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Reconstructing the settled landscape of the Cyclades : the islands of Paros and Naxos during the late antique and early Byzantine centuries
Roussos, K.

Citation

Roussos, K. (2017, October 12). *Reconstructing the settled landscape of the Cyclades : the islands of Paros and Naxos during the late antique and early Byzantine centuries*. *Archaeological Studies Leiden University*. Leiden University Press, Leiden. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/58774>

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Author: Roussos, K.

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Issue Date: 2017-10-12

Chapter 3

The social and economic history of the Cyclades

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The Cyclades are rarely mentioned in the literary sources of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Early Middle Ages. Sporadic information in different kind of written sources that are separated by a great chronological distance, such as the *Hierokles Synekdemosis* (Parthey 1967; see more in Chapter 3.3.2), the *Stadiasmus of Maris Magni* (Müller 1855; see more in Chapter 5.2.2), *Notitiae Episcopatum, Conciliar Acts* (Mansi 1961; Darrouzès 1981; Fedalto 1988; see more in Chapters 3.3.3 and 3.), hagiographical texts (the *Life of Saint Theoktiste*: Talbot 1996; see more in Chapter 1.3; the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius*: Lemerle 1979; 1981; Bakirtzes 1997; see more in Chapter 3.3.2), the lists of the civil, military and ecclesiastical offices of the Byzantine Empire (*Taktika*: Oikonomidès 1972; see more in Chapter 3.4.2) and historical accounts (Ioannes Caminiates, *On the capture of Thessalonica*: Böhlig 1973; see more in Chapters 3.4.3) in combination with numismatic (Penna 2001), sigillographic (Brandes 2002, 387) and epigraphic evidence (Kiourtzian 2000) provide only sporadic pieces of information regarding the socio-economic history, as well as the administrative and ecclesiastical status of the Cyclades. During the period in question there is no textual source dedicated to the Cyclades.

Due to the scarcity and uncertainty of the written sources, the historical evidence that covers the Late Antique and the Early Byzantine period is very limited and, therefore, it is very difficult to draw clear chronological boundaries. However, some important events such as the foundation of Constantinople in 324 (a new dynamic emerging in the Aegean Sea), the volcanic eruption of Thera in 726 (marking the beginning of iconoclasm), the occupation of Crete by the Arabs between 824-828 (the gradual establishment of the Arabic maritime supremacy over the Aegean), and the Fourth Crusade

in the early 13th century (the domination of the Franks on the Aegean islands and other Byzantine territories) shaped the historical fate of the islands of the southern Aegean and the Cyclades in particular.

The chronological framework followed by this study is: i) the Late Antique or Late Roman period (from the foundation of Constantinople in 324 to the middle 7th century), ii) the Byzantine Early Middle Ages or the so-called “Byzantine Dark centuries” (from the late 7th to the early 10th century), and iii) the Middle Byzantine period (from the middle 10th century to the beginning of the venetian occupation in 1207). This chronological arrangement slightly differs from the general historical subdivision of the Byzantine Empire, because it is adjusted to the peculiar circumstances pertaining to the maritime area of the south Aegean after the 7th century. It seems that, on the Cyclades the Byzantine Early Middle Ages lasted longer, compared to other regions of the Empire (see more details in Chapter 3.4.1).

The following Chapter 3.2 discusses the importance and role played by the Aegean islands in a wider Mediterranean context over the course of the Roman to the Early and Middle Byzantine centuries. Chapters 3.3 and 3.4 aim to outline the main historical context of the Cyclades during Late Antiquity, and the Early Byzantine period, presenting aspects of social, political and economic life on the islands. From the late 4th century the vast and united Roman state was split between two worlds, the east and west. The historical trajectory of the two halves was diametrically opposite. These Chapters deal with the historical context of the Eastern part of the Late Roman Empire and its successor, Byzantium. Finally, despite the fact that the study of the material culture and settled landscape of the Middle Byzantine period is beyond the scope of this study, Chapter 3.5 provides a very brief overview of the historical context in the Cyclades between the middle 10th and the early 13th century. This evidence can be used

as comparative material in order for the complex historical reality of the Byzantine Early Middle Ages in the Cyclades to be thoroughly understood.

3.2 AEGEAN SEA: CONNECTIVITY AND INTEGRATION

The strategic geographic position of the Aegean Sea, in combination with the geographical features of the islands such as, the clement climate, the great complexity of coasts, and the large number of safe natural ports, comprise geographical data which have always been important and historically support the development of the islands. The very presence of the sea, which defines the territory of an island can be seen either as a bridge to prosperity or separating it from the external world. Communication by sea played a fundamental role during ancient times. Sea routes and maritime trade created economic, social and cultural connections which influenced all the areas involved. The Aegean Archipelago connects the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and therefore was of great importance to ancient and medieval trade routes (Fig. 3.1). The numerous islands scattered across the Aegean Sea functioned as reference points providing ideal conditions for navigation (Fig. 2.1).

In the vast Early Roman Empire, the Aegean Sea (and the Cyclades in particular), constituted a relatively minor maritime zone within the wider Mediterranean context regarding its role and contribution to the imperial economy. Possibly, the Cycladic maritime zone was not among the most significant parts in the network of the Empire's long distance trade system. However, the Cyclades were places of cultural and commercial activity in the Roman period, since archaeological evidence unearthed in several ancient cities of the islands shows that this maritime area was characterised by interaction, integration and connectivity (Le Qu  r   2013).

The reorientation of the Empire to Constantinople, the New Rome, which was located northeast of the Aegean, in 324 was a crucial point in the historical trajectory of the Aegean islands. Establishment of the new capital on the site of the ancient city of Byzantium transposed the centre of the Empire from the West to the East (Fig. 3.1). During the following centuries there were new economic and social circumstances pertaining to

the Aegean Sea, which emerged as a vital maritime zone for the commercial and financial activities of the Eastern Roman Empire (Wickham 2005, 29). This discernible change had far-reaching consequences for the pattern of exchange, and movements of goods and travelers in the Aegean and East Mediterranean basin. From the 4th century to the 7th centuries Aegean ports gradually became integral parts in the network of the long distance trade and the Aegean world was considered a major financial contributor to the Empire's economy, supporting the needs of the new capital and the military forces on the Danube (Abadie-Reynal 1989). A new maritime route connecting the north and south Aegean was created. The Cycladic islands located in the heart of the Aegean Sea acted as supply stations of commercial importance, connecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

Furthermore, during this period the phenomenon of pilgrimage to the Holy Land and other religious centres emerged (Constantinople, Rome, Asia Minor etc.), which gradually became extensive. Christian pilgrims, encouraged by church fathers, visited the most important destinations of pilgrimage in the eastern Mediterranean, and pilgrimage itineraries frequently passed through the Cyclades (Avram  a 2002). Some of the earliest documented Christian pilgrims who passed this way, were Saint Helena, Saint Paula (347–404), and Egeria who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land about 381–384. Saint Paula on her route to the Holy Land passed through Kythera, the Cyclades, Rhodes, and Cyprus (Avram  a 2002; Malamut 1988, 538/539, 656: Malamut dates Saint Paula's trip during the 5th century). Epigraphic evidence from two pilgrimage centres in the Cyclades, Grammata on Syros and Gastria on Tenos, both dated to the Late Antique period, suggest high mobility over the Aegean Sea and connections between the Cyclades and other regions like Asia Minor, Mainland Greece and Northern Africa (Feissel 1980, Kiourtzian 2000). Around 653/654 Pope Martin I (649-655) during his journey from Rome to Constantinople landed on Naxos due to bad weather, and remained on the island for some time as a prisoner (Peeters 1933; Dakoronia 1969-1970; McCormick 2001, 483-488).

The islands of the Aegean Archipelago continued to play a significant role during the

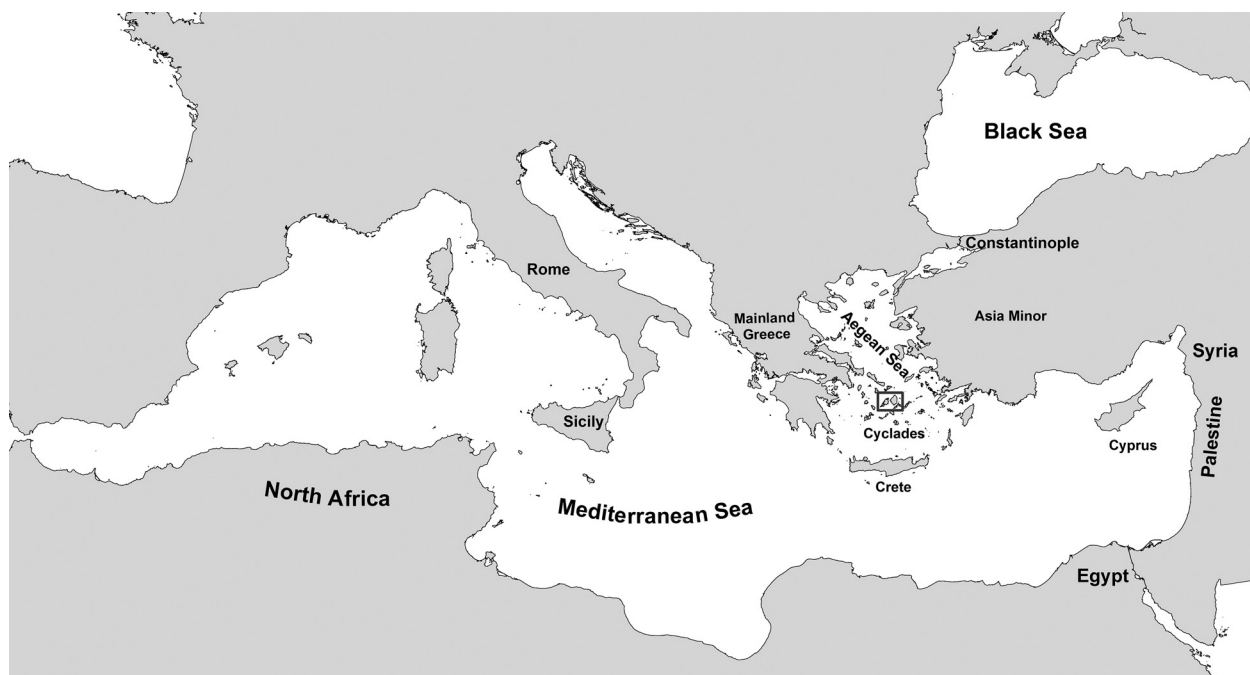


Fig. 3.1: Map of the Mediterranean world.

