worth

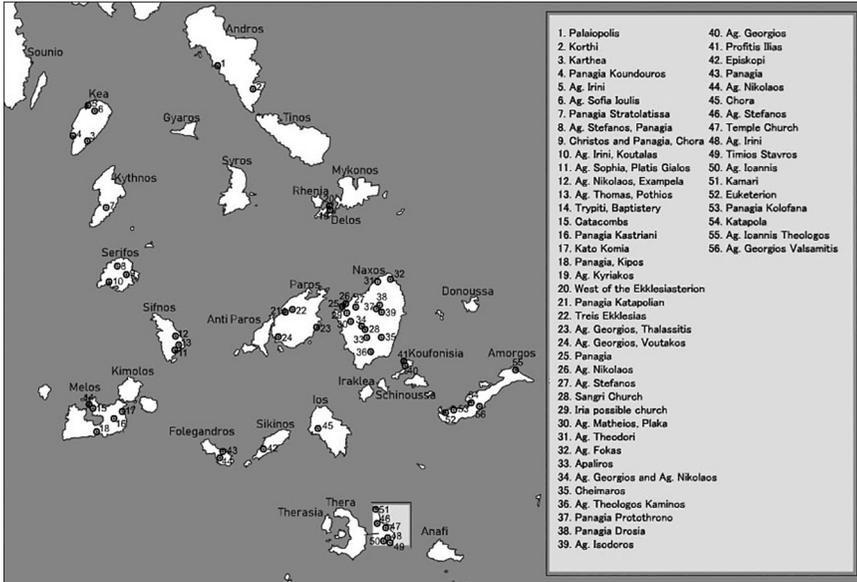


Figure 8.1. Map of the Cyclades showing location of the churches.

noting that those who write in negative terms about the islands tend not to be from islands themselves, while island writers are often more sympathetic to their homeland. For example, Paros' famous poet, Archilochus, seems to have written favorably about his island (he mentions figs and seafaring). The opposite is not always true: some well-famed island authors such as Peig Sayers wrote endless tracts about the misery of life on the Basket Islands, off the Kerry coast in Ireland.

In recent years, there has been something of an adjustment in the way islands are perceived in scholarship, particularly as positive views of resilience and adaptability begin to underpin interpretations. This is paralleled in literature; where once islands signified remoteness, as mobility across the world has increased, the idea of the quiet island has become a positive (Myres 2011). Crucially, an analysis of the archaeology of the Cyclades in the Roman and Late Antique periods indicates more the optimistic view of life on the islands, rather than the gloom-laden one purported in the literary data. In a sense, the lived experience is the resilient and dynamic one, while the notional one is conservative and isolated. It is unquestionable that the islands faced significant challenges, including the collapse of Delos, the Cyclades' major trade and religious hub, with ensuing changes in networks and economy, as well as wars being played out in their waters. In spite of such setbacks, the islands seem to have rebounded, continued to thrive, and remained well-

networked into wider socio-political and religious systems. This is shown by the fact that islands such as Amorgos, Paros, and Thera were some of the earliest in the Greek provinces to have Christian churches and is indicative of resilience and complexity seen on the islands today (Figure 8.1). In this chapter, I address the central question of why the apparently isolated Cycladic islands were among the first in the Greek provinces to be Christianized and how these processes occurred. By taking a diachronic approach, some of the bias of expectation of change with the adoption of a new religion will be challenged. Within this context of a positive approach, the chapter focuses on portable material culture and the topography of the churches. Through comparative data and application of theoretical approaches, I argue that there are natural and engineered tendencies for islands to be resilient and open to new ideas that encompass theories of complexity for understanding Christianization processes.

### **Christianization Processes**

Recent analysis of the topography and architecture of Late Antique churches has contributed to understanding the spread of Christianity within the Eastern provinces (Sweetman 2010; 2015a; 2015b; 2017). In some cases, it has been possible to postulate reasons why certain places were Christianized at particular times (for example, through pilgrimage or trade), and the next stage is to examine the practicalities of how this happened. Islands are a particularly good place to embark on such a study, in part because insular spaces represent dichotomies: they are isolated yet central, and innovative yet traditional. In travelers' tales, islands are commonly present in mythic and/or real circumstances. They are seen as representative of the journey but are also depicted in contradictory ways: as welcoming and threatening, as places of calm and agitation, or as wild and civilized (Chamberlin 2013: xiii). Just as individual islands have seemingly contrary characteristics, so too do groups of islands. The Cyclades are often discussed in terms of being a monolithic group, with the consequence that individual islands are lost in generalizations of isolation. However, as we will see here, certain islands played different roles within the wider networks of trade, tourism, and pilgrimage, while others may not have participated directly, but rather indirectly through other islands. In this respect, a diachronic view of the Cyclades shows that they conform to processes of dialectical change, where apparent paradoxes are incorporated into society.

