"ONE, NONE, AND A HUNDRED THOUSAND"

Settlements and identities in the prehistoric Mediterranean Islands

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Abstract

This paper explores the relations between island settlement, identity and sense of place in the prehistoric Mediterranean. It uses modern examples and archaeological case studies to discuss the effects of colonisation and abandonment on island communities and the creation of distinctive identities as a form of cultural resistance. Abandonment had a homogenising effect on prehistoric cultures, as the resulting movement of people encouraged cultural exchange. At the same time, however, certain traits were maintained, reflecting people's sense of place and community affiliation. This homogeneity therefore is only superficial, masking different layers of identity constructed through cultural interaction. Time and space are critical factors in the creation of different cultural identities, which are not fixed but in continuous transformation.

Keywords

Identity, island, settlement, 'sense of place', colonisation, abandonment

Introduction: Shifting places and ideas

What is identity? According to Luigi Pirandello, Sicilian writer and Nobel Prize winner for literature (1934), we are 'one, none, and a hundred thousand'. Following a mundane argument with his wife, the main character of his novel *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* (1926) realises that, far from being unique, he has no single identity and, ultimately, that he possesses multiple identities in the eyes of others. Europe's early 20th Century historical and cultural milieu influenced these ideas, and yet it is hard to let go of the idea that Pirandello's place of origin, the strangely named Caos (or Chaos) locality in the Agrigento province of the island of Sicily, with its multiple layers of identity left by past civilisations, had an impact on his outlook on life.

The relation between sense of place and identity, and specifically between settlement continuity and the creation and transmission of insular identities, is the focus of this paper. From an archaeological point of view, the settlement record for the Mediterranean islands shows that their colonisation, abandonment and recolonisation were all components of a punctuated - as opposed to linear - process, as islands were rarely continuously occupied following their initial colonisation. A key feature to be considered here is that Mediterranean islands colonised for the first time in the Bronze

Age (a period spanning the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, associated with extensive maritime trading) experienced shorter occupation periods than those occupied in the Neolithic (the age of agriculture, 6th to 4th millennium BC), suggesting that Bronze Age island settlements were abandoned more often and sooner than previously (Dawson, 2006: 40–41). In light of this phenomenon, this paper asks if and how abandonment and resulting population mobility and interaction affected the creation of the islanders' identity. Most archaeological studies of past identities focus on material culture, emphasising uniformity or variation in the archaeological record in order to address, amongst other things, issues of gender, status, and belief (eg Knapp and Meskell, 1997; Meskell, 2001). Settlement strategies also give important insights into the islanders' changing perception of their environment. This perception is affected by interaction with other communities and, in turn, affects the islanders' sense of identity, which is then reflected in their material culture.

Over the past thirty years, archaeological island studies have moved from an original concern with the timing and nature of what constitutes successful colonisation (and thus mainly an environmental or biogeographical approach – with an emphasis on 'nature') (eg Cherry, 1981; Evans, 1973), to studying what happens *after* colonisation (social interaction and isolation – with the emphasis on 'culture') (eg Anderson, 2004; Broodbank, 2000; Stoddart 1999b). In reaction to the 'laboratory paradigm' of island archaeology in the 1970s (eg Evans, 1973), which treated island cultures as simpler versions of their mainland counterparts, a new generation of island studies emphasises that islands are not conveniently bounded units of study, focusing instead on reconstructing "encultured island biogeographies" (Broodbank, 2000: 28–32). Recent approaches pivot around the idea that social interaction links island populations to other communities well beyond their immediate visual geographical setting (Broodbank, 2000; Rainbird, 1999, 2007), and that this interaction effectively 'encultures' or transforms the landscape. The Mediterranean Sea, though physically rather stable in terms of sea levels by the Bronze Age (Lambeck, 1996), was also progressively 'encultured', as people acquired more efficient means to move across it and interacted with each other.

Island-mainland relations

Do island and mainland cultures differ and, if so, how and why? Do islands pose specific challenges and opportunities that provide the setting for the development of cultural differences? Ecological differences between islands and mainlands were explained by Vayda and Rappaport (1963: 134) in terms of the 'founder effect' principle, which postulates that an animal or plant species colonising an island will develop differently from its parent population, because only part of the gene pool is brought to the island. It was further suggested that human colonisers would also bring a selection of cultural traits onto an island and thus eventually diverge from their mainland population. This model could explain, for example, the cultural divergence between the Aeolian and the Maltese archipelagos, which had both been colonised in the Neolithic by settlers coming from Sicily (Evans, 1973, 1977).

