Thirsty Seafarers at Temple B of Kommos

Commercial districts and the role of Crete in Phoenician trading networks in the Aegean

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Cover: Kommos bay from the south (by the author)
Back cover: the site of Kommos (by the author)

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Abstract

The island of Crete was an important place for cultural and economic exchanges between Greeks and Near Easterners in the Aegean during the 1st millennium BC. Kommos and its temple provided materials that attest the connections between different populations, such as Greeks and Phoenicians. An examination of these objects and those form other Cretan sites such as Knossos, the Idaean Cave and Eleutherna is presented in this book. Moreover, the case of Kommos is compared to other Aegean cult structures of similar characteristics, such as the Sanctuary of Apollo in Eretria, the Heraion of Samos, the temple of Kition in Cyprus or the Temple of Vroulia in Southern Rhodes, among other temples. These appear to be not just religious spaces but also economic and social meeting points, integrated in networks of commercial districts connected by land and sea routes. This book aims to understand Phoenician presence and trade in Aegean temples, as well as how Crete shaped its role within the context of Mediterranean trade routes from the East to the West.

Preface and acknowledgments

This book stems from my doctoral thesis, developed between 2015 and 2020. The idea of examining the archaeological record of the island of Crete started when I was studying my Master's on Archaeology of the Classical Mediterranean at the University of Sheffield (United Kingdom) between 2014 and 2015. The history and archaeology of the island fascinated me during the courses of John Bennet, Paul Halstead and Peter Day, and, having some background on Phoenician studies thanks to Maria Eugènia Aubet's lessons during my undergraduate degree at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona, Spain) and I ended up focusing my Master's dissertation on the role of Phoenicians on Crete under the supervision of J. Bennet. Later, I decided to continue researching on this field, and this is when I started off my PhD, supervised by M.E. Aubet (Universitat Pompeu Fabra) and Susan Sherratt (University of Sheffield), examining not only the role those Phoenicians played on Crete, but also how they could have helped shape trading networks all over the Aegean Sea through the establishment of the so-called commercial districts and commercial temples.

I would like to thank Maria Eugènia Aubet for her ideas and suggestions, as well as for encouraging me to write my PhD thesis, which later on became this book. Writing it would not have been possible without her; moreover, the conditions under which it began, while I was in the UK and she was in Spain, were difficult for both of us, so I am also grateful for her patience and the ease with which we could communicate online.

Besides her, I would also like to thank all the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield, where I took my Master's, and particularly, John Bennet, who not only supervised my thesis but was also my tutor and mentor throughout the whole academic year. I am also very grateful to Peter Day and Paul Halstead, from whom I learned much about archaeological science and who were extremely patient with me, bearing in mind that I was coming from a different field.

Special thanks should also go to Susan Sherratt, who supervised me at the University of Sheffield while she was a visiting researcher there during the academic year 2016–2017. During that time I decided the main sites that would be explored throughout my research, making clear that my main focus would be on Kommos in southern Crete. In that moment I started planning some field trips in order to get to know the archaeological site. My first visits to the site were in August 2016 and 2017. I managed not only to understand the archaeological organisation of the settlement but also to appreciate the geographical space of the island, the distances between sites, and the difficulty or ease of access from one area to another.

I am also grateful to Antonis Sardakis and Niki Sardaki, who helped me when, in 2018, I managed to access the Apotheke of Pitsidia (Crete, Greece) as a member of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. There I drew and photographed Phoenician sherds of both the catalogued and uncatalogued pottery, getting familiar with the fabrics, shapes and thicknesses, as well as pieces with inscriptions and miscellaneous objects, such as faience beads and vessels.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Vyron Antoniadis, who guided me during my 2019 stay at the National Hellenic Research Foundation, where I explored the role of Aegean temples in terms of their functions and Near Eastern material, such as Egyptian or Phoenician objects. Furthermore, I am grateful for the support and guidance of other researchers from the centre, especially Giorgos Bourogiannis, an expert on Rhodian and Near Eastern Black on Red pottery, and Demi Andrianou, specialist on furniture and Iron Age material culture of the Near East. Moreover, I have been able to visit the archaeological sites of Eretria, with the help of its excavators Tobias Kapf and Samuel Verdan, as well as Corinth, guided by the associate director of its excavations, Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst.

Special thanks also go to other students of archaeology who have walked with me along the path of researching and writing my thesis, including Eleni Makrigiorgou, Malamatenia Vlachou, and Carolina Jiménez. I am also deeply grateful to the Kampourakis family, who hosted me on Crete several times and offered me their help to visit numerous archaeological sites, museums, and research centres. And, of course, my deepest thanks go to my friends and family, and, especially, to my brother, Marc, and my parents, Manel and Núria, who supported me unconditionally.