Islands have a considerable reputation as being resilient, particularly in terms of battles with climate change, and especially issues with rising sea levels.<sup>1</sup> As Dahlberg (2015: 543) has noted, there are widely varying definitions of resilience. Across most disciplines, however, there is fundamental agreement that it signifies "to rebound" and the ability to absorb and adapt to change (although in common parlance the

phrase tends to be used in the more negative sense of resisting). A similar issue exists with the use of the word “adaptation” that is central to island resilience: “Adaptation has been framed in terms of identifying what is to be preserved and what is expendable, rather than what can be reformed or gained” (Pelling 2010: 9).

Ecologists were some of the first to apply the concept of resilience to understand how swift disasters, as well as long-term events, are dealt with (Rose 2017: 19). Several disciplines now work with theories such as individual and community resilience, and also resilience as a process. But as Cutter et al. (2008: 598) note, it is still difficult to assess and quantify the role of community or individual resilience. Further complexities arise when trying to ascertain whether repeated incidents (both natural and manufactured) resulted in an acquired resilience or, rather, made islands more vulnerable: “Vulnerability is the pre-event, inherent characteristics or qualities of social systems that create the potential for harm” (Cutter et al. 2008: 599).

The application of these theories is even more complicated when relating them to past societies. An advantage of examining an archipelago, however, is that it might be possible to identify vulnerabilities and resiliences of different islands, leading to a deeper understanding of how they adapted to change. Islands have a robustness that makes them strong enough to absorb change without impacting the security of their own identity. This may come from the sense of uncertainty with which island communities naturally live, giving them a sense of readiness and, arguably, a natural resilience. In fact, when examining islands that face challenges of climate change, what can be seen is a strong community involvement and, in many cases, even the banding together of diverse islands in the face of a common threat. For example, the SIDS (Small Island Developing States) group consists of islands from the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans that do not share a common culture but consider themselves like-minded in the face of climate change induced by larger, more powerful countries. Resilience, Petzold (2017: 25) notes, does not imply passivity or conservatism, and in fact a complex system needs constant change and ‘non-linear’ behavior. Furthermore, different agents (local and global) can be identified in building resilience (Ollwig 2012: 112). This is particularly pertinent in the Cyclades, which were part of a wider imperial system, but maintained strong community identities.

### **Resilience and Complexity Theory**

Complexity theory identifies a process of sharing ideas used to initiate change, which is manifested through adaptive behavior where the change is quickly taken on (Sweetman 2015: 289). There are elements of both intended and organically instigated changes. If there is sufficient complexity within a

region, new ideas may emerge that are not necessarily predictable. So while there may be processes of planned change (for example, the desire to build a church), their outcomes may be unintended. With complexity theory in mind, it is easy to see how island communities are among the earliest to build churches, while the elements of unintended consequences mean that there is a diversity of effects.

In earlier work on Christianization processes, I have identified three different means for the spread of church building: complexity, social movement and tipping point (Sweetman 2015b). Although the processes happen sequentially, they are not tied to specific time-periods and I have argued that the earliest churches were constructed through complexity. Complexity processes led to the earliest churches in the Peloponnese being constructed at the edges of sanctuaries or in major port towns, where there was a high volume of traffic and multiple networks already in existence. In these areas, the population was used to new ideas and therefore adapted quickly to change (Sweetman 2015a: 289–290). Furthermore, those islands that were already more culturally diverse were perhaps among the first to hear of new trends, as well as being chosen to have strategically-placed churches because of their high level of traffic.

Despite the potential for using islands as a means of understanding a range of issues—from political structuring processes to social interaction, as well as continuity and change—islands in the Late Antique period remain an under-utilized resource. With the benefit of a long-term perspective, what can be seen on the islands is acceptance of significant socio-political and religious transformations, as well as adaptations to them that resulted in changes that would probably not be perceptible within a generation.