Byzantine period in a different way. After the dynamic emergence of the Arabs, the Aegean Sea, in the context of the Byzantine-Arabic struggle for control over the Aegean, has functioned as a first line of naval defense to the capital protecting a large vital space that surrounded it. In the perception of the Byzantines the numerous islands scattered around the Aegean Archipelago were a different world (Malamut 1988, 26-31). The very presence of the sea which surrounds them, and the unstable weather conditions, especially the strong and sometimes violent winds that prevailed for most of the year, constituted two key elements that distinguished them from the mainland. Constantine VII *Porphyrogenitus* (913-959) in his work *De Thematribus* (an account of the military districts of the Empire, 10th century) describes the Aegean as «*hard to sail and difficult to cross, with long waves like mountains*» (Pertusi 1952). Additionally, in his letters, the archbishop of Athens Michael *Choniates* or *Acominatus* (c. 1138-1222) pointed out that dangerous winds blew in the sea area between the islands of Keos and Naxos, while he often complained about the isolated life on the island of Keos (Lambros 1879-1880, 143, 194-195).

Despite the difficulties throughout the Byzantine period, communications by sea were considered faster

and more efficient than overland routes (Avraméa 2002, 77-78). The *Stadiodromikon* of Constantine VII *Porphyrogenitus*, is a text interpolated at the end of the list of ships being prepared to participate in the campaign of 949 to recapture Crete from the Arabs. The author records a maritime route of 792 nautical miles from Constantinople to Crete via Mytilene (Lesvos), Chios, Samos, Fournoi, Naxos, Ios, Thera and Christiana (Pertusi 1952). In relative terms, the island chain of the Aegean Sea provided all the conditions for a supportive sea journey with a dense network of safe natural ports. Many hagiographical texts and local oral traditions refer to ships that were forced by headwinds to land on the safe ports of the Aegean islands (e.g. *Life of Saint Theoktiste*: Talbot 1996).

In conclusion, after the 4th century a major transportation and communication network developed with important maritime routes which linked Constantinople and Asia Minor via the Aegean islands, with the ports of Crete, the Eastern and Western Mediterranean basins, Mainland Greece, and North Africa. The Cyclades benefited from their geographic position, became part of those itineraries, and participated in the network of long distance trade. The Aegean Sea connected the

capital with the eastern provinces (Egypt), which had great importance for the economy of the Empire. An important route began from Constantinople, which followed a coastal navigation along the west coast of Asia Minor then passed through the Cyclades and led to mainland Greece or continued to the ports of the Western Mediterranean basin. Another maritime route connected the capital to the harbours of Crete, the Eastern Mediterranean basin, and North Africa via the Cyclades. In addition, the Cycladic archipelago became a maritime area of fundamental importance for the defensive system of the Byzantine Empire due to their close proximity to the Arabs of Crete. The south-east Aegean Sea was the basic field in the struggle between the Byzantine and Arab fleets.

3.3 LATE ANTIQUITY OR THE LATE ROMAN ERA (early 4th - middle 7th c.)

3.3.1 Introduction

During the 3rd century a critical period (235-284) of political instability and insecurity began in the Roman state, the so-called “third-century crisis” (see more information about the debate among scholars in Cameron 1993, 1-29; 2012, 4-8; Gregory 1994). This turbulent situation was characterised by a constant and rapid turnover of emperors, almost total collapse of the silver currency, significant changes in economic and social life, military anarchy, and consecutive warfare with civil wars and hostile invasions (Cameron 1993, 1-29; Gregory 2010, 23-34). The reforming measures of Diocletian (284-305) in the late 3rd century put the “third-century crisis” under partial control and the final victory of Constantine the Great (306-337) terminated the period of uncertainty, laying the foundation for the recovery of the 4th century (Cameron 1993, 3, 30-65; Gregory 2010, 41-45).

The following Late Antique or Late Roman period from the early 4th till the middle 7th centuries in the Eastern Mediterranean moved between two opposite sides of the spectrum, between continuity and discontinuity, abandonment of earlier structures and intensive building activity, strong central economy but social decline, and military insecurity (Bintliff 2014b). Nevertheless, many regions in the

Eastern provinces achieved considerable prosperity in these centuries with important economic activities in both urban and rural sites in comparison with the collapsing Western provinces, which in the 5th century fell into Barbarian hands (Bintliff 2012b, 351). Through Late Antiquity new political, social, economic and religious conditions were created. The reorientation of the Empire to Constantinople, the administrative and military reforms, the economic policies and Christianisation gave the Late Roman Empire a new character.

The foundation of Constantinople in 324 was a crucial point in the historical trajectory of the Aegean islands. The Aegean Archipelago played a significant new role and emerged as a vital space for the commercial and financial activities of the Eastern Roman Empire (Abadie-Reynal 1989). The Aegean Sea connected the capital with the provinces and the Aegean islands acted as supply stations. It seems that the Cyclades, located in the heart of the Aegean Sea, were no exception to the rule, since they utilised all the favorable circumstances and achieved considerable prosperity through the 4th to 7th centuries.

3.3.2 The political and military history of the Cyclades

After the 4th century the East Roman Empire followed, in relative terms, the administrative division formed by Diocletian and Constantine. The reforming measures of both Emperors aimed to provide an effective and stable government by re-organising the provincial administration, the army and the economy (Gregory 2010, 41-45). The individual city and its surrounding areas remained a basic structural element of the state. The large provinces were fragmented and made smaller, increasing their overall number from about 50 to around 100. The Empire was divided into twelve new large administrative districts called *dioceses*. Each diocese was administrated by a vicar (*vicarius*) and comprised many provinces. The dioceses were grouped and constituted four *praetorian prefectures*, which were commanded by a *praetorian prefect* (Cameron 2010, 41-42).

In this context, probably since the end of the 3rd century, the new *province of the Islands* (*provincia insularum*) was established in the maritime area of



Fig. 3.2: The province of the Islands according to the *Synekdemosis*.

the Aegean, which included most of the Cycladic and North Aegean islands along with the Dodecanese (Kiourtzian 2000, 12-13). It was commanded by a *Praeses Insulariorum*, whose headquarters was on the island of Rhodes, which was the political and ecclesiastical capital of the province. The *province of the Islands* alongside the *provinces of Asia Minor* formed the *diocese of Asia* (Nigdelis 1990, 223-224).

According to the *Synekdemosis*, an official public document written before 535 by *Hierokles*, this administrative division in the Aegean Sea remained, with some small changes until the 6th century.

This was a geographical listing of all the cities of the Eastern Roman Empire in the 2nd half of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century (Parthey 1967, 31-32; Avraméa 1997, 35). The Empire at that time measured 935 cities and 64 provinces. As the *Synekdemosis* reveals, during the 5th and the 6th centuries the islands of the Cyclades were not as a whole under the same administrative unit but were split into two different provinces. The 29th position of the catalogue corresponds to the *province of the Islands* (ἐπαρχία τῶν Νήσων) (Fig. 3.2), which had a commander with the title *hegemon* (ἡγεμών).



Fig. 3.3: The regions that controlled by the *quaestor exercitus*.

The province included in its territory twenty cities; nine of them were located in the Cyclades (Andros, Tenos, Naxos, Paros, Sifnos, Melos, Ios, Thera, and Amorgos). Other cities mentioned are in the Dodecanese and the North Aegean (one is omitted). The author put in first place on the list the capital of the province, the island of Rhodes, then the large islands situated opposite the coast of Asia Minor (the Dodecanese, Chios, Lesbos, Samos, Tenedos etc.), then the islands of the central and northern Cyclades (Andros, Tenos, Naxos, Paros) and at the end the small islands in the southern Aegean (Sifnos, Melos, Ios, Thera, Amorgos, and Astypalea). It seems

the *hegemon* of the *province of the Islands* had most of the islands of the Aegean Archipelago under his jurisdiction, apart from Imvros, Euboea, Kythera, the islands of the Argo-Saronic Gulf and some of the Cyclades. The rest of the Cycladic islands, namely Keos, Delos, Mykonos, Serifos, Kythnos and probably Syros were included in the *province of Hellas* (ἐπαρχία Ἑλλάδος), which was listed in the 10th position of the catalogue. The province, which included in its territory 76 cities, was based in Corinth and commanded by an *anthipatos* (Parthey 1967, 9-13).

In 536, Emperor Justinian carried out further reforms to the provinces' administration system

establishing (*Nov. Iust.* 41, May 18) a new institution, the *quaestor exercitus* (*Quaestura Justinianus exercitus*: Von Lingenthal 1881, 354; Stein 1949, 474-475; Schoell & Kroll 1972, 262-3, 293-4; Hendy 1985, 404, Wiewiorowski 2006; Gkoutzioukostas & Moniaros 2009). The duties of this officer and the reasons for his establishment are matters of debate among scholars (see more about this debate in Wiewiorowski 2006; Gkoutzioukostas & Moniaros 2009). The seat of the *quaestor* was Odesus on the Black Sea (present-day Varna in Bulgaria) and controlled the provinces of Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor, which were associated with Caria, the Cyclades, and Cyprus (Fig. 3.3).

What is important for the Cyclades in this case is that the *quaestor exercitus* was primarily obliged to supervise the collection and distribution of taxes and army supplies (Wiewiorowski 2006, 333). It has been recently suggested that through the administrative linkage between the Aegean islands and coastal regions concerned with the Danube zone, the three “naval” regions of Caria, the Cyclades, and Cyprus were functioning, in fact, as major contributors to the support of the military forces in the two Danubian provinces (Gkoutzioukostas & Moniaros 2009). Taxes and supplies from the Cyclades probably helped to keep the Roman forces of Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor in good condition. Moreover, starting from the 4th century delivering supplies from distant Mediterranean provinces to the Danube region was common practice as indicated by the epigraphic, sigillographic, and ceramic evidence (Wiewiorowski 2006, 333-334). Regarding the duties of the *quaestor Iustinianus exercitus*, it is possible that, he was, in fact, not only a civil officer but also a military commander in the Lower Danube zone (Wiewiorowski 2006, 334). However, after 582 his military duties were diminished as the Empire placed particular emphasis on the war against the Slavs and the Avars. Nevertheless, sigillographic and ceramic evidence suggests, the Justinianic prefecture did not disappear, as had been assumed, but it continued to exist through most of the 7th century (Gkoutzioukostas & Moniaros 2009).