Introduction

Contextual analyses

'Any Phoenicians sailing to the western Mediterranean would have been foolish to avoid the Aegean' (Coldstream 1982: 261) and especially the island of Crete [Figure 1.1]. Possibly towards the end of the 10th century BC, maritime traffic from Phoenicia to the west emerged, and was later intensified by the tribute demands of Assyria after its growth in the 8th century BC (Sherratt and Sherratt 1993: 365–366). Cypro-Levantine objects started to appear in many places, such as Sardinia and Italy, north-west Africa and southern Spain, as well as the Aegean. Even though many Levantine exports are not of Phoenician origin, they were probably carried by Phoenician sailors (Coldstream 2000: 16). Cultural encounters, social interactions and negotiations between Phoenicians and locals from the areas mentioned took place in a so-called 'middle ground', where a phenomenon of hybridisation occurred (Hodos 2009: 222), beliefs were transmitted, and practices were shared and imitated (Kotsonas 2012: 155). Hence, these factors impacted on the identities, ideologies and economies of natives and newcomers alike (Knapp 2008: 7).

Strategic points started to develop, e.g. the port-town of Kition on Cyprus, Kommos and Knossos on Crete, and Near Eastern cultural and religious values were transferred due to trading contacts (Sherratt and Sherratt 1993: 365–366). Phoenician contacts with Crete could have been an end in themselves (Coldstream 2005: 181), although they probably happened as they progressed westwards. The main east–west routes followed by Phoenician merchants were through the Cyclades to Euboea and Attica, crossing the isthmus of Corinth, or via Crete, where Phoenician installations, such as Kommos, were supplied (Sherratt and Sherratt 1993: 367). The island of Crete appears to have played a relevant role in Phoenician routes east–west, and it deserves attention.

Trade routes throughout the Eastern Mediterranean depended, of course, on the winds and sea currents that moved the merchant ships [Figure 1.2]. Weather stations in Crete prove that the wind direction between Crete and Egypt was mainly in a north and north-west direction, and in the summer (known to be the sailing season) there were blowing velocities of around Force 4–5 on the Beaufort Scale (20–38 km/h); the sea currents moved south–east as well, giving speeds of 20–40 km/h. Taking into account the weight of the ship, the fact that currents and wind are not stable, and the wind blows 10–12 hours a day, and not every day with the same intensity, travelling from Crete to Egypt (a journey of 490 km) would have taken around four days, a period of time that Strabo also records in his writings (Lambrou-Philipson 1991: 12). This further implies the difficulty and improbability of travelling straight from Egypt towards the north to reach Crete, and therefore the most probable journey would have been along the Levantine coast. There, some southerly winds between May and October may have helped sailors heading north. Wind speeds in winter were not violent (Force 2–4) and summer speeds were of a maximum of Force 4 on the Beaufort Scale (20–28 km/h), which suggests that travelling in the summer towards the direction of the wind would have been faster than in winter, but it also reminds us that sailing was not necessarily restricted to one season, as travelling in winter was also possible (even though the wind direction then was not so favourable). However, winds were of a higher scale offshore, so that would have made sailing in open seas difficult if the winds were against one (Safadi 2026: 354). Nonetheless, sailing from the Levant to Cyprus presented no excessive dangers, so this would have been the main route followed by Iron Age merchants travelling in the Eastern Mediterranean. Egyptians, Phoenicians and Syrians sailing towards the Aegean would, therefore, have gone from the mainland towards the north-east potentially in summer, following the northerly winds, turning west to Cyprus, and then Crete and the North Aegean. From Crete, they would have gone south straight to Egypt to go back to their homelands (Homer, *Odyssey* 3.276).