The Christianization of the Cyclades was not a sudden process; in fact, the outcomes should be traced to much earlier in the period, when the Cyclades were part of the Roman Empire. Just as contemporary ancient sources and modern scholars emphasize the isolation of the islands, they also tend to treat them erroneously as a unified archipelago. In the Hellenistic period, the Cyclades were the center of religious and economic movements in the Eastern Mediterranean. But once Delos, a major hub, was taken out, the network collapsed and the Cyclades changed. When the Cyclades were navigated in the Roman period, ships sailed east–west through the islands as fast as they could, rarely stopping unless it was necessary to do so (Le Quéré 2015a: 58–59). Opportunities and weaknesses came into play for different islands: Melos, for example, became a more significant player in terms of trade, but many of the other islands, such as Tinos, were self-sufficient and did not attract much external attention (Sweetman 2016).

Throughout the Roman period, many of the Cycladic islands played a variety of roles within the wider imperial networks. Levels of participation varied, depending on willingness and resources of the individual islands, as well as a degree of involvement by requirement. For example, with a desire to make the most of its mineral resources, Melian communities made a number of safe harbors around the islands available to move its alum off the island in as efficient a manner as possible (Photos-Jones and Hall 2014: 68–73). The distribution of Melian amphorae as far as northern Italy is indicative of the success of its adaptation to new trading potentials after the collapse of Delos (Quiri and Spagnolo Garziola 2015). Andros, Thera, Paros, and Naxos also appear to have maintained reasonable trade links for their agricultural and marble supplies. Islands such as Tinos and Delos continued to be the focus of religious tourism and others (such as Serifos, Kythnos, and Amorgos) were commonly used for exiles and, as such, different and less enduring connections were made with the imperial network (Sweetman 2016).

The third and early fourth century was a period of fluctuation, in terms of the changing Roman Empire and the foundation of Constantinople. Giardina (2007: 74) argues that significant economic changes occurred between the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Diocletian, when there was a decrease in population, agricultural production and tax increases. Debasement of coinage did not help to combat this, but to a degree the expansion of imperial-owned properties did make a difference. Where

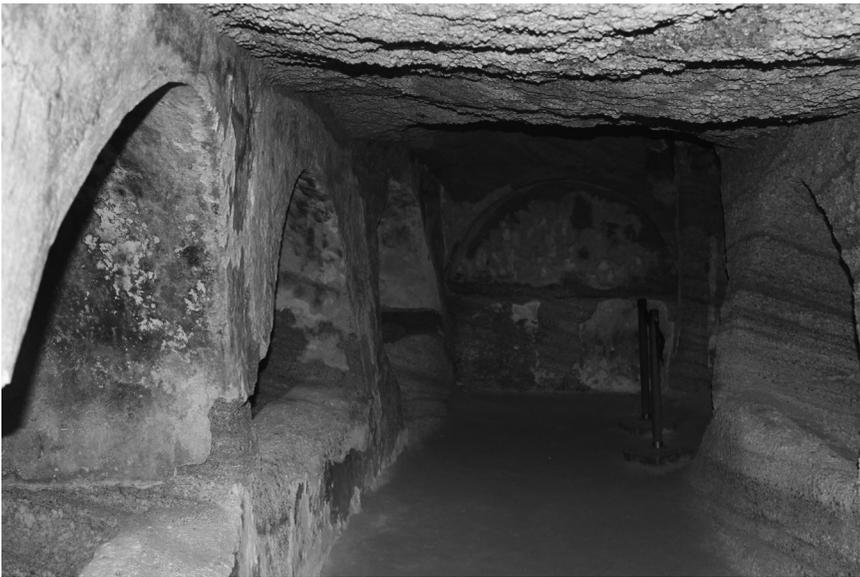


Figure 8.2. Melos, Catacombs.



Figure 8.3. Amorgos, Eukterion.

once the Late Antique economy was seen as a decline, it is increasingly being seen as a period of diversity and prosperity (Giardina 2007: 75). The assumption of swift and significant social changes during the period of the rise of Christianity is also being re-evaluated (Sweetman 2015b), and the archaeology of the Cyclades also indicates that evidence for change is less perceptible than supposed. Diocletian created the province of the islands (*Provincia Insularum*), which was part of the Diocese of Asia under the Prefecture of the East, with Rhodes as its capital. This situation lasted from



Figure 8.4. Thera, Agia Irini.