During the period from the 4th to the early 6th century literary sources make no mention of any hostile operation against the islands of the Cyclades. Furthermore, it seems the Cyclades were

not actively involved in the internal conflicts of the Empire. In the second half of the 6th century the Slavs made a dynamic emergence crossing the Danube. The continuous invasions against many regions of the Empire resulted in considerable damage and demographic changes across the Balkan Peninsula. The Slavs after 582 raided as far as the Peloponnese, while in 586, 604, 615 and 682 they attacked Thessaloniki (Vasmer 1970; Metcalf 1991; Obolensky 1994; Moniaros 1995-1996; Cameron 2012, 121, 160, 180, 198).

The first mention for a hostile invasion against the Cyclades, during the end of Late Antiquity, is witnessed in the second book of the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius* (Lemerle 1979; 1981; Bakirtzes 1997). In recounting the first miracle of the saint (179-180), the rescue of the city of Thessaloniki from Slavic attack, the author makes a list of all the areas approached by the Slavs with their “monoxils” (small riverboats) and which suffered their depredations. Among these were included the Cycladic islands (Bakirtzes 1997, 236-237). Lemerle connected this miracle with the Slavic attack on Thessaloniki at 615 (1981, 441). For many years, scholars, based on this report, considered the Slavic penetration into the islands an indisputable fact (Avraméa 1997, 74-75, 79-80; Lemerle 1986, 130; Malamut 1988; Metcalf 1962, 14-23; Metcalf 1991, 140-148; Touratsoglou 2006a, 327-330; 2006b, 95-101; Touratsoglou & Chalkia 2008, 14-16).

Recent studies have addressed the problem of the impact of the Slavic invasions on the islands from a different perspective, and have raised doubts whether the Slavs managed to approach the islands of the Cyclades (Moniaros 1995-1996; Trombley 2001, 137-138; Nikolaou 2004, 295-296, Penna 2010, 28). The term “Cyclades” in Late Antique and Byzantine sources had acquired a wider geographic significance, including islands such as Lemnos, Mytilene (Lesvos) and Skyros. Therefore, it is not sure the author of the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius* refers to the islands that we know today as the Cyclades, and perhaps means some of the islands in the northern Aegean. In addition, the list of areas attacked by the Slavs could be a “form of exaggeration” in order to further emphasises the importance of the miracle of Saint Demetrius and to increase the value of his achievement. The author seeks to highlight that the city of Thessaloniki, contrary to other areas,

including the islands, succeeded with the aid of Saint Demetrius to expel the invaders.

Nevertheless, a Syrian Chronicle composed about 640 (previously known as *Liber Calipharum* or *Chronicon miscellaneum ad annum domini 724 pertinens*) and written probably by a Syrian priest called Thomas mentions that the Slavs invaded Crete and “the other islands” in 622/623 (Palmer 1993, 18). Unfortunately, there is no a detailed list of the “other islands” approached by the Slavs. It is only mentioned that some Jacobite monks were taken captive and some twenty of them were killed in the island of Crete. It seems that the impact of the Slavic raids was restricted to some human casualties and damages.

The fact that the Slavs were invaded Crete, which is located more than 55 nm (nautical miles) from the nearest coast of the Peloponnese, indicates that they potentially were able to conduct raids on the Cyclades and even the most remote islands could have been within the range of their hostile activity. However, due the scarcity and uncertainty of the historical sources we cannot be very accurate when talking about the possible Slavic attacks on the Cyclades. It remains uncertain, whether or not the Slavs turned their hostility against the islands that we know today as the Cyclades. Even if the Cyclades suffered Slavic raids, it was difficult to be a focus of Slavic invasion due to their large number and the diverse geographic features of this maritime zone. It is difficult to imagine that the Slavs invade all the Cyclades, from Andros, which is close to the Greek mainland, to Anafi and Amorgos, which are the most remote islands.

On the basis of archaeological material presented by this study, it appears that the Slavic raids had far less effect on the Cyclades (and the southern Aegean) than in the rest of Mainland Greece and they did not result in significant changes regarding navigation and the daily life of the islanders. Moreover, invasions and settlements of the Slavs in territories of the East Roman Empire are very complicated issues and have been subject to considerable debate among scholars. Until recently the majority of researchers believed the Slavs occupied and established themselves permanently from the second half of the 6th century. However, more recent studies have shown this complicated phenomenon lasted hundreds of

years and there was no Slavic settlement in Greece till the 7th century (Gregory 2010, 168-172).

3.3.3 *The ecclesiastical history of the Cyclades*

Information about the ecclesiastical administration on the islands is extremely thin and fragmentary until the 6th century. During the 4th century the first ecclesiastical units in the Cyclades are mentioned in the Acts of the Ecumenical Councils. The bishop of Paros Academios participated in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 (Mansi 1961, II, col.695: «*Academio a Paro*»). This is the first bishopric (*episkope*) in the Cyclades confirmed by a written source. The following bishops: Auxentios of Naxos (Kampanellis 1991, 34; Savvides 2006, 103), Agapios of Tenos (Kiourtzian 2000, 203) and Dioscuros of Thera (Mansi 1961, III, col.38.) participated in the Council of Sardica (Sofia), held in 343/344. At the Council of Alexandria in 362, a certain *Zoilus Andro* attended, probably bishop of the island of Andros (Mansi 1961, III, col.353; Kiourtzian 2000, 45).

Later in the 5th century, in 431 bishop Athanasios of Paros participated in the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (Fedalto 1988, 219; *ACO* I, 1, 2, 58, n.71.). The same bishop or possibly an eponymous successor (Fedalto 1988, 219; *ACO* II, 3, 1, 234, n.185: «*Athanasius episcopus Pari insulae suscripsi*»), along with the bishop of Naxos Varachos (Fedalto 1988, 218; *ACO* II, 2, 2, 76, n.32.) attended the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. In 458-459 the bishop of Andros Palladios participated in a Council held in Constantinople (Mansi 1961, VII, col. 917; Fedalto 1988, 206).

Probably during the first half of the 6th century the bishopric of Paros included the islands of Sifnos and Amorgos under its jurisdiction. In the great Council of Constantinople held in 536 by the Patriarch Menas, the bishop of Paros Theodore signed as «*ἐπίσκοπος Παρίων, Σιφνίων καὶ Ἀμουλγινῶν*» («bishop of Paros, Sifnos and Amorgos»; Fedalto 1988, 219; *ACO* III, 119, n. 93.). This change has been made after the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, which was attended by Bishop Athanasios signing only as Bishop of Paros. Bishop Paul of Naxos also participated in the Council of Constantinople (Fedalto 1988, 218; *ACO* III, 119,

n.19). In 553 the bishop of Tenos, Ekdekios, attended the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (Fedalto 1988, 223; *ACO* IV, 1, 7, n.11).

Additionally, the names of bishops, which are totally unknown in religious written sources, are included among the donors of some churches of the 6th/7th century. The most characteristic examples are: the Bishops Hylasios and Georgios of Paros (church of Panagia Ekatontapiliani: Kiourtzian 2000, 102-126; Mitsani 2006, 75, 87-88) as well as the Bishop Sisinnios of Naxos (church of Panagia Drosiani: Kiourtzian 2000, 112-115).

Overall, during the 4th century the first bishop sees had already been established, especially on the larger islands of the Cyclades. As we can observe, the ecclesiastical officials frequently mentioned in the written sources of this period are the bishops of Paros (four mentions) and Naxos (four mentions), two islands of great importance in the Cyclades. Bishops of Paros participated in three out of five Ecumenical Councils held until the 6th century. It seems that larger islands like Paros, Naxos, Tenos, Thera and Andros had their own bishop's see. Some of them, occasionally or sometimes more permanently, had smaller islands under their jurisdiction, like Paros. Unfortunately there is no more evidence to form an overall picture of the ecclesiastical administration on the islands until the 6th century. In addition, during the 4th and 5th centuries monasticism began to grow, nevertheless neither historical nor archaeological evidence provide information about the foundation of monasteries in the Cyclades.

3.3.4 *Social and economic aspects*

In economic and social terms through Late Antiquity the East Roman Empire experienced two opposite sides of the spectrum. On the one hand, abandonment of earlier structures, re-use of ancient building material, shrinkage of towns, and social decline is observed. On the other hand, a remarkable building activity, mainly with the erection of large or small religious complexes, a strong central economy, and commercial connections with important economic activities in both urban and rural sites appeared in the Eastern provinces (Bintliff 2014b; 2012a). Nevertheless, in general, the Eastern Roman Empire achieved considerable florescence compared

to the collapsing Western provinces (Bintliff 2012b, 351).

Due to the lack of contemporary literary witnesses, archaeological evidence constitutes the basic source of information regarding the social and economic context of the Aegean. The various regional surface survey projects in conjunction with the promising turn of scholars to the study of Late Antique material culture unearthed in the Aegean, especially the ceramic and sculpture data, have contributed to the historical comprehension of the Late Antiquity (Abadie-Reynal 1989; Reynolds 1995; Sodini 2000a; Ward-Perkins 2001; McCormick 2001, 25-119; Bonifay 2004; Loseby 2005; Wickham 2005, 708-720; Bonifay & Treglia 2007; Bintliff 2007; 2013a).

The picture about settlements during Late Antiquity, emerging through analysis of the results of regional surface survey projects within the broader Aegean world, suggests a busy rural landscape which is characterised by a dense network of sites of various types, mainly large commercial estates or *villas* (Bintliff 2012b, 353-360). In general, these rural sites expanded progressively after the 4th century and served the needs of food and other material of the Eastern Empire's large cities (Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria etc.) and the frontier military forces. In this context, epigraphic evidence from the so-called *cadaster* of Thera, probably based on the tax reform of Emperor Diocletian, provides testament concerning the organisation of agricultural production in the Cyclades during the early centuries of the period in question (Kiourtzian 2000, 212-240; 2001, 11). It is a valuable source of information for rural life in the Late Antique Cyclades (structures, use of the land, organisation and development of production, farming practices, crop types). It is quite impressive that during the early 4th century on the small island of Thera (76 m²) with limited available arable land compared to other larger and more fertile Cycladic islands such as Paros and Naxos, the local rural production was organised in more than 50 estates. Each one of these agricultural communities had a particular name, domestic organisation and cultivation. The main crop types cultivated on Late Antique Thera, were cereals, grapes (two different varieties: *ἀλωπέκιον* and *κάνθαρον*) and olives. Stockbreeding is also mentioned as an accessory

activity. In terms of social stratification, the *cadaster* of Thera mentions landowners, *paroikoi* (dependent peasants) and slaves. Unfortunately, there is no clear mention whether this production covered the needs of the local market or flowed to external markets.