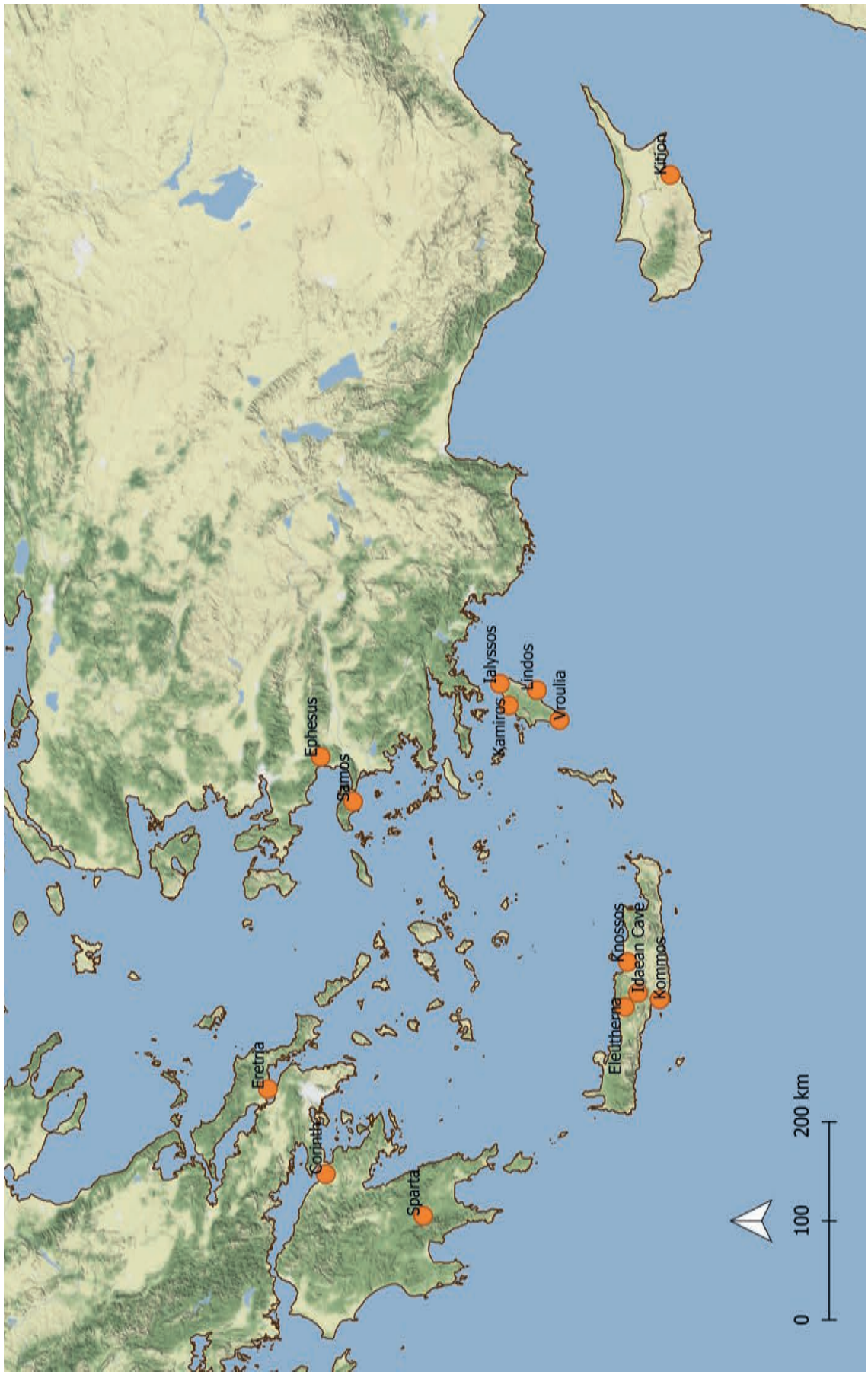

Figure 1.1. Map of the main Aegean sites mentioned throughout the book.