Figure 8.5. Paros, Katapoliani.

around A.D. 293 to 563 when the islands became part of the *quaestura exercitus* under Justinian. The Cyclades came under religious jurisdiction from the East. The extent to which religious authority played a role in the impact of Christianization processes, however, appears to be negligible (Sweetman 2017). Through an examination of how Christianity spread, we can assess the evidence (or not) for change on the islands themselves, especially in terms of wider networks such as religious and economic ones. Giardina's (2007: 75) questioning of terminology is a useful addition to the discussion. He notes that terms such as "decline" and "continuity" are often replaced with "transition". Although the word is meant to be neutral, he believes that it does not allow enough emphasis on continuity.

### Early Christian Material

The majority of the evidence for Early Christian communities on the islands comes from the churches constructed between the late fourth and seventh centuries (Figure 8.1), yet evidence for Christian communities active from the second century is plentiful. Most striking are the Christian catacombs on Melos which were in use from the second to the fourth centuries (Figure 8.2). A combination of traditions is used in some of these burials: for example, the use of a coin to pay Charon on a Christian burial, and an inscription threatening a curse in the name of the 'guardian angel' on any attempts to include non-family members in the grave (Sweetman 2019). A diverse group of communities lived in the Cyclades in the Roman and Late Antique periods. In addition to Christian and polytheistic groups, Valeva and Vionis (2015: 343) note the evidence for Jewish communities in Thera, Naxos, Paros, and Melos. Epigraphic data is not especially revealing for the fourth century, save for some epitaphs from the Melian catacombs and epigrams from Keos (Kiourtizan 2000: 83–96). A significantly larger number of inscriptions is found in the fifth and sixth centuries, including the names of individual priests and deacons from Melos, Naxos, Paros, and Delos, and graffiti from Syros (Kiourtizan 2000). The Ecumenical Councils record the attendance of a number of Cycladic bishops: for example, bishops from Paros and Naxos attended the 3rd and 4th Councils. Bishoprics are known from islands such as Amorgos and Thera. It can be no coincidence that the earliest churches constructed in the Cyclades have been identified on Amorgos, Kalotaritissa Bay (Figure 8.3), Thera, Perissa (Agia Irini) (Figure 8.4) and Paros Parikia (Katapoliani) (Figure 8.5). In each case, the earliest church foundations at these sites appear to be from the late fourth century or possibly the early fifth. This is at least a generation earlier than most churches in the province of Achaea and, with the exception of the KMF basilica in Knossos, earlier than most of the churches in Crete as well.

Previously (Sweetman 2016), I argued that the foundations were a result of imperial input (Empress Helena, in the case of Katapoliani), trade or contact with Asia Minor (Amorgos), and trade or Jewish communities (Thera). However, I have yet to explore these suppositions in terms of the practical means for these connections, via analysis of evidence of contact through trade (pottery, lamps, and numismatics) and individual travel (epigraphy). From the fourth century, the majority of the Cyclades appear to have been self-sufficient but lacking in the capability to produce a sufficiently significant surplus to attract external buyers. Even the role the Cyclades played in *annona* provision is difficult to define, although Diamanti (2016: 693) suggests that the number of sixth-century amphorae that the Parians were producing indicates a role as part of the *quaestura exercitus*. Before this period, however, the extent to which large-scale merchants were willing to travel to the islands remains in contention. In addition to Diamanti (2016), Empereur and Picon (1985) have published evidence for significant amphora production on Paros and Naxos. Current exploration of Naxos' south coast is revealing new evidence for small harbors and extensive indications of amphorae.<sup>2</sup> Following his study of the imported ceramics at Karthaia on Keos in the Late Antique period, Zachos suggested that ships called into Keos as a regular stop from the East before heading into Piraeus. He noted evidence of African Red Slip and table wares, along with beehives and amphorae (Zachos 2010: 788–789). This evidence in combination with that from Melos suggests that Kiourtizan's (2000: 17) hypothesis that the Cyclades more generally played a role in the redistribution of goods throughout the Aegean carries weight. This is not a unique situation. Olesen and Hohlfelder (2011: 818) distinguish international harbors such as Portus or Carthage from smaller examples such as Aperlae in Lycia. They suggest that although deepwater freighters could not access the harbor, smaller vessels were able to do so. Aperlae could have redistributed goods to and from the larger nearby harbor at Andriaki.