Moreover, the Keos Survey provides clear evidence of expansion of rural sites across the countryside on the island during Late Antiquity (Cherry *et al.* 1991). The majority of these sites were small and only a few can be classified as larger estates. In Bintliffs' words: "these latter lack trade mark signs of *villa* life (wall-painting fragments, mosaics etc.) suggesting that their wealthier landowners are not in residence" (2012b, 354). It is possible that dependent workers living within these establishments or in separate nucleated or dispersed rural sites managed the estate on behalf of wealthy owners.

In this context, the urban economy drastically changed and many regional cities were reduced in size with limited traces of secular investment compared to previous centuries. The increase in taxes and the economic shrinkage resulted in public service and official urban positions being unpopular for members of the local elites. This phenomenon in connection with the increasing power of the Christian Church led to a significant change concerning urban authority. From the 4th century onwards the authority of the cities shifted to a combination of state representatives, and local bishop and clergy. Progressively, the Late Antique Urban environment was dominated by spacious and elaborate Christian religious complexes with widespread re-use of older building material. These large building projects leave no doubt as to where the financial surplus of the authorities and wealthy civilians was directed. Thus, Christian churches emerged as the cities' new landmarks constituting the most prestigious urban constructions (Saradi 2006). A characteristic example is the construction of the large, elaborate and expensive religious complex of Panagia Ekatontapiliani in the 6th century within the city of Paros (see more details in Chapters 4.2.5 and 4.2.6).

In this respect, changes in urban topography can be seen as traces of radical re-organisation of the urban space under the pressure of a Christian population in order to create public space within cities for the accommodation of Christian churches,

charitable institutions and cemeteries. Late Antique cities adjusted to the standards and needs of the new religious and Christian churches which emerged as the main urban landmarks. Additionally, small-scale public building projects, namely, erection of new structures or the restoration of pre-existed installations, such as fortifications, aqueducts, bridges or harbours are considered as evidence of new extensive building activity and signs of urban activity (Tsigonaki 2012).

Archaeological research has recognised dense networks of long distance exchange with many production ports and centres within the Mediterranean world. After the crucial point of the foundation of Constantinople, trade and exchange must have played an important role in the economic life of the Aegean islands through the Late Antique period. The complex coastlines of the Cycladic islands provided many safe ports and bays, and acted as supply stations of commercial importance, participating actively in the network of maritime transportation of travellers and goods during this period (Abadie-Reynal 1989; Sanders 1996, 148; Vionis 2012, 31). Sea routes connecting Constantinople with Crete, the Eastern Mediterranean, mainland Greece, the coast of North Africa and the West were passing through the Cyclades. Strong evidence about high mobility over the Aegean Sea derives from the inscriptions and graffiti on Syros and Tenos (Kiourtzian 2000, 137-200; 2001, 11-12). The epigraphic data suggest communications between the islands of the Cyclades and other regions like Asia Minor (Miletus, Ephesus, Bithynia, and Lycia), Northern Africa (Egypt and Syro-Palestine), mainland Greece, the Saronic islands, and the West. According to G. Kiourtzian, from the 4th until the early 8th centuries visitors, merchants, pilgrims, soldiers and military or government officers travelled regularly through the maritime area of the Cyclades (2001, 12).

3.4 THE BYZANTINE EARLY MIDDLE AGES (late 7th - early 10th c.)

3.4.1 Introduction

Until the middle 7th century the Eastern Empire more or less maintained its Roman character, since

its material culture and organisational structures were based on forms and models which had been shaped in the turn from the Middle to Late Roman period. From the late 7th a transitional period of multiple transformations challenged the very existence of the Eastern Empire (Haldon 1997; Gregory 2010; Bintliff 2012b, 382). The relevant stability, the considerable activity in town and countryside, and the economic models which were developed throughout Late Antiquity were challenged, and a new world gradually rose. The Byzantine Early Middle Ages is characterised by the transformation of the economy and society, and the shift to a rather different medieval world. It was a transition period for political institutions, and economic and social life from antique to medieval life-ways and mentalities. Byzantine Emperors tried to rebuild the Empire on a new basis.

The limited archaeological evidence and literary sources in combination with the constant struggle of the Empire to survive led many scholars to describe this period as the “Byzantine Dark Ages”. The fragmentary view that we have about these centuries is also related to the lack of interest among researchers and excavators. At the end of this period the Byzantine Empire eventually survived, emerging as a great power in the Mediterranean world. Under the leadership of the Macedonian and Comnenian dynasties its greatest days of prosperity and power were achieved. The East Roman Empire had been transformed into the Byzantine Empire of the Middle Ages with important changes in material culture, new urban models, and very distinctive art, architecture and pottery.

Despite the new dynamic given to the Byzantine Empire by the rise of the Macedonian dynasty (Basil I, 867-886), the strong presence of the Arabs in the southern Aegean Sea extended the period of uncertainty and fluidity in this particular maritime region throughout the 1st half of the 10th century, at least until the re-conquest of Crete by general Nikephorus Phokas. The information about the Cyclades datable during the Byzantine Early Middle Ages is even more limited compared to other regions of the Empire. As a result, it is a challenge to reconstruct the history of the Cycladic islands between the late 7th and the early 10th centuries with the Cyclades hardly mentioned in the written sources of the period.

3.4.2 *The administrative history of the Cyclades*

After the middle 7th century, important administrative changes were made, and several reforms within the organisational structure of the Byzantine state took place, resulting progressively in the dissolution of the administrative units of the Late Roman period. The older structures, the Late Roman provinces, dating back to the times of Diocletian and Constantine were gradually replaced or modified by a new system which was more closely suited to the functional needs of the Early Byzantine Empire. The system of many small provinces was gradually replaced by a new one with its main characteristic being a number of territorially distinct districts of both civil and military administration called *themata*, “θέματα” (Haldon 2002, 86-87; Gregory 2010, 192-195). There is a huge debate among scholars about the date of the emergence and the nature of the thematic administration, which is an issue beyond the present study. In brief, initially the origins of the new thematic administration were placed sometime in the 7th century, when the armies retreated into Asia Minor after the loss of the East to the Arabs. However, recent studies have started to challenge this picture and it is quite possible that what we know as *themata* did not come to be before the early 9th century (see more details in Haldon 1990; 214-215; Brubaker & Haldon 2011, 723-771).

Although archaeological material, such as lead seals, and textual sources provide sporadic evidence for the administrative status of the Aegean Sea within the framework of the Byzantine Early Middle Ages, the overall picture remains fragmentary and ambiguous. Thus, questions and matters of administrative changes in this maritime area are often left unanswered. Therefore, forming an administrative history of the Cyclades is very problematic and it is difficult to proceed further in order to clarify the issue thoroughly. It seems that, during the Byzantine Early Middle Ages there was a clear trend towards administrative reform within the Empire.

It is not clear when the dissolution of the Late Roman *Province of the Islands* took place. However, from the middle 7th to the early 8th century appeared the naval command of the *Karabisianoï*

(Καραβισιάνοι or ἡ στρατηγία τῶν Καραβίων). The origins and nature (whether it was a theme or not) of this maritime division remain unanswered questions, despite the fact that there is a huge debate among scholars (on the *Karabisianoι* see Gelzer 1890: between 670-678; Bury 1911, 190: naval command; Antoniadēs-Bibicou 1966, 63-98: between 648-654; Ahrweiler 1966, 19-31: the first regular and permanent fleet of Byzantium, after the siege of 672-678; Toynbee 1973, 324-325: 640s; Hendy 1985, 652-653; Malamut 1988; Lemerle 1981; Haldon 1990, 217 about 654; Yannopoulos 1990, 209-210: after 670; Brubaker & Haldon 2001, 174-726 with n. 4; Pryor & Jeffreys 2006, 25: after 659; *ODB* II, 1105-1106). In any case, it is quite possible that the creation of *Karabisianoι* was the reaction of the Byzantine Empire to the hostile activity of the Arab fleet in the Aegean Sea (Deligiannakis 2006, 29).

The *Karabisianoι* fleet was commanded by a *strategos*, or general, whose headquarters have not been clarified yet, with suggestions ranging from Rhodes to Keos and Samos (Rhodes: Haldon 1999, 74; Keos: Malamut 1988, 68, 105; Samos: Haldon 1990, 217; Pryor & Jeffreys 2006, 25). Although there is no clear evidence for the territories under his jurisdiction, it seems that his sphere of activity extended all over the Aegean Sea. Therefore, it is possible that all the islands of the Cyclades were included in his jurisdiction. His subordinates also included the *droungarios of the Kibyrhaiotai*.

An interesting mention of the *strategos* of the *Karabisianoι* comes from the second collection of Saint Demetrius' Miracles, compiled at the end of the 7th century (Lemerle 1979, 230-231; 1981, 154-162). The Bulgarian leader Kouver with his people crossed the Danube and approached the *Kerameisios kampos* (the Keramesios plain, probably located northwest of Thessalonica). Then, he sent an embassy to the Byzantine Emperor requesting that he can settle there with his people and have access to food supplies from the neighbouring Slavic tribe of Drougouvites. According to the narrative: «*when most of them (Drougouvites) went among the huts of Slavs in order to provision themselves and when, upon asking, they ascertained that our city was not very far, most of those of Roman origins, with wives and children, began to enter our city saved by God. The administrative officials immediately sent them*

by ship to the capital.» (Lemerle 1979, 229.14-17; Charanis 1970, 231). When Kouver learned of this he decided to organise collusion in order to take the city of Thessalonica. It is mentioned that the Emperor reacted immediately and ordered the commander of the *Karabisianoι*, the *strategos* Sisinnios, to lead his fleet to Thessalonica and enter the city. At that time the fleet of *Karabisianoι* had sailed to the island of Skiathos (Sporades). The date of the episode could have taken place between 680 and 688 (On the Kouver episode see: Lemerle 1981, 161: 682-684. Charanis 1970, 82-83; between 680-688; Gregoriou-Ioannidou 1981, 77-86). This narrative provides some information of great significance for our study. Firstly, it presents a context that shows the *Karabisianoι* fleet could be deployed rapidly and operated in the Aegean. Sisinnios departed from the regions of *Hellas*, reached the island of Skiathos and then sailed to Thessalonica. Secondly, it describes the island of Skiathos as uninhabited, for at least some time in the past. Thirdly, comes the reference that Kouver, after having fortified himself (in Thessalonica), was planning a war against the islands and Asia, and even against the emperor himself.