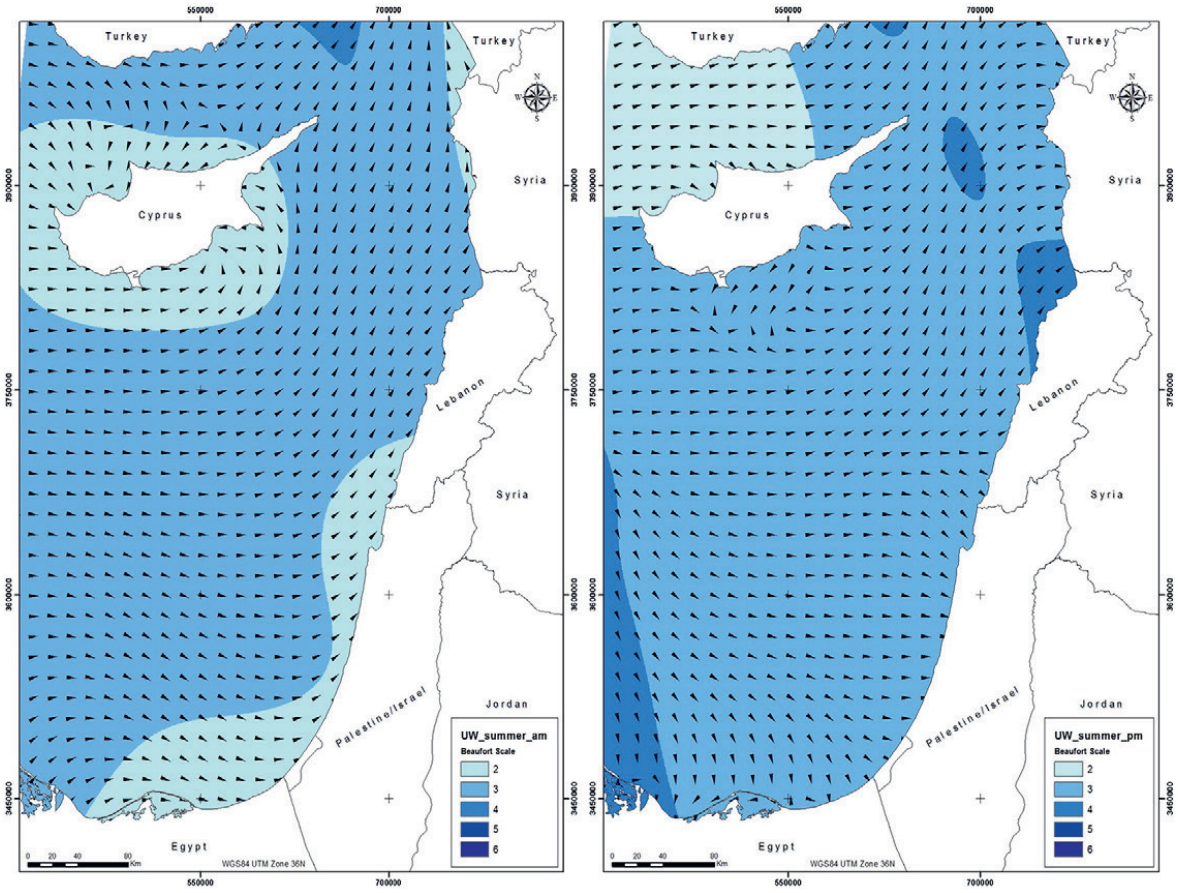

Figure 1.2. Map of Eastern Mediterranean winds in the summer (Safadi 2016).

Aim and methodology

The themes addressed in this book refer to the role of Crete in the Phoenician routes, east to west, during the 1st millennium BC. According to the archaeological record, most of the trading contacts in Crete took place at Kommos, Knossos, Eleutherna, and the Idaean Cave [Figure 1.3.], and, therefore, several questions are raised. When did Phoenicians arrive in Crete? What materials were transported to the island? Were they arriving for their intrinsic value or for their contents, i.e. in the case of pottery? Did Phoenician trade routes touch exclusively on Crete, or did they extend into the Aegean to the north? Did Phoenician material reach Mount Ida and Eleutherna through Kommos or Knossos? Were the Phoenicians settled in Crete for a period of considerable length, or regularly visiting the sites? What was the role of Temple B at Kommos? What other Aegean sites share characteristics with Cretan ones? Were other Aegean temples used for commercial purposes? What were the interests of Phoenician seafarers? What were they pursuing?

To answer these questions, an examination of the role of the Phoenicians in the creation of trading networks within the Mediterranean Sea is needed, mainly by paying special attention to Kommos, as the archaeological evidence suggests many contacts in the port and temple. For an understanding of the site of Kommos, this will be contextualised within the island of Crete, and thus other relevant sites will also be analysed, such as Knossos, Eleutherna, and the Idaean Cave. This current research also aims to explore the role of Temple B at Kommos, and to compare it to other Aegean temples that might have had a similar role, analysing the similarities between objects found on Crete and objects found at other Phoenician establishments, such as Kition (Cyprus) and other Aegean sites that present Phoenician and Near Eastern material. The type of settlement used