The issue at hand, however, is identifying where these redistribution points might be. It is important to note the work undertaken by Caraher and Pettegrew (2016: 169) who suggest that evidence of large quantities of amphorae imply wide-scale and state-controlled trade, but that imported fine wares indicate evidence of local tastes and preference. Yet, as they note, fine wares are not as readily visible on surveys, and coarse wares are over-represented in the archaeological record. They also note that the changes in import types may correspond to a specific event in time and are not necessarily a long-term trend (Caraher and Pettegrew 2016: 190–191).

Kingsley and Decker (2001: 3) question the prevailing view propagated in literary sources, such as Libanius, that Constantinople suppressed private commerce between the fourth and fifth centuries. They further

note that in the East there is little evidence of any one particular import dominating pottery distribution in the Aegean East. Contrary to the sources that primarily provide evidence for state and high-level trade, Kingsley and Decker (2001: 5) argue that there was an expectation that local populations would produce their own food, while transformation of ship construction in Late Antiquity created cheaper and more efficiently built ships enabling local, independent business people to set up their own trading ventures. Patterns of internal connections between the Cyclades are further attested by epigraphic data. Religious tourism appears to have been focused more on a local rather than international market, according to the epigraphic data. Overall, as the epigraphic data from Syros suggests, the majority of known visitors come from neighbouring islands and locations such as Andros, Gyaros, Melos, Naxos, Paros, and Thera (Kiourtizan 2000: 25) (Figure 8.1). External visitors to Syros came from Hydra, Miletus, Pinara (Lycia), Peluse (Egypt), and Tyre, but their numbers are fewer than those from neighbouring islands. Examples of the more extraordinary traveller tend to make a greater impression in sources such as St Jerome and Empress Helena (Kiourtizan 2000: 25), although in both of these cases at least they appear to have been accidental pilgrims at the mercy of Cycladic storms.

The question remains of how the first churches came to be constructed on the islands. Thera and Naxos are worth exploring in a little more detail for analysis of the lamps found at a number of sites there. Bournias (2014: 792) concluded that the import profile of the lamps shows a concentration of connections with Asia Minor, Syria, and Cyprus in the Late Antique period. In addition to locally produced lamps at sites such as Gyroulas and Naxos town, there were imports from the Levant and Palestine; there were also copies of Syro-Palestinian lamps which may have been made on site too. Importantly, Bournias noted a complete absence of Athenian third- to fifth-century lamps, which is an unusual feature in the Aegean islands. The presence of imported lamps, as well as the copies, indicates either a direct connection with the Holy Land or possibly indirect connections via Cyprus. As such, these communications with the Holy land illustrate a conduit for the spread of Christianity to the islands. The fact that it was so successful comparatively early is a result of strategic planning in terms of church location and melding of tradition, as well as the openness and resilience of the Cyclades.

### **Spread of Christianity**

Religion spreads through a number of means, such as migration, organized missions or more informal and personal connections (Stump 2008: 20). In



Figure 8.6. Sikinos, Episkopi from the south coast.

some respects, Christianity faced more of a challenge for gaining followers, since it was such a completely new spiritual option, with little connection to older religions (Stump 2008: 39). In light of this, it is possible to see why place was such a fundamental element in conversion processes. It is clear from the location of the Cycladic churches, on routes throughout the islands and places visible from the sea, for example Sikinos (Figures 8.6 and 8.7), that a primary means of conversion was through advertising the church itself. Stump (2008: 21) further notes how the impact of adoption of a new religion is more likely to be noticed in places where there are few existing religious institutions. As such, the fact that it was a supposedly seamless transition is helped by the concentration of cult buildings already on the islands.

As is to be expected from these culturally complex islands, there is significant religious diversity in the Cyclades throughout the Roman period. Although Delos was no longer as religiously significant as it had been in the Hellenistic period, the island had a panoply of sanctuaries which included ones to Egyptian gods (Isis and Serapis), more traditionally Greek sanctuaries (Apollo and Artemis), as well as those with local epithets (Sanctuary of Kynthian Zeus), and new cults like Agathe Tyche. Throughout the Roman period there were many imperial dedications such as those to Augustus, Livia, and Julia Domna. Agrippa and Hadrian attempted (unsuccessfully) to reinvigorate the Delian cult. As both Le



Figure 8.7. Sikinos, Episkopi closer view from the south coast.