This basic explanation for cultural divergence, inspired by biogeographical models, works for the Mediterranean only as long as we also take consequent cultural interaction into consideration as being largely responsible for change. In the 1990s, island settlements were defined as 'transformed' or 'transported' landscapes (Gosden and Head, 1994: 114), as useful plants and animals were introduced by people to the

islands. Often, however, island communities had to adapt to newly found conditions and diversify in the area of subsistence. The idea that they may have been more conservative or archaising in other cultural realms (such as symbolism and belief), in order to express ties to their parent population or because isolated, is open to question. Although there are examples that appear to support these views, it is all too easy to generalise about island cultures.

Figure 1 – map of Mediterranean islands mentioned in the text

Recent research developments from the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean exemplify some of the points made so far. Several parallels were noted by Peltenburg and his associates (2000, 2001, 2002) between the cultures of the island and the Levantine mainland in the period of settlement establishment on Cyprus (9th millennium BC or Pre-Pottery Neolithic period), following a shorter occupation of the island in the 10th millennium BC (for the latter see Ammerman and Noller, 2005 and Simmons, 1999). The similarities were noticeable in the chipped stone tradition, in the manufacture of mud bricks, and in the domestic architecture, as well as in the symbolic realm, with parallels in mace-heads, engraved pebbles, figurative artwork, and in skull treatment (Peltenburg et al, 2000: 845, 2001: 54). However, there were also significant differences.

At the site of Kissonerga-*Mylouthkia*, Cyprus, excavations revealed five water wells, dated to the second half of the 9th millennium BC (Peltenburg et al, 2000, 2001, 2002). These are among the earliest known wells in the world, and Peltenburg et al (2001: 55) have pointed out that they are unparalleled so far on the mainland (ie in the Levantine Corridor). The subsequent deposition inside the wells of whole articulated sheep and goat skeletons and of human bones is also specific to Cyprus, though it apparently echoes the tradition of removing skulls attested on the mainland (Peltenburg et al, 2001: 55). The evidence from this period on Cyprus indicates that domesticated animals (sheep, goat, and cattle) were imported from the mainland to the island more than a thousand years earlier than until recently believed. Cattle were also a very early introduction to the island, though they disappeared in the 8th millennium and were reintroduced much later in the early Bronze Age (Peltenburg et al, 2001: 46). These features reinforce the idea that island communities were not simple replicas or miniature versions of mainland ones. One reaches similar conclusions when considering the

different paths followed by the early colonisers of the Maltese and Aeolian islands. Although both groups originated from Sicily, they developed very different cultures.

Figure 2 – Map of Sicily, Malta and minor islands

Island identities: convergence and divergence

The Maltese and the Aeolian Islands were colonised in the Neolithic by people coming from Sicily and went on to develop very differently, as the prehistoric people on Malta began to build megalithic temples. These structures, unique in their layout and style, are the oldest known standing stone structures in the world.

Figure 3 - Haqar Qim Temple, Malta (photograph: Helen Dawson)

The idea that identity is a form of cultural resistance seems applicable to Malta, where the "Temple culture" may have flourished because of internal social tensions or as a response to interaction with Sicily (eg Bonanno, 1990; Dixon, 1998; Robb, 2001; Stoddart, 1999a, 1999b). The Aeolian Islands, on the other hand, do not display such distinctive cultural manifestations, in spite of sharing a Sicilian ancestry with the Maltese colonisers, and of being both central and marginal to exchange networks at different times throughout their prehistory. One might expect this, on that basis, to lead to interesting cultural effects, such as those seen on Malta.

Malta

Malta lies c95 km south of Sicily and has a surface of 246 sq km. Traditional explanations for cultural change on Malta, especially the end of the Temple period (c3600–2500 BC), have invoked population replacement (Evans, 1971; Anati, 1988). A lively debate has developed concerning the nature of Maltese society and its contact with the outside world during the Temple period, in particular concerning ideas of physical vs. cultural insularity (Robb, 2001). This complex debate can be reduced to two opposing camps for explaining change: 1) those in favour of cultural factors and 2) those in favour of population replacement.