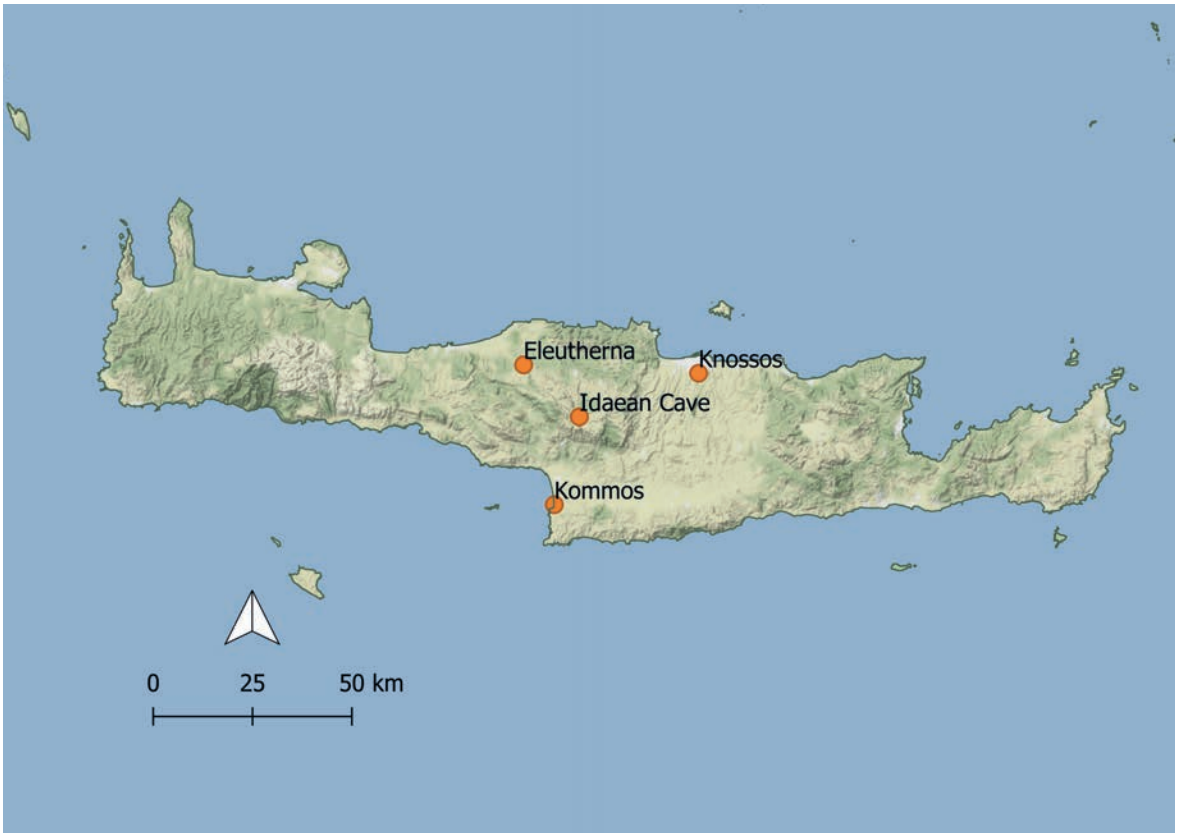

Figure 1.3. Map of Crete detailing the main sites subject to study (by the author).

by Phoenicians will also be considered, as well as whether it can be called a 'colony', by analysing the phenomenon of identity creation and hybridisation.

Moreover, the following hypotheses will be tested and explored, some of which have a general character and others are related to specific sites and finds: a) Crete was a very important stop for Phoenician merchants on their east–west route, and the Phoenician objects found on Crete present similarities to those excavated at western and eastern sites; b) we cannot know about the ethnic origin of a potter by looking at his or her pots (Kotsonas 2001); c) Kommos was the Cretan port most frequented by the Phoenicians; d) its temple was not only used for religious purposes, but also for economic ones, as Aubet (2009) argues; e) *cippi* are proof that Phoenicians lived at the sites of Knossos and Eleutherna (Stampolidis and Kotsonas 2006: 352); f) going to Eleutherna for economic exchange was not viable for Phoenician merchants. These hypotheses shall be extrapolated examining the archaeological record of each site. After examining the hypotheses, and having answered the questions presented above, the general question of the role of Crete will be re-evaluated.

To conduct this research, existing theories are examined, e.g. those of Aubet, who claims the economic use of the temple at Kommos (Aubet 2012: 66), and Kotsonas, who conceives the funerary statues similar to *cippi* as proof that Phoenicians lived at the sites of Knossos and Eleutherna (Stampolidis and Kotsonas 2006: 352). However, some of the existing theories were contrasted by examining the archaeological record.

Published archaeological reports are used as the main source of collecting data.[1] For each Cretan settlement the reports written by the relevant archaeologists are used. The main publications for

[1] For the works of these scholars, see the bibliography.

the site of Kommos are Joseph Shaw's reports; the principal sources for Knossos are Boardman, Coldstream and Kotsonas; and for Eleutherna the main references used are the reports of Kotsonas and Stampolidis. Ceramics and faience objects from Kommos analysed during the present author's study season at the Apotheke of Pitsidia in 2018 are discussed here, together with finds from other Cretan sites, mainly of Egyptian origin, displayed in the collections of the archaeological museums of Heraklion and Eleutherna.

Other Aegean sites are also evaluated, basing the data collection on publications as well as evidence collected during field work in 2019. The temples selected for examination are located at the sites of Kition (Cyprus), Vroulia (Rhodes), Eretria (Euboea), the Heraion on Samos, as well as the Artemision at Ephesus, the Temple of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, a series of Corinthian temples, and Olympia.

These temples are regularly compared in shape, location, and finds to Temple B at Kommos (Crete). One more aspect analysed here is whether these temples could share the characteristics of a commercial district (following the terms of Aubet 2012).

Most of the temples reviewed here are examined through published excavation reports, as well as articles and data collected during fieldwork in 2019. The Sanctuary of Apollo at Eretria is studied with the publications from the excavations of the Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece prepared by Sandrine Huber and Samuel Verdan. The information on the Samos Heraion is mainly extracted from archaeological reports of the German School of Archaeology by Kyrieleis. The Rhodian temple of Vroulia is studied through the reports of Knich from the early 20th century. The Temple at Kition, published by Karaeorghis, is also included in this research.