Quéré (2015a: 109) and Morales (2016: 146) note, the dedications are indicative of a continued Athenian interest in the island during the Early Imperial period, rather than direct connections with Rome. Assimilation of the Emperors into the Delian cult and the Sanctuary of Apollo was a cultural and religious move that was part of the political propaganda of Athens. There is literary evidence for a Jewish population on Delos (I Maccabees 15: 15–23; Josephus, *Antiquities* 14: 213–216). Many scholars have argued that building GD80 on Delos was a synagogue (Plassart 1914: 23; Bruneau 1982). Trümper (2004) suggested that the building was a diaspora synagogue and Hudson McLean (1996) believes it to have been a Samaritan synagogue. Others such as Mazur and Sukenik (White 1987: 137) argue that the building is both too early and different in form to be considered a synagogue at all. The most recent consensus is that it is a synagogue and likely a diaspora one.

Delos was not alone in its diversity. The wide variety of religion and cult of Palaiopolis, the main city of Andros, is also evident primarily from the epigraphic remains. While the festival of Dionysus was renowned, and recorded by Pliny, there were also the cults of Eileithyia, Estia Voulaia, Apollo, Zeus, Artemis, Nemesis, Isis, and Mithras. There was also imperial



Figure 8.8. Thera, Agios Stefanos.

cult, with a heavy emphasis on worship of Hadrian. It is likely that, as a well-watered and fertile island, Andros was thoroughly networked to other islands in the Cyclades and the dedications by citizens and military certainly indicate connections with the wider imperial network. A similar situation can be seen at the *polis* of Thera, where the profile of the sanctuaries reflects its Hellenistic diversity, with the Sanctuary of Apollo Karneios, Hermes and Herakles, Temple of Dionysus, and Temple of Egyptian gods joining the more traditional Temple of Apollo Pythios.

Widespread architectural evidence for cult practice is not as well-known on islands such as Paros and Naxos, although in each case significant sanctuaries have been investigated. On Naxos, the sanctuaries of Demeter and Dionysus appear to continue in use at least until the third century and both have evidence for a Christian presence (the sanctuary of Demeter is one of the few examples of the conversion of a temple into a church). On Paros, while the temple of Delian Apollo went out of use in the Hellenistic period, it is likely that the sanctuaries of Asclepius and Pythian Apollo continued to be used, possibly even during the period of the building of the Katapoliani church to the southwest.



Figure 8.9. Delos, Agia Kyriaki.

### Location of the Churches

The Christianization of the Cyclades was a successful process in part because the islands were adaptable and used to change, and in part because there were strategic choices made about the location of the first churches, including relationship to earlier cult buildings as well as visibility.

The earliest churches in the Cyclades are all constructed by good harbors. In the case of Thera and Paros, the churches were constructed near or in existing cemeteries on the edge of town, within good sight of incoming vessels to the harbor. The Amorgos church is an interesting example, as it is not actually within the main harbor town of Katapola, but instead in a small harbor on the southwest coast. This gives weight to the suggestion that it functioned more as a *eukterion* or house shrine rather than a public church (Gikoles and Pallas 2014: 377, no. 591). Although establishing the chronology of church foundation in the Cyclades is as problematic as it is across the Empire, it is possible to ascertain that following the first church constructions, a small number of churches were built in the course of the fifth century—for example, at Palaiopolis on Andros, Panayia Kipos on Melos, Agios Stefanos on Thera (Figure 8.8), and Agios Kyrikos on Delos (Figure 8.9) (Sweetman et al. 2018). As with other provinces such as Crete and Achaëa, the majority of Late Antique churches in the Cyclades date to the sixth century. This includes Treis Ekklesies on Paros; the churches at



Figure 8.10. Folegandros, Agios Nikolaos.

Portaria and the Sanctuary of Demeter, as well as Agios Stefanos, Fraron and Panagia Drosiani on Naxos; Agios Ioannis Theologos on Amorgos; and possibly two churches at Karthaia on Keos (Sweetman et al. 2018). Dating issues stem from the lack of well-preserved stratigraphic contexts (with the exception of Treis Ekklesies on Paros, and Sangri and Agios Stefanos on Naxos), and many churches have either been cleared to reveal earlier buildings (Portaria on Naxos) or incorporated into later buildings (Agios Georgios Valsamitis on Amorgos).