Kiourtzian suggests the Cyclades had to provide crews and naval bases to the *Karabisianoι* fleet (2000, 13, 152; 2001, 10). According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, in 711 the commander of the *Karabisianoι* Theofilos met pope Constantine in Keos on his return from Constantinople. This is the last mention of the *Karabisianoι* in the written sources and an indication there was a naval base of the fleet on the island of Keos. It is also possible that except for Keos, there was another base of the fleet in the Cyclades, on the island of Syros (Kiourtzian 2000, 13, 152; 2001, 10). This view is derived from an inscription at the site Grammata on Syros, which probably dates to the 7th century and mentions «Κ(ύ) ρ(ι)ε σοσον τον δρόμωνα» ("Lord save the dromon"). The *dromon* was a Byzantine navy warship with a fighting deck over the hull (Luttwak 2009, 326-333, 428). The inscription testifies that such a warship arrived and was secured on Syros sometime during the 7th century. There is no information in the sources about the date of the dissolution of the *Karabisianoι* fleet. According to Ahrweiler this must have happened around 718 (1966, 27-30; see also Malamut 1988, 539). The *Karabisianoι* probably

proved to be inadequate during the second Arab siege of Constantinople in 716/717.

Sigillographic evidence suggests the Aegean Archipelago was not a single steady administrative unit until the middle 8th century (Brandes 2002, 387). These seals were issued by the officials active in the Cyclades attached to their private or official correspondence. A series of four lead seals from the first half of the 8th century mention the existence of the *vasilika kommerkia* on some small Aegean islands. The first one is dated to 730-1 and bears the inscription «τῶν βασιλικῶν κομμέρκιων τῆς Μήλου» (*royal kommerkion of Melos*), which is an indication that the island was the headquarters of the *royal kommerkiarios* (Oikonomidou 1964, 559; Zacos & Vegler 1972, no. 242; Brandes 2002, 379). The second seal is dated to 734/735 and mentions the βασιλικά κομμέρκια of the Aegean Sea Islands (Brandes 2002, 386 with n. 841). The third seal is dated to 736/737 and mentions the βασιλικά κομμέρκια διοικήσεως of Andros (Brandes 2002, 386, 555). The fourth seal is dated to 738/739 and is similar to the first. On one side the portraits of two emperors are depicted, probably Leo III and Constantine V, marking the 7th *indiction* (the word *indiction* has a chronological meaning, it indicated one year within a 15-year cycle, without specifying which cycle: *ODB* II, 992-3). On the other side stands the inscription «βασιλικῶν κομμέρκιων Μήλου, Θήρας, Ἀνάφης, Ἴου καὶ Ἀμοργοῦ» (*royal kommerkion of Melos, Thera, Anafi, Ios and Amorgos*; Antoniadis-Bibicou 1963, 8; Oikonomidou 1964; Zacos-Vegler 1972, 194; Malamut 1988, 540; Stavrakos 2011; Brandes 2002, 386, 556).

There are many unsolved issues regarding the duties of this institution. He was likely to have had the power to control the economic activity of a commercial centre, and to collect taxes from commercial activities in order to strengthen the Byzantine army (On *kommerkiarios* see: Oikonomidou 1989; Gerolimatos 2001, 359; Brandes 2002; Ragia 2011; Stavrakos 2011; Montinaro 2013). According to Brandes, the appearance of βασιλικά κομμέρκια on the small islands of the Cyclades and the changes that can be observed in a short period indicate the non-existence of a steady Byzantine presence in the maritime area of the South Aegean Sea (2002, 387). There was not a single steady administrative unit, thus in 730/731 the βασιλικά κομμέρκια only

included Melos, but a few years later in 738/739 it also included Ios, Amorgos, Thera and Anafi. On a rather different note, Stavrakos on the basis of the four seals, in connection with numismatic finds from the Cycladic islands and traces of trade connections between Constantinople and Africa, was led to the opposite hypothesis that during this period Byzantine presence was relatively strong within the southern Aegean (2011, 269-276). Melos was the centre of tax collection which later included a number of islands, in order to support the operation of the Byzantine fleet.

We can take the middle path here arguing that, on the one hand during the 8th century the Byzantine state and the navy were present all over the Aegean Sea (strong or weak depending on the region). Moreover, in 747 the Byzantine fleet was able to achieve an important victory against the Arabs on the coast of Cyprus. On the other hand, presumably, during that period the Cycladic islands were not included in the sphere of operation of the Arab fleet. It seems the Cyclades were divided in the *vasilika kommerkia* system according to current needs with no specific pattern or plan, in a more convenient and flexible arrangement (Ragia 2011, 104-105).

Shortly after the dissolution of the *Karabisiani* fleet, the emperor Leo III created two new naval organisations: the imperial fleet (*basilikon ploimon*) and the fleet of *Kibyrrhaiotai*. *Kibyrrhaiotai* was the most important naval theme, based at Attaleia (On the *Kibyrrhaiotai* see: Ahrweiler 1966, 81-85, 131-135; Haldon 1990, 220; 1999, 77; Yannopoulos 1991; Savvides 1998; Cosentino 2004; *ODB* II, 1127). *Kibyrrhaiotai* was a specific maritime theme, commanded by a *strategos*, who had both military and civilian power. He was a naval commander whose main subordinates were the *kapetano of Masdaites*, the *ekprosopou of Sylaiou*, and the *droungarios of Kos*. The *strategos of Kibyrrhaiotai* is first mentioned by Theophanis in 732 (De Boor 1963, 410, 4-9).

Because of the paucity of textual sources, it is not clear whether the islands of the Cyclades were part of the theme, comprising the coasts of Asia Minor from Miletos to Cilicia, together with the interior of Caria, Lycia, Pamphylia, and part of Isauria. In addition, information about the lifetime of the theme and the period during which the Cycladic islands could be part of it is ambiguous. Some

scholars consider that after the establishment of the *theme of Kibyrrhaiotai* the Aegean Archipelago was subdivided into two naval zones; each zone was commanded by a *droungarios*, probably a subordinate of the *strategos* of *Kibyrrhaiotai* (Ahrweiler 1966, 81-85, 131-5; Penna 2010, 12-13). The *Taktikon Uspensky* or *Uspenskij*, the conventional name of a middle 9th century catalogue of the civil, military and ecclesiastical offices of the Byzantine Empire, provides some important information. Oikonomidès has dated it to 842/843 (1972, 25, 353). According to the *Taktikon* (53.18-19), in the first half of the 9th century the *Kibyrrhaiotai* theme was still existent (49.12.). In addition, it mentions two new thematic officers the *droungarios of the Aegean Sea* and the *droungarios of the Kolpos*. Both of them were probably subordinates of the *strategos of Kibyrrhaiotai*.

The *Taktikon* does not specify the sphere of activity of the two new thematic officers; therefore there have been different views on the administrative unit which included the Cyclades. Ahrweiler suggested that the *droungarios of the Kolpos* was the successor of the former *droungarios of Dodecanese*, the naval commander of the Cyclades (1966, 80-81). This attitude partly derived from the view of Zakynthinos, who supported the idea that the terms “Cyclades” and “Dodecanese” were synonymous in the Byzantine period (1942, 264-269). The *drougos of Kolpos* was centred around the island of Samos and included most of the Cyclades. The *droungarios of the Aegean Sea* had the islands of the northern Aegean Sea and the Propontis under his command (Ahrweiler 1966, 76-81).

On the contrary, Yannopoulos points out that the Cycladic islands were part of the *drougos of the Aegean Sea* (1990, 215). This view is based on the *De Thematribus*, a book written by the emperor Constantine VII *Porphyrogenitus* (see below). It mentions that during the 10th century the Cyclades were part of the *theme of the Aegean*. According to Yannopoulos, the *theme of the Aegean* was an administrative unit which in the late 9th century replaced the *drougos of the Aegean Sea*; therefore there is no reason to presume that the Cyclades were part of the *drougos of the Kolpos* in the 9th century.

Over the centuries several changes within the structure of the thematic system took place. The original large themes gradually tended

to be subdivided into smaller, and comprised fewer territories under their jurisdiction. Other important documents provide information about the administrative framework of the Empire during the Byzantine Early Middle Ages. The *Kletorologion of Philotheos* (*Κλητορολόγιον*) is a document with noteworthy information about the civil, military, and ecclesiastical titles and offices of the Byzantine Empire. It was published in 899 during the reign of Leo VI the Wise by the otherwise unknown *protospatharios* and *atriklines* Philotheos (Bury 1911; Oikonomidès 1972, 65-235). The *Kletorologion* mentions the *theme of the Aegean Sea* and the *theme of Samos*. At the same time, the *droungarios of the Aegean Sea* and the *droungarios of the Kolpos* are absent from the catalogue. It is possible the two new maritime themes replaced the former *drougos of the Aegean Sea* and the *drougos of the Kolpos*. The foundation of these maritime themes was a Byzantine effort to restrain the aggressive strategy of the Arabs in Crete throughout the second half of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century. The document makes no mention of the territories that comprised the two administrative units. We can only assume the Cyclades were detached from the *theme of Kibyrrhaiotai* and some of them were included in the *theme of the Aegean Sea*.

This hypothesis is supported by another important written source, the *De Thematribus* of the Constantine VII *Porphyrogenitus* (913-959). According to Constantine, the *theme of the Aegean Sea* held the 17th position of the hierarchy, was commanded by a *strategos*, and comprised the Propontis, the Cyclades, and the islands of Chios, Lesbos, Lemnos, Tenedos and Imvros (Pertusi 1952, 81, xvi, 13-81-16). The author does not identify all the islands of Cyclades included in the theme; he only mentions Melos, Amorgos, Thera, Therasia and Rhenia. It seems the *theme of the Aegean Sea* did not include all the Cycladic islands in its sphere of activity, but mostly included the islands of the Northern Aegean. In the same text, Constantine mentions for a second time the Cyclades, as part of the *theme of Hellas* (Pertusi 1952, 90, 5, 14-15). This Byzantine province located in central and southern Greece. It is obvious the author copies the *Synekdemos* of Hieroklis, but once again does not specify which islands belonged to the theme.