Even though Cyprus is not strictly located in the Aegean Sea, it acts as a gateway from the Levantine coast to the Aegean, and thus it is crucial to include it within this present study. In fact, this island acts as a 'first stop' for oriental merchants as they enter the Aegean routes and, afterwards, the western ones. Moreover, the temple of Kition serves to draw parallels with other temples on other islands: i.e. the presence of metallurgy associated with this temple site can be connected to others (e.g. Eretria); sacred prostitution will be linked to activities traced at Corinth; and, furthermore, Cypriot pottery is reflected in possible 'unguent factories' at Knossos, Kos, and Rhodes.

Other sites with temples that were visited during the 2019 fieldwork are also included in this volume, i.e. certain Rhodian sanctuaries devoted to Athena at Ialyssos, Camiros and Lindos, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Temple of Aphrodite and the Temple of Demeter and Kore at Corinth, the temple of Artemis Orthia at Sparta, and the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.

An examination of these sites and the character of their temples in terms of Phoenician interactions and commercial exchanges is offered here, together with an array of several maps that assess the major land and sea routes that comprised this Iron Age commercial network. Each site contributes much towards our understanding of the function, or functions, of Temple B at Kommos, including its relationship with the island it was built on, as well as the sea that surrounds it.

The site of Kommos

Location and context

Kommos is a port site on the south of Crete, located on its eponymous bay [Figure 1.4] (also known as Mesara Bay). The bay comprises the beaches of Kommos and Kalamaki, a rocky area that served as a fantastic harbour for the site of Kommos, which is identified as the ancient port of Phaistos (Melfi 2013: 355), according to the *Odyssey* when describing the place of Menelaos' shipwreck (Homer, *Odyssey* 3.293–296).

Figure 1.4. Kommos, bay showing Papadóplaka (right) and the archaeological settlement (left).

Figure 1.5. Kommos, general view of the site (by the author).

The bay faces west, and therefore receives westerly winds. Nonetheless, being a bay, the port is relatively sheltered from the rough seas that characterise the south of the island. A useful landmark for seafarers using the site would have been the little islet known as Papadóplaka, just a few metres west of the site of Kommos. This islet (now less visible after bombing in WWII) would have been used by merchants as an extension of the harbour and as a first point to anchor their ships.[2]

The site of Kommos [Figure 1.5], located in the Mesara region, was, indeed, linked to other settlements in western Mesara, i.e. Agia Triada and Phaistos, together referred to as the 'Great Minoan Triangle' (Shaw, J. 2006: 79). After the decay of the palaces in LM IIIB, a decrease of population in the area led to the abandonment of some sites. However, the arrival of 'new Greeks' at Phaistos seemed to promote the creation of new temples in the region, such as a shrine in front of the megaron of the abandoned site of Agia Triada, and an 11th-century BC shrine (later called Temple A) at the site of Kommos, referred to in linear B tablets from Phaistos as 'Amyklaion' (Watrous *et al.* 2004: 310). During the Protogeometric period, it was not only Kommos that received great volumes of imports, as we will examine, but also Phaistos, mainly in terms of Aegean pottery. The 7th century BC saw population growth in the region, with the construction of a monumental temple at Phaistos and a shrine at Kalamaki, and with a great intensity in overseas relations at Phaistos and Kommos. Nonetheless, the 6th century BC saw a decline in these contacts, and Kommos and Agia Triada started to welcome only sporadic visits, whereas Phaistos and Gortyna managed to continue their relations during the Archaic period, until the latter destroyed the former in the 3rd century BC (Watrous *et al*. 2004: 312–320).

Kommos, hence, is thought to have been, together with Kition (Cyprus), one of the places from where the Greeks absorbed oriental elements (Sherratt and Sherratt 1993: 167), as the archaeological record from the 2nd to the 1st millennium BC confirms. In this book, however, we will be focusing on the finds that correspond to the 1st millennium BC.

The Southern Area

The site of Kommos is made up of various areas [Figure 1.6]: the 'Minoan Hilltop Houses', the 'Central Hillside' and the 'Southern Area'. The latter is the territory that will be studied in this book, as it encompasses the buildings that were built and used during the 1st millennium BC.

The Southern Area [Figure 1.7] includes buildings constructed during Minoan times, as well as Iron Age structures, or attachments and renovations. Building P, built during LM III on top of the Minoan North Stoa of Building T, is one of the most curious at Kommos. It features parallel galleries 5.5 m wide and 38.5 m long (Shaw, J. 2006: 37–39). Hundreds of storage vessels were found there, and therefore this building is of great importance, despite its deterioration *c.* 1200 BC, and sporadic use during EIA, as we will examine later.[3]

By the end of the 11th century BC, a rectangular construction identified as a small temple was built upon the ruins of Minoan civic structures. The building, called Temple A, was replaced by a larger one, Temple B, during the 9th century BC, which was in turn replaced by another, Temple C, towards the end of the 7th century BC (Shaw, J. 1998: 15–16).