1) Stoddart (1999b: 142) has pointed out that the evidence for abandonment of the island at the end of the Temple period is weak, as there is a lack of settlement data in general and the arguments in favour of abandonment are derived from cemeteries and temples. Stoddart and Trump support the idea of continuity with evidence from the Tarxien temples, which were transformed rather than abandoned or destroyed: the temple of Tarxien itself became a cemetery, and the Xaghra hypogeum, the temple at Borg-in-Nadur, and Skorba all became domestic sites (see Stoddart, 1999a: 70, 1999b: 141; Trump, 2002: 238–239). Thus, the building and subsequent demise of the temples could be explained by increased/reduced contacts with the outside world (Trump, 2002: 31), rather than by abandonment.

2) Leighton (1999), on the other hand, favours the population replacement theory. In the Tarxien Cemetery phase, after the demise of the temples, Malta displays close cultural parallels to Sicily. Stoddart (1999b: 141) and Trump (2002: 242) have commented that this is evident in the appearance of cremation, the use of monochrome incised ware, the first clear evidence for copper alloys (remarkably, the temples were built without any knowledge of metal tools, which were present in Sicily), and the demise of temple construction itself. Leighton explained these changes, which occurred in both the mortuary and the daily sphere, by the arrival of new people from southern Sicily.

More recently, Robb has demonstrated that there were 'necessary and regular' contacts between Malta and Sicily (2001: 183, 186–188) not just after the demise of the temples but even during the Temple period. Trump (2002: 210–12) admits that relations with Sicily continued throughout this time, as is evident from the importation of raw materials, but also of exotic goods. This dismisses the necessity of immigration to explain the reappearance of exchanged objects in the Tarxien Cemetery phase, since it would appear that this exchange never ceased. In fact there is no indisputable evidence of a physical abandonment of the island. Instead, it is possible that the temples were constructed at a time when contact was seen as a threat to local identity, and that once this contact became a 'normal' part of life, their function became redundant.

The development of the Maltese temples shares some aspects with the emergence of Minoan 'palaces' or monumental architecture on the island of Crete in the 2nd millennium BC. It would seem that complex identities, manifested for example through Maltese temples and Minoan palaces, occurred on islands where occupation was continuous and long-lasting, such as Crete and Malta. The fact that only Crete in the Aegean developed such complex cultural phenomena as the Minoan palaces in the 2nd millennium BC may have to do with its long history of settlement (Crete was colonised around 7000 BC), given that, just like the Maltese temples, the palaces certainly did not develop in physical or cultural isolation and there is no evidence on Crete for abandonment or population replacement.

The Aeolian Islands

The seven Aeolian Islands lie north of Sicily, between 20 and 40 km from the coast and between 55 and 115 km from southern Italy. They are all volcanic and they range in size from Panarea (3.4 sq km) to Lìpari (37.6 sq km). Volcanic activity is most evident on Vulcano and Stròmboli. In prehistoric times, none of the islands could support an endogamous population at low densities (estimated at 300 individuals, below which communities need to intermarry with other populations in order to survive – see Adams and Kasakoff 1976). However, the archipelago as a whole was potentially demographically self-sufficient. For this reason, it is best not to try to ascribe individual communities to each of the seven islands, but rather to envisage an 'Aeolian' population. What then can be said of their prehistoric identity? The archipelago experienced both phases of settlement expansion and contraction, with some island communities behaving in rough synchrony at certain times (eg Filicudi and Salina were both abandoned at the same time twice, in the Early and Late Copper Ages). Lipari was the only island to be continuously occupied following its initial colonisation in the 6th millennium BC, while occupation on the other islands was intermittent (Bernabò Brea, 1957; Balistreri et al, 1997: 643). Alicudi, the island furthest to the west (but not the smallest), was occupied for a short period during the Early Bronze Age, which is the

only time when the whole archipelago (apart from Vulcano, which was never permanently settled, as far as is known) was occupied.

Evans considered that the Aeolian Islands were 'too small, and certainly too closely linked through the obsidian trade with their nearest neighbours ever to be able to build up an *independent cultural identity*' (1977: 21, emphasis added). In spite of their 'openness', the Aeolian Islands have yielded sites (such as La Calcara on Panarea) that, though not monumental, suggest a ritual or symbolic behaviour linked to the natural environment (such as volcanic fumaroles, or smoking holes), or the use of the island of Vulcano as a burial ground in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Giustolisi, 1995: 10). In classical sources, the island of Vulcano is referred to as *Hiera* (the 'sacred one') and in Christian culture it became the entrance to the underworld. Vulcano became a burial ground repeatedly visited by surrounding islanders, thus acquiring prominence in an island world without ever being settled. Clearly the Aeolian people avoided settling Vulcano because the island is an active volcano, displaying a variety of volcanic manifestations that still today inspire a sense of awe in visitors.