We have to point out that during the second half of the 9th and the beginning of the 10th century the situation over the Aegean Sea was fluid, especially in the Cyclades which were in close proximity to Crete. As mentioned below, throughout this period many Cycladic islands were occupied or paid taxes to the Moslems of Crete. Islands like Naxos, Paros, Ios, and Thera periodically did not belong to the Byzantine Empire and the Arabs had established maritime-supremacy over the Cycladic Sea. Probably the ambiguity of the literary sources on the administrative division of the Aegean islands is related to this uncertainty. In addition, as previously mentioned, the term “Cyclades” in the Byzantine era had acquired a broad meaning, even including some islands of the north Aegean Sea. We can find a middle ground here, arguing that the islands of the Cyclades which were still under Byzantine rule were divided into two themes. Probably some of them were included in the *theme of the Aegean Sea*, and the others which were located close to the Greek mainland were included in the European *theme of Hellas*.

Despite the ambiguity of the written sources, it is clear that the administrative position of the Cyclades within the framework of the Byzantine Early Middle Ages underwent significant changes between the middle 7th and the early 10th centuries. The Arab threat spread over the Aegean Sea, especially after the conquest of Crete, and the iconoclast controversy (see Chapter 3.4.4) were key factors of destabilisation and fluidity. They were also some of the main reasons that forced the Byzantine Empire to make many administrative changes on the Aegean islands. In addition, it is worth noting that it was very problematic for the Byzantine Empire to control, defend and tax such a large number of scattered islands because of the actual geographic complexity of the Aegean Sea.

3.4.3 *Life in the Aegean under the shadow of the Arab presence*

The centuries that followed the prosperity of Late Antiquity are rather problematic on multiple levels due to the limited securely dated evidence for religious and secular life. In the transition to the Byzantine Early Middle Ages the insular communities of the Aegean Sea were influenced by a

series of events which led, in socio-economic terms, to a completely new reality. A series of parameters such as the *Great Plague* (541/542), and its cyclical return from the 6th until the 8th century, climatic change, several earthquakes, the Arab-Byzantine struggle for supremacy in the Mediterranean Sea, the permanent loss of the richest provinces, the fading of the Late Antique cities, the reduction of economic space in the Byzantine Empire, the subsequent decrease of the demand for commercial goods, the transformation of the economic system from market to subsistence economy, and the essential changes in the character of the Byzantine State caused many problems in the Empire and its very existence came into question (Bintliff 2012b, 383-384).

After the second quarter of the 7th century, the Byzantine Empire faced a new threat on its eastern frontier: the rise of the Arabs and the spread of Islam. As early as 641 Byzantine territories like Syria, Palestine, Armenia and Egypt were already conquered by the Arabs. Moreover, during the late 7th century the Arab army advanced into Asia Minor, whilst other forces had already completed the conquest of North Africa. In this context, the Arab fleet made a dynamic emergence over the Aegean Sea. We can separate the Arab presence in the Aegean Sea into two comprehensive periods: a) the time before the Arab conquest of Crete, and b) the time after the Arab conquest (824-828) until the Byzantine recapturing of the island (961).

During the first period, from Arab naval bases in Cyzicus, Smyrna and on the southwest coast of Asia Minor, Constantinople was besieged twice, once in 672-678 and after in 715-717. In this context, the Aegean Archipelago gradually became the forefront of the naval contest between the Byzantines and the Arabs. Between 652 and 654, the islands of Crete, Rhodes and Kos were raided by a Muslim fleet. A few years later in 667, Rhodes was assaulted again and during the period between 673 and 680 was occupied by the Arabs (Bosworth 2002; Pryor & Jeffreys 2006, 25-26). Crete was also raided probably in 672 and 713. The maritime-supremacy of the Byzantine Empire in the Mediterranean had begun to be challenged.

Once more, the written sources provide no information concerning the fate of the islands of the Cyclades and there is no mention of any hostile

act against them. Nevertheless, a re-evaluation of the material culture dated to this period from many Cycladic islands provides indications for Byzantine presence in the Cyclades, and the existence of a regional network of trade and communication with the imperial centre and other regions of the Aegean world. Presumably during that period the islands of the Cyclades were not included in the sphere of operation of the Arab fleet. It seems the Arabs turned their hostility against Constantinople, the coast of Asia Minor and the largest and more prosperous islands of the southern and south-eastern Aegean (Rhodes, Kos, Crete).

Ceramic evidence from sites on the island of Naxos (late variants of LRA 1 type, lamps, coarse ware, cooking pots) dated to the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries suggest commercial activities and connection with the capital (Simantoni-Bournia 2001, 29-31; Vionis *et al.* 2009, 155-156; Vionis 2012, 32; 2016; 2017). Six sites on Melos have produced early lead-glazed White Wares imported from Constantinople, providing evidence of continuity into the late 8th or the early 9th century (Sanders 1996, 148) and communication with the imperial centre. On the island of Keos ceramic fragments dated from the 7th to the 9th centuries have been discovered (Chery *et al.* 1991, 354, table 18.1; Armstrong 2009, 176). Additionally, according to Katsone, the seal of *vasilika kommerkia* of Melos, Thera, Anafi, Ios and Amorgos could potentially be connected to the role of Thera as a station in the maritime trade of the Byzantines and the Arabs - but on the other hand could also indicate internal trade of indigenous products (2008, 107-108 with n. 111; for more details on *vasilika kommerkia* see Chapter 3.4.2). Numismatic data from Naxos, Amorgos, Sikinos, Andros, Sifnos, Melos, Kimolos, Mykonos, Delos and Thera (dated from the 7th until the first half of the 9th century) suggest economic and trade activities (Penna 2001, Pennas & Samoladou 2010).

The situation changed progressively from the first half of the 9th century. During the reign of Michael II Arab adventurers from Spain took advantage of the weak naval defensive system of the Byzantium, and because of the participation of the *Kibyrrhaiotai* fleet in the revolt of Thomas the Slav (see next Chapter) succeeded in occupying the island of Crete (sometime between 824 and

828). Constantine VII *Porphyrogenitus* mentions in *De administrando imperio*: «For when Michael the Lisper had got possession of the rule over the Romans, and the rebellion of Thomas broke out and lasted three years, then, while the emperor was engrossed with the troubles which had arisen, the Agarenes who lived in Spain saw their chance had come, fitted out a large fleet and started out from the region of Sicily and desolated all the islands of the Cyclades, and, coming to Crete and finding it rich and carelessly guarded, since none opposed or engaged them, they took it, and hold it to this day» (Moravcsik & Jenkins 1967, 22.41-48).

All the Byzantine naval campaigns to retake the island from 829 to 866 were unsuccessful. The Byzantine Empire lost a strategically and commercially important island. It was a crucial point of the Byzantine-Arabic struggle for control over the Aegean, which altered the equilibrium in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Byzantine sources report little and fragmentary information about the fate of the Cycladic islands during the conquest of Crete.

The *Life of Saint Theoktiste* mentions the Moslem raids and their effect on the islands of the Cyclades (Ioannou 1973, 1-17). According to the narrator (the Byzantine ambassador Niketas Magistros), Saint Theoktiste at the age of eighteen was taken prisoner by the Moslems of Crete who raided her native island Lesbos. The Moslem fleet, commanded by Nisiris, stopped on the island of Paros on its way back to Crete, and the Saint managed to escape her captors. It may have occurred sometime between 823 and 828 (Talbot 1996, 97). In the first quarter of the 10th century on his way to Crete Niketas stopped on Paros. During his stay there, he met a hermit by the name of Symeon who told him the story of Saint Theoktiste. The hermit asked Niketas to write for posterity the Life of the Saint. He described Paros as an uninhabited island, only inhabited by deer and other animals, and serving as a naval base for pirates.

Nonetheless, this report may indicate that the island of Paros was captured by the Arabs, but it is difficult to believe that one of the largest islands in the Cyclades had become so isolated (see more in Chapter 4). According to Tomadakes, this is an exaggerated report found in hagiographical works (1965, 109-110; Jazdezewska 2009); a literary *cliché*. Unfortunately many scholars without critical

thinking easily adopt the view that throughout this period Paros was in this state. In the *Life of Saint Theoktiste* it is also mentioned that Byzantine sailors who had stopped on Naxos attended a service at a local church and received Holy Communion. On the one hand, this reference may indicate the Arabs of Crete did not destroy the churches on the occupied islands (Christides 1981, 82). On the other hand, it seems that Byzantine sailors could occasionally visit an occupied island.

In 898, Arabs from Tarsus commended by Raghib, managed to defeat a Byzantine fleet, probably the *Kibyrrhaiotai* (Pryor & Jeffreys 2006, 62). This victory facilitated the raids of Leo of Tripoli's fleet over the Aegean Sea (Leo of Tripoli, known to the Moslems as Gulam Zuraafa, was a former Byzantine seaman from the *Kibyrrhaiotai* who converted to Islam). As Ioannes Caminiates reveals (*On the capture of Thessalonika*), after the capture of Thessaloniki, in 904, Leo of Tripoli sailed around the islands of the Aegean in order to avoid any confrontation with the Byzantine fleet (Böhlig 1973, 59-60). During his way back to Crete he stopped-over at the island of Naxos, which had already been occupied by the Moslems of Crete, to whom the islanders paid tribute. According to Christides, by the middle of the 10th century the Cycladic islands that were definitely in the hands of the Arabs of Crete were Ios, Thera, Paros and Naxos, functioning as basic naval stations for the Arab fleets sailing from Crete or Syria (1981; 1984, 165-167). The Caminiates' text indicates that the island of Naxos experienced good relation with the Arabs of Crete, as the locals welcome the Arab fleet offering gifts and supplies.

It is also worth recalling that the Emperor Romanos II (959-963) signed a treaty with the emir of Crete Abd al Aziz before the Byzantine re-conquest of the island in 961, which is known only from Arab sources. According to the treaty, the Byzantines would pay an annual tribute to the Arabs. The emir of Crete would stop the raids against the islands and allow free trade between the insular communities in return (Panagiotaki 1960, 52; Christides 1981, 97; Dimitrokallis 2005, 33-34).

Michael Attaleiates mentions that (224) the general Nikephorus Phokas stopped on Ios during his campaign in order to reoccupy the island of Crete. He could not find an experienced Byzantine sailor to lead

his fleet to Crete, because no Byzantine ship had sailed in that direction for many years. This is an indication that the Moslem fleet had dominated the area of the central Cyclades and the Byzantine fleet had taken several years to force its passage through this route.