As will be explained below, Temple B [Figure 1.8] has an oriental structure (Aubet 2012: 66) and it is associated with the Phoenician merchants who came to Kommos on their east–west route. Near Eastern objects, including Phoenician pottery (e.g. amphorae and drinking vessels), were found in this structure – as well as in other buildings that surrounded it (Bikai 2000).

[2] This system is attested at other Aegean sites, and is also present at Amnisos, in the north of Crete, as will be examined in Chapter 3.
[3] See 2.1.2.3. Finds in other buildings.

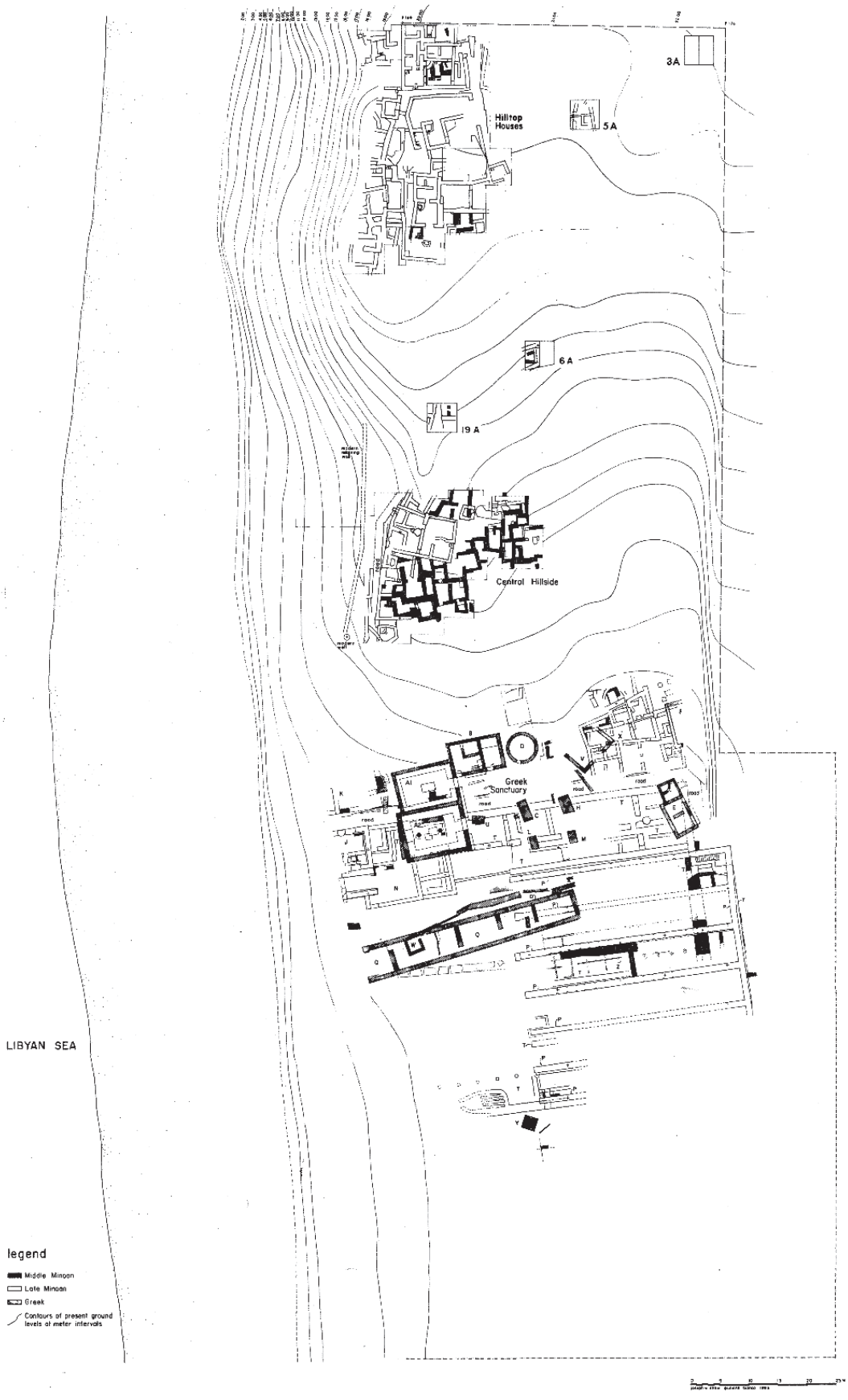

Figure 1.6. Kommos, general site plan (Shaw 2000: Fig. 1.6).