As noted elsewhere (Sweetman 2015b), locations for the new Christian churches capitalized on visibility and drew on existing social patterns (traditions and memories) to help situate the church without stress on the local community. In the majority of cases, the new churches were built in existing cemeteries (e.g. Katapoliani on Paros; Figure 8.5), approaches to towns (Agios Stefanos on Thera; Figure 8.8), or other gathering spaces such as holy springs like those at Agios Giorgios Valsamitis on Amorgos or Panagia Kipos on Melos. The mausoleum (Episkopi) on the lower slopes of Agia Marina on Sikinos was probably located in the cemetery of the ancient hilltop town (Figures 8.6 and 8.7); this too became the site of a Late Antique church. On other islands also, churches were located on natural route-ways both in rural and peri-urban spaces: for example, a late fifth- or early sixth-century church was excavated on the approach to Karthaia from the interior of the

island via the Vathypotamos valley (Graindor 1905: 352). On Folegandros, the church of Agios Nikolaos incorporates a number of earlier architectural fragments and it is likely to have been the site of a previous church. This is located on a natural route through the central hills of the island between Chora and the coast (Figure 8.10).

There is little evidence for temple closure or destruction. Those churches that directly re-use temple space in varying ways (particularly the Temple of Demeter and the Temple of Dionysus and Portaria on Naxos) are likely to have been built only after the temple had already gone out of use. A number of other churches on the islands are located close to earlier cult sites—for example, the church above the temples of Apollo and of the Egyptian gods on Thera. Other examples, such as Treis Ekklesies on Paros and Agios Matthaios on Naxos, contain architectural elements of earlier cult buildings in their superstructures. As with other provinces, the location of the churches and their relationship to earlier cult buildings by and large suggests a strategic process of Christianization undertaken to encourage participation in the new religion through visibility and availability. That does not preclude individual expressions of Christian ideals. For example, a grave relief of a poet or philosopher now in the Andros Museum had a Christian cross carved into it at a later date.

### Location of the Settlements

A significant issue with the study of the Cyclades (and in fact many other places) is the expectation of change because of a known event (such as the spread of Christianity). However, what is abundantly clear from the Cyclades is that, although there is a religious change, there are significant amounts of continuity in settlement patterns. The Cyclades in the Late Antique period are still primarily known through the evidence of the churches and cemeteries. In recent years, however, more attention has been given to secular material from the period. The evidence revealed through rescue excavations and by surveys on land and underwater is indicative of a largely unchanged urban landscape. It is more difficult to assess the rural situation, but we will examine the data to see what can be gleaned.

In terms of the archipelago, the islands that seem to have been of significance in the wider structures of the Empire, such as Melos, Thera, Paros, and Andros, continued to play similar roles throughout the Roman and Late Antique periods. There are certainly changes: for example, Tinos does not appear to have attracted the same kind of external visitors as it did in the Early Imperial period. However, it is arguable that this change occurred in the third century and not as a result of Christian input. Unless an island had specific resources (such as Melos and Paros) or food (Theran wine) or could be used as a center for redistribution (Amorgos), it is unlikely they

would have attracted a multitude of different visitors who would leave clear evidence of their presence on the island.

The majority of settlement evidence for the Late Antique period comes from urban spaces. Of the primary sites that have been investigated, such as Paliopolis on Andros, Parikia on Paros, Chora on Naxos, and Perissa on Thera, there is little to indicate significant changes in the topography of the city from the Roman to Late Antique periods. In fact, excavations in these urban areas have indicated long-term continuity in domestic and industrial spaces (Sweetman 2013). Surveys have been undertaken on Kea, Melos, and Naxos; and, although it is more difficult to identify chronologically well-defined rural settlement distributions, there seems to be continuity and increase in the number of rural sites from Roman through Late Antique (Cherry et al. 1991; Renfrew and Wagstaff 1982). It is possible, as I suggest elsewhere, that some islands may have grown in importance throughout the Late Antique period (Sweetman 2019). Amorgos, Thera, and Naxos seem to have been significant hubs in the Late Antique period, marked by several large settlements on each island. More significant changes in settlement evidence in the Cyclades can be identified during the seventh century, when a large number of hill-top settlements on Naxos (Apalirou), Andros, and Kythnos (Kastro) grow and become the major centers at this time. Bournias (2014: 792) suggests that there was little impact of the seventh-century Slavic raids in terms of Cycladic trade patterns and that it was the Arab raids that were more disruptive, leading to recession and growing regionalism.