Overall, the Arab-Byzantine struggle for supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean established new general circumstances over the Aegean Sea. The fragmentary information derived from the Byzantine literary sources describes a context of Arab supremacy in the Aegean Sea with a very weak Byzantine presence after the early 9th century. From a strategic point of view, it seems the Arabs after 824-828 founded their base in the southern Aegean on the island of Crete, and were preparing to establish a new empire based not only on raiding, looting and booty, but according to an organised central plan (Vionis 2017, 174-175). According to Vionis, the reference of Ioannes Caminiates indicates that the Arabs were probably not continuously plundering the islanders since they planned to extract taxes from them. Alternatively, the conquered islands would need cash and agricultural products to be able to meet their tax obligations. Agricultural products presuppose an organised system of local rural production while cash could be acquired through a form of inter-regional trade, by exporting these products and other commodities within (as well as outside) the territory of the Byzantine Empire (Vionis 2017, 175). In this respect, the islands of Cyclades remained highly interactive microcosms throughout the troubled period of the Arab presence in the Aegean.

3.4.4 Internal conflicts

During the period from the middle 7th to the 9th centuries the Byzantine state faced many internal political conflicts and ecclesiastical controversies. A crucial point for Byzantine history was the period of Iconoclasm. This great controversy that convulsed the Empire is divided into two phases: i) the first Iconoclasm was initiated in 726 or 730 by Leo III and reversed in 787 by the empress-regent Irene, ii) the second Iconoclasm was commenced in 787 by Leo V and was ended in 843 by empress-regent Theodora. Moreover, many emperors faced defections and efforts of usurpation to their throne which resulted in civil wars.

It seems the islands of the Cyclades were actively involved in some of these political and ecclesiastical controversies during the 8th and 9th centuries. The first mention of involvement of the Cyclades in such events is dated to 725-726 or 728 (Malamut 1988, 70). According to Theophanes and Nikephoros, the inhabitants of Hellas and the Cyclades, moved by “divine zeal”, came to an accord and revolted against the emperor Leo III (De Boor 1963, 405, 14-24; Mango 1990, 128-129.60). They collected a great fleet and made a certain Cosmas their emperor. The commander of the expedition was Agallianos, the *tourmarches of the Helladics* (τουρμάρχης τῶν Ἑλλαδικῶν), and Stephen. They led their fleet against Constantinople but after joining battle their ships were burnt with Greek fire and were defeated. Both of the authors inform us that Agallianos threw himself in the sea while Cosmas and Stephen were beheaded; nothing is included about the fate of the Cyclades and Hellas.

The second active participation of the Cyclades in a political controversy is dated to 821-823. The reign of Michael II was marked by the revolt of Thomas the Slav. Thomas was a high ranking military officer in the *Anatolikon* theme who organised an insurrection in Asia Minor against the Byzantine emperor. It was a great conflict lasting over two years and assumed the proportions of a civil war. Thomas succeeded in gaining most of the themes of Asia Minor, including the maritime *theme of Kibyrrhaiotai* onto his side. At the same time he claimed that he was an adherent of the *iconophile* party and utilised the discontent of a great part of the population against the iconoclastic policy of the emperor Michael II. The Arabs tried to make a close alliance with Thomas in order to help him in deposing the emperor. Thomas was crowned as emperor of the Romans at Antioch and the Caliph al-Ma'mun recognised his “title”. Shortly thereafter, he directed his forces against Constantinople. From December 821 to spring 823, supported by the fleet of the Cyclades, Thomas besieged the capital both on land and on sea. The imperial forces using Greek Fire neutralised the threat. After the failure of the siege the revolt quickly collapsed. The revolt of Thomas and the two year controversy weakened the Byzantine Empire's naval defensive system and helped the Arabs occupy Crete.

3.4.5 The ecclesiastical history of the Cyclades

Several ecclesiastical documents dated to the Byzantine Early Middle Ages provide information about the organisational structure of the Christian Church. According to the church hierarchy, the chief bishops of the Christian Church were the five Patriarchs (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem). The Byzantine state was subdivided into ecclesiastical provinces, called *metropoleis*. The head of each province was the metropolitan-bishop. He was the supervisor of his territory and had several bishops' sees under his jurisdiction. The head of each bishopric was the local bishop. A small delegation of bishops from each ecclesiastical province participated in Ecumenical Councils and ecclesiastical synods.

The first comprehensive view of the ecclesiastical administration of the Early Byzantine state is offered by the *Notitia I* dated to the 7th century; an official document furnishing the list with the metropolitan's hierarchical rank, and the local bishops of the church (Darrouzès 1981, 3-9, 203-213). The 30th (λ') position on the list corresponds to the *province of the islands of the Cyclades* (ἐπαρχία νήσων Κυκλάδων). The head of this ecclesiastical province was the metropolitan bishop of Rhodes, who had twelve bishoprics under his jurisdiction, seven of which were located on the islands of the Cyclades, while one is omitted. According to the hierarchical rank of the bishoprics, the fourth position was held by the bishop of Naxos, the fifth by the bishop of Thera, the sixth by the bishop of Paros, the eighth by the bishop of Andros, the ninth by the bishop of Tenos, the tenth by the bishop of Melos, and the eleventh by the bishop of Pissynis, which was one of the ancient names of Amorgos (Vagiakakos 1991-1993, 243).

Sometime in the late 6th or the early 7th century the island of Amorgos was detached from the power of the bishop of Paros, and was promoted to a separate bishopric with its own Episcopal see. It seems that during that period demographic and economic conditions in Amorgos gave the opportunity for the island to form a separate bishopric. On a rather different note, Sifnos failed to be promoted to a separate bishopric and remained under the bishop of Paros's jurisdiction throughout the Early and Middle

Byzantine periods. This status was maintained until 1083 and the island was included in the newly created bishopric of Paronaxia, where it remained at least until the 16th century (Kampanellis 1991, 37; Konstantinides 1998, 208).

Evidence from the *Notitia I* indicates that in the 7th century only the larger islands of the Cyclades had Episcopal sees. In contrast, the smaller islands, like Sifnos, were probably under the jurisdiction of larger bishoprics. It is also worth recalling that the *Notitia I* does not provide any information about the ecclesiastical division of the other Cycladic islands included in the *province of Hellas* (Keos, Delos, Mykonos, Serifos, Kythnos, and probably Syros).

The following bishops participated in the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople held in 680-681: Georgios of Naxos (Fedalto 1988, 218; *ACO*, 2nd edition, II, 2, 2, 764), Stefanos of Paros (Fedalto 1988, 219; *ACO* II, 2, 2, 520; Mansi 1961, XI, 680C, 652E), Dimitrios of Tenos (Fedalto 1988, 223; *ACO* II, 2, 520, 20), Eftichios of Melos (Fedalto 1988, 213; *ACO*, 2nd edition, II, 2, 2, 764) and Georgios of Thera (Fedalto 1988, 222; *ACO*, 2nd edition, II, 2, 2, 764).

During the first half of the 8th century an important change took place in the ecclesiastical status of some Cycladic islands. Pope Gregory II appealed to the Byzantine emperor Leo III to moderate his position on the iconoclastic controversy. Leo tried to bring him under control and decided to transfer territories from the Pope's ecclesiastical jurisdiction to the Patriarch of Constantinople. In the year 727 the emperor detached Hellas and the neighbouring islands from the Pope's sphere of activity and transferred them to the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Important information regarding the ecclesiastical administration of the Cyclades is offered by the *Notitia 3*, dated between the second half of the 8th and the late 9th century (Darrouzès 1981, 20-33, 229-245). According to the *Notitia 3* the islands of the Cyclades were not included as a whole in the same ecclesiastical administrative unit. The 44th position on the list corresponds to the *province of Hellas* (ἐπαρχία Ἑλλάδος). The head of this ecclesiastical province was the metropolitan bishop of Athens, who had 39 bishoprics under his jurisdiction, two of which were located on the islands of the Cyclades. According to the hierarchical rank of the bishoprics, the third position was held

by the bishop of Keos and the fifth by the bishop of Mykonos. The high position of these two Cycladic bishoprics on the hierarchical rank suggests they played a significant role.

The following bishops participated in the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea held in 787: Constans of Andros (Mansi 1961, XIII, col.373; Fedalto 1988, I, 206), Galatios of Melos (Mansi 1961, XIII, col.149, 396; Fedalto 1988, I, 213) and Eustathios of Tenos (Mansi 1961, XIII, col.736; Fedalto 1988, I, 223). In 879 the bishop of Andros Philippos participated in a Council held in Constantinople (Mansi 1961, XVII-XVIII, col.376; Fedalto 1988, I, 206).

In relative terms, we can say that the islands of Cyclades during the period from the 7th to the 9th centuries were not included as a whole in the same ecclesiastical province. Most of them were under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Rhodes and the rest were in the sphere of activity of the metropolitan bishop of Athens. It is obvious that originally the ecclesiastical division generally followed the secular administration. However since the 7th century the ecclesiastical division did not follow the changes in the civil administration. The evidence from the *Notitiae* indicates there is stability in the ecclesiastical division of the Cycladic islands from the 6th to the 10th centuries, with only a few exceptions. The Episcopal sees were mainly on the largest and most populated islands. Some of the local bishops had more than one island under their jurisdiction.

3.4.6 Natural disasters

During Late Antiquity a series of natural catastrophes afflicted the Aegean islands. In 344, 477, 516 and 554 violent earthquakes were reported, which caused considerable damage to the islands of Rhodes and Kos (Spiropoulos 1997, 283-5; Papazachos & Papazachou 1997, 185, 187, 189; Ambraseys 2009, 180, 199, 207). The written sources however, do not mention the Cyclades in this context. It is possible that through the Late Antique centuries the islands of the Cyclades did not suffer significant earthquake damage.