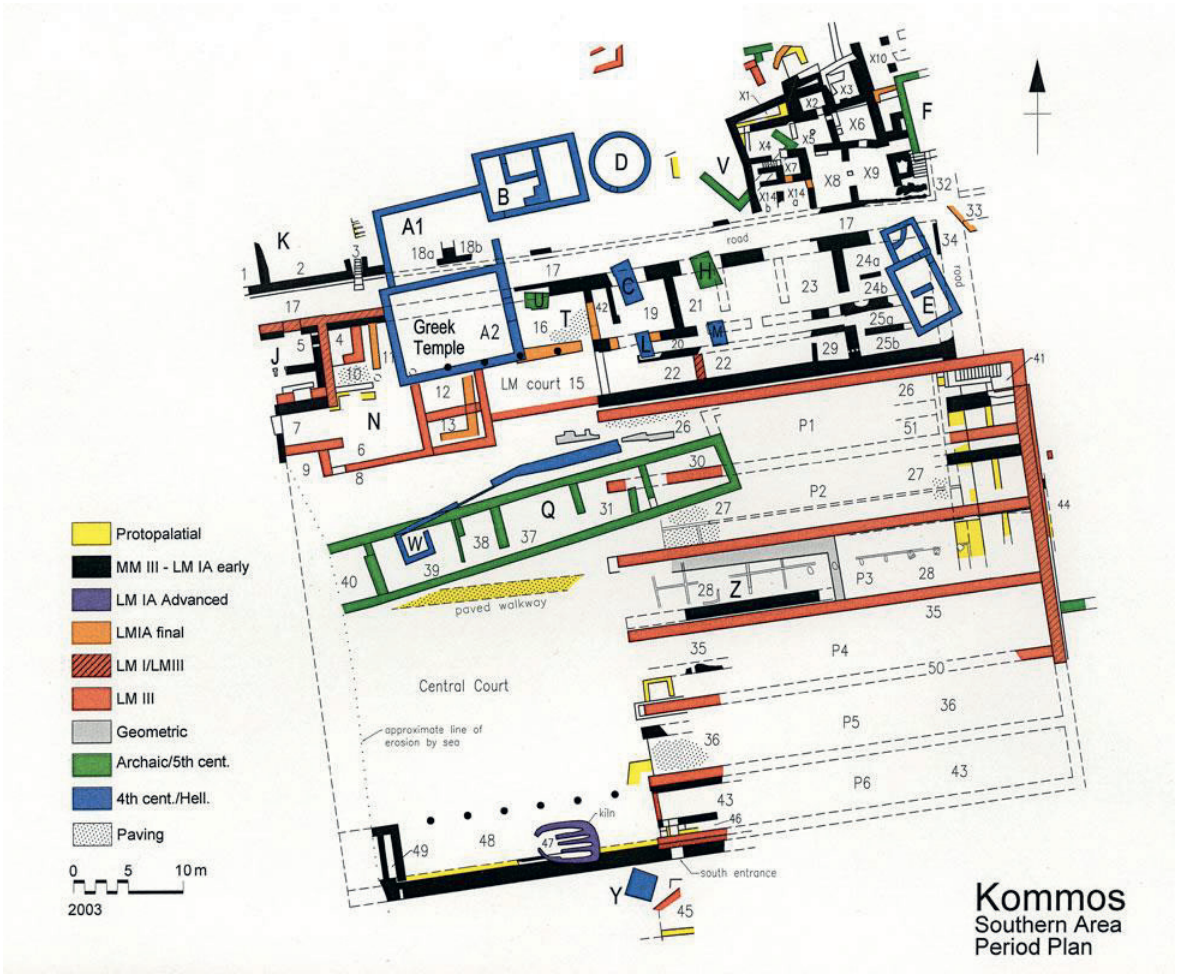

Figure 1.7. Kommos, Southern Area Period Plan (Shaw 2006).

Figure 1.8. The temples of Kommos (by the author).

Also during the 7th century BC, building Q was established to the south of the temple, as a long porch with successive rooms, where fragments of imported transport amphorae were found (Shaw, J. 2006: 43). Building Z, erected during the Geometric period, and Altar U and Building V, raised during the Archaic period, have also provided pottery finds that will be analysed throughout this chapter.

All this material draws scholars into speculation about the Phoenician presence at Kommos (Morris 1992: 154–155). Some argue that Phoenician traders lived permanently at the site, as they had a permanent religious building (Negbi 1992: 609), whilst others claim they lived there only semi-permanently in order to trade (Aubet 2012: 230); Kourou also conceives that craftsmen, apart from traders, were resident there as well (Kourou 2012: 41).

The use of Temple B is also questioned by Aubet, who defends its economic role (Aubet 2012; Muñoz-Sogas 2017), whereas other scholars, such as Papalardo support its religious function (Papalardo 2002).