The lack of change in settlement evidence until the seventh century suggests that the impact of Christianization was minimal and that this is reflective of a high level of resilience. It was a slow-paced change and one engineered to incorporate existing social processes and tradition as much as possible. The visibility of the churches in highly visited space meant that there was always a subtle remainder of the promise of the new religion. The islands that were among the first to have Christian churches built on them were those that were already well networked with a diversity of existing cults, including traditional polytheistic cults as well as the Jewish diaspora. Once the first churches were constructed on Amorgos, Thera, and Paros, the motivation for further church-building is seen first in ports of the other islands such as Melos, Andros, and Delos, before the interior areas of those original islands. This further emphasizes the significant role well-connected port towns played in the process on the islands, both in terms of being open to accepting new ideas and actually hearing about them first. Christianization processes are not identical on all the islands; for example, a Late Antique church has yet to be identified on Tinos, while Deligannakis has noted Naxos as being different, with the foundation of two churches on earlier cult spaces

(Dionysus and Demeter). Once the momentum for church-building spreads to other islands, there is significant internal variation in how churches are subsequently distributed, based on a range of factors including topography, and both local and imperial choice.

To examine this in a little more detail, it is worth comparing two larger islands, Crete and Cyprus. On Crete, the earliest churches are found in the largest towns on the island, Knossos and Gortyn (Sweetman 2017: 10). Unlike in the Cyclades, the busiest and most cosmopolitan towns were not necessarily coastal. Following these suburban constructions, churches were built along busy routes through the Cretan mountains—for example, along the Amari Valley from Agia Galini in the south to Panormou in the north (Sweetman 2017: 16–17). In contrast, the earliest Cypriot churches were built at coastal locations with an emphasis on towns, particularly in the south and west, throughout the Late Antique period. It has been argued that this was a strategic move to maximize the potential for passing and visiting pilgrims (Sweetman 2017: 23). For both Crete and Cyprus, it is arguable that the urban topography changed over the course of the Late Antique period in order to adapt to the new religious focus in the city—namely, the church (Sweetman 2004: 352). This is not so obviously the case with the cities of the Cycladic islands. What all these islands have in common is the importance of the visibility of the earliest churches. In the case of Crete and Cyprus, the valley and pilgrim routes were marked and arguably used for wayfinding. The same might be the case for the Cycladic islands without the early churches. In these examples, churches such as Episkopi on Sikinos (Figures 8.6 and 8.7), Agia Anagyri on Anafi, Kastro on Kythnos, Chora on Serifos, and Kastro on Sifnos would have acted as landmarks for sailors, some of them more visible from the sea than the land. Like Crete, there are churches on internal routes, such as Agios Nikolaos on Folegandros and Agios Stefanos on Serifos. There are clear elements in common between the islands in terms of the Christianization processes: primary among them is the swift adoption of the new religion without significant disruption to everyday life. The paradox of isolation and connection, as well as continuity and change, is central to a sense of island-ness.

### Conclusion

Braudel (1972) argued that Mediterranean unity, the connectivity through objects and landscapes, superseded any impact of change from structuring systems such as the Empire or even unified religion. Although Horden and Purcell (2000) with their emphasis on human agency moved away from the rather deterministic views of Braudel, they all defined the Mediterranean as something of a single entity, connected physically and conceptually by

environment (Concannon and Mazurek 2016: 5). I would argue, however, that it was not so much Mediterranean unity which enabled a buffering from the impact of Christianization, but rather levels of resilience on the individual islands at a particular period. Diversity of island communities is seen with archipelagos and between different islands in terms of Christianization processes. Furthermore, resilience is not necessarily a constant; it is a temporal phenomenon dependent on a range of factors, including how often their levels of resilience are tested.

Islands by their nature will experience change and adopt new ideas faster than mainland locations, but only if the islands are already part of a network or benefitted from phase transition from other islands. Once the initial, strategic, decision to construct a church had been taken, the impetus for further church-building and community use was more organic. In these respects, the Christianization of the Cyclades foreshadows the process on the Greek mainland. The state of being islands has an impact on how early they were Christianized. The consequences of the foundation of the churches and conversion to Christianity on secular life on the islands was, on the whole, quite low-key, with significant continuity in domestic and mortuary contexts. This is what typifies the island-ness of the Cyclades: the successful co-existence of sets of dichotomies.

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### Notes

1. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/islands-champions-resilience>
2. <https://archaeologynewsnetwork.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/underwater-survey-on-south-coast-of.html#Gvc3Hrr8p5FBzlQR.97>

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