The first report of an earthquake directly affecting the Cyclades was the eruption of Thera's volcano, in the summer of 725/726, during the early

iconoclastic period. The paroxysm lasted three days, but the eruption continued for more than a month (Ambraseys 2009, 226-227). According to the detailed descriptions by Theophanes and Nikephoros the effects of the volcanic eruption caused a great sensation (Mango 1990, 128-9, 59-60). The authors comment on the smoke, the lava and the rocks that came from the volcano. Theophanes mentions that «ἀτμὶς ὡς ἐκ καμίνου πυρὸς ἀνέβρασεν ἀναμέσον Θήρας καὶ Θηρασίας τῶν νήσων ἐκ τοῦ βυθοῦ τῆς θαλάσσης» (*Chronographia* 404. 18-20; “a vapour as from a fiery furnace boiled up for a few days from the depth of the sea between the islands of Thera and Therasia”: Mango & Scott 1997, 559) and «πετροκισσήρους μεγάλους ὡς λόφους τινὰς ἀνέπεμψε καθ’ ὅλης τῆς μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ Λέσβου καὶ Ἀβύδου καὶ τῆς πρόσθιάλασσαν Μακεδονίας» (*Chronographia* 404. 23-25; “pumice stones as big as hills were thrown up against all of Asia Minor, Lesbos, Abydos, and coastal Macedonia”: Mango & Scott 1997, 559). Nikephoros notes that «θέρους ὥρας ἐνεστηκυίας συνηνέχθη τον θαλάττιον βυθὸν πλεῖστον ὅτι καπνῶ δὴ ἀτμὸν ἐξερευγέσθαι, ἐξ οὗ ἐπὶ πολὺ πυκνουμένου τοῦ ἀέρος πῦρ ἐξαφθῆναι, καὶ μετὰ τὸ πῦρ λίθους κισσηρώδεις διεκβρασθῆναι εἰς πλῆθος μέγιστον» (“During the summer season the watery deep happened to belch forth a quantity of smoky steam, out of which, as the air became thicker, a fire burst and, after the fire, an enormous mass of pumice-like stones was cast out”: Mango 1990, 59. 6-7). Both of them emphasise that as a result of the explosion a new island was created and united with the Holy Island (Delos). All these lead to the hypothesis that the eruption of Thera’s volcano was a very intense phenomenon, causing much damage, not only on Thera but also on other islands of the Cyclades.

3.5 THE MIDDLE BYZANTINE PERIOD (middle 10th – early 13th c.)

3.5.1 Introduction

Despite the fact that the study of the material culture and settled landscape of the Middle Byzantine period is not the aim of this thesis, this chapter provides a very brief overview of the historical context in the Cyclades between the middle 10th and the early 13th century. This evidence is an excellent

comparative material that allows a better understanding of the complex socioeconomic phenomena of the Byzantine Early Middle Ages in the Cyclades.

The total victory of the *iconophiles* in 843, political stability and military power strengthened the Byzantine Empire on many levels during the late 9th century. Thus, the Byzantine Empire reached its height under the leadership of the Macedonian and Komnenian emperors (Haldon 2010; Bintliff 2012b, 388-389). The smooth functioning of institutions, lack of political and religious controversies, demographic growth, general stability, military power and victories against enemies (Bulgaria) in combination with the economic policies of the emperors led the Empire, especially during the late 10th and the early 11th century, to its apogee of power.

In the second half of the 11th century however, the Byzantine state once again faced many problems. Internal political and ecclesiastical conflicts, the rise of the large estates, the decline of the free peasantry, the crusades, the threat of the Normans in Italy, the Hungarians, the Uzes and the Cumans in the Balkans, and the Seljuk Turks in Asia Minor negatively affected the Byzantine Empire. The economy and administration gradually collapsed and the Byzantine Empire in fact failed to recover. This period ended with the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204.

After the so-called “Dark Ages”, the archaeological evidence for Byzantium becomes more plentiful. There is evidence of city life and monumental architecture being built, but not on the vast scale that characterised the Late Roman period. Information about the islands of the Aegean Sea during this period is sufficient. As previously mentioned the Middle Byzantine era for the Cyclades commenced during the second half of the 10th century and lasted until the early 13th century. It seems that the Cyclades, in the Middle Byzantine centuries, were characterised by new economic, social and administrative transformations (Malamut 1982, 350).

3.5.2 The political and ecclesiastical history of the Middle Byzantine Cyclades

In 961, during the reign of Romanos II general Nikephorus Phokas finally succeeded in reoccupying the island of Crete and restoring Byzantine maritime-

supremacy over the Aegean Sea. His total victory against the Moslems of Crete provided peace and stability for the Cyclades in the second half of the 10th century, and Byzantine rule was restored in the Cyclades until the coming of the Franks (early 13th century).

There is only one ambiguous mention of Muslim hostile activity against the Cyclades after the Byzantine reoccupation of Crete. According to Ioannis Skylitzes (Thurn 1973, 6-8, 396-398) and Ioannis Zonaras (Dindorf 1868-1875, XVII.10, 14) Muslim corsairs attacked Myra and the Cyclades, but were totally defeated by the fleet of *Kibyrrhaiotai*. In the following years the Arab presence in the Aegean Sea came to an end and the three maritime Byzantine themes of *Kibyrrhaiotai*, *Samos* and *Aigaion Pelagos* tended to decline (Pryor & Jeffreys 2006, 88).

According to the *Taktikon Escorial*, dated in the late 10th century (c. 971-975), the Cyclades together with some of the islands of the Dodecanese formed a new theme, *the theme of the Cyclades* (Oikonomidès 1972, 267, 31). Oikonomidès argues the Cyclades became a separate theme after 949 (1972, 361). In the late 11th century the *Cyclades theme* also included Chios, Kos, Karpathos, and Ikaria. In addition, in 1107 a flotilla from the Cyclades participated in the naval operations of the Byzantine fleet in the Adriatic (Varrias 1998). In 1125 however the Venetian fleet sacked Samos, Chios, Lesbos, and Andros after the emperor John II Komnenos refused to renew the commercial privileges which had been granted to the Venetians.

There is also information about the ecclesiastical history of the Cyclades during the Middle Byzantine period. A clear and overall view of the ecclesiastical administration of the Cyclades throughout the late 9th and the 10th centuries is offered by the *Notitia* 7, dated between 901 and 907 (Darrouzès 1981, 53-78, 269-289). In this document we observe certain changes. The 28th position on the list corresponds to the *province of Hellas*. The head of this ecclesiastical province was the metropolitan bishop of Athens, who had ten bishoprics under his jurisdiction. According to the hierarchical rank, the fourth position was held by the bishop of Andros and the tenth by the bishop of Syros. It is obvious the metropolitan bishop of Athens had fewer bishoprics under his jurisdiction in the late 10th century than in the 8th and 9th centuries.

Moreover, we have to mention, on the one hand there is the absence of the bishoprics of Keos and Mykonos, and on the other hand the existence of the bishopric of Andros, which was detached from the ecclesiastical province of Cyclades and was included in the ecclesiastical *province of Hellas*. This change must have happened during the middle 9th and the early 10th centuries (Malamut 1988, 342). The 38th position on the list corresponds to the *province of Cyclades*. The metropolitan bishop of Rhodes still maintained all the dioceses under his jurisdiction in the 10th century, with the exception of Andros.

This status was maintained until the late 11th century. In 1083 the Churches of Paros and Naxos were detached from the metropolis of Rhodes and formed a new metropolis called *Paronaxia* (Darrouzès 1981). This newly created ecclesiastical district probably had smaller islands like Sifnos under its jurisdiction (Kampanellis 1991, 37; Konstantinides 1998, 208).

3.5.3 *The social and economic conditions in the Cyclades*

Administrative and economic reforms gave the Empire a new character following the Early Byzantine centuries. As a result of these gradual transformations we notice a remarkable increase in rural settlements in the countryside throughout the Middle Byzantine period.

The new conditions of peace and stability created by the restoration of Byzantine rule over the Aegean Sea led to demographic increase and a rise in settlement, or even a resettlement of the Cycladic islands. During this period this phenomenon has been noticed for many regions of Greece, like Phocis, Laconia and Boeotia (Armstrong 1989, 1996; Bintliff & Snodgrass 1985; Bintliff 2000a; 2012b, 391-394). The location and size of these settlements varies and is usually organised around a church. In the Cyclades humble churches usually signify extensive rural settlement and agricultural intensification (Vionis 2013; 2017). The large number of small and simple churches found scattered around the Cycladic islands, dated to the Middle Byzantine period, support this view and indicate an increase in population and number of settlements. This is an indication that agricultural production remained a prime economic activity in the Middle Byzantine era.

In addition, some islands developed other economic activities; Andros for example became an important silk centre during the Middle Byzantine centuries (Jacoby 2000).

3.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The aforementioned overview of the history of the Aegean over the course of Late Antiquity and the Early and Middle Byzantine centuries has offered a general picture of political, economic and social evolution, which affected the everyday life of the insular communities of the Cyclades.

The fate of the Cycladic complex and the role played by its islands arose from the political, social, economic and cultural circumstances created by the external leading centres from the Roman and Byzantine Empires to Venetian and Ottoman domination. Over the course of the Middle Roman Imperial era the Cyclades remained almost “invisible” in the context of the vast “Global” Empire. The reorientation of the Roman Empire to Constantinople placed the islands of the Aegean Sea at the centre of development and had long-term impact on the history of the Cyclades from the 4th century onwards. The close proximity to the capital in many ways shaped the historical trajectory of the Cyclades. Thus, over the course of the Late Antique centuries, the insular communities of the Cyclades had formed diverse and highly interactive microcosms characterised by the integration to maritime commercial routes, and the connectivity with important cultural and political Mediterranean centres of the period in question. In general terms, most of the Cycladic islands achieved a relevant socioeconomic florescence from the 4th to the middle 7th century.

During the Byzantine Early Middle Ages the multiple transformations affected daily life on the islands, changing their nature and character. The Aegean Sea was the theatre of military operations and the Cyclades in particular, integrated to the main maritime military routes of the Byzantine Empire, acting as the forefront of defence of the Capital amid the naval struggle between the Byzantines and the Arabs. The dramatic fluctuations of the period’s political, military and social situation created special conditions in the South Aegean, and some islands of the Cyclades could occasionally act as Byzantine or

Arab naval bases. However, the Cyclades continued to be a region of interaction with commercial activities and daily life, even during the turbulent Dark Ages. The Cycladic islands continued to be connected, interacted with broader worlds on a different level and never experienced total isolation or abandonment. Probably, some islands, like Paros, although viewed as completely isolated, were particularly affected by specific conditions in this exact period of time, for reasons analysed below. In contrast, islands like Naxos seem to be affected to a lesser degree.

In the Middle Byzantine era the Aegean gradually became a “Byzantine sea” as the Empire established a stable and relatively safe context. Then, after the 13th century the Aegean Archipelago emerged as a crucial maritime area for the commercial activities of the rapidly growing Italian cities. Investigating the material culture and built environment of the Cyclades in the following chapter provides important evidence, shedding more light on everyday life in the insular communities throughout Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Early Middle Ages.