The Aeolian Islands' culture may not have been innovative or unique, in the sense that is ascribed to the Maltese temples, but it did develop in rather distinctive physical and cultural conditions. The fact that the Aeolian Islands were abandoned and recolonised a number of times, whereas Malta appears to have been continuously inhabited following its initial settlement, would have affected cultural cohesion in the archipelago, with Malta displaying a more distinctive culture when compared to the Sicilian mainland than the Aeolian Islands.

Figure 4 – Aeolian islandscape: Middle Bronze Age village at Punta Milazzese, Panarea island (photograph: Helen Dawson)

What is 'identity'?

The writer Pirandello's affirmation that identity is not fixed, but mutable, reflects concerns expressed recently by archaeologists dealing with past identities. Thomas, for example, has stated that, "the diversity of forms of personal identity that may have existed in the past remains an open question" (2005:188). Past identities were not fossilised, but constantly in the making, tantalisingly evading a fixed definition and challenging for us to investigate. The search for 'true' identity may be a lost cause, as material culture can be effectively manipulated by individuals and communities to project different identities at different times. Broodbank has pointed out that "insularity is a cultural strategy that islanders might manipulate and 're-invent' as a resistant identity", to oppose both physical and cultural displacement and threats (real and perceived) (2000: 33). Similarly, Boomert and Bright have stated that "many islanders use the island metaphor to establish and express social identity" as a form of cultural resistance (2006: 17). Identity then (or identity at that particular moment in time), according to these authors, would appear to be expressed more conspicuously when under threat, whether from the inside or outside (as seen, for instance, from the example of Malta, just discussed).

Is practice 'identity'?

According to Conlin Casella and Fowler, "practice is not identity" (2004: 7). In archaeological terms, it has long been accepted that archaeological cultures or assemblages of material remains do not correspond to people (cf Childe, 1942: 26–7) and that stylistic differences between periods are not necessarily brought on by population replacements. In this respect, the previous discussion of the changes seen on Malta raises several (still unanswered) questions. However, that practice is not *always* identity seems a more acceptable stance. Social practices can be associated with people and reflect their identity, or indeed affect their identity, so that insights about identity can be gained by looking at such practices.

Archaeologically, the identity of social groups may be more amenable to study than that of specific individuals. Nonetheless, even a study of collective or group identity poses its challenges. Can we discern an island identity as opposed to a mainland identity in the prehistoric Mediterranean? Is it possible to separate an Aeolian identity from a broader Sicilian or southern Italian one? Therein lies the challenge: islanders are not a fixed category: in prehistory, individuals may at one point or another become islanders, but may return to the mainland or to another island in due course. Would this movement affect an islander's identity and if so how would the sense of belonging to a specific place be maintained? As a Sicilian native of British descent who has lived in the UK over ten years, I feel Sicilian as well as British but, as stated by Thomas, it is harder to envisage "a similar sense of identity before the emergence of nations" (2005: 1888) as we know them. Nonetheless, in the absence of nations, other geographical or cultural entities would have played important roles, so that similarities may remain between past and present.

Sense of place

It has been persuasively argued that island cultures stretch beyond their terrestrial limits and embrace the 'islandscape' (Broodbank, 2000: 21–3), which encompasses the island itself, the nearest mainland, and/or other islands, as well as the intervening sea. Zedeño has pointed out that "landscapes may not be bounded, but they are finite", as they extend "only as far as people's experience, gained through direct and indirect interaction with other lands and resources" (2000: 97). Thus the islandscape is not unlimited. The people who inhabit the islandscape are of the utmost importance. Contact across the islandscape is vital to ensure demographically viable populations on small islands. I think of this network of contacts as an 'extended island', by analogy to the network of mutual assistance afforded to the members of a typical Mediterranean extended family.

At this point of the discussion, three modern examples may serve to illustrate the link between settlement, sense of place and identity, especially in terms of cultural adaptation, displacement (identity crisis), and cultural resilience. External influences can have opposing effects on culture. At first sight, the indigenous Andamanese people, who inhabit an archipelago off the eastern coast of India, conform to the stereotypical island culture developing in pristine isolation. The reality is very different, as outside contact has had dramatic effects on their livelihood. The Andamanese were first brought into global awareness following the devastating tsunami in 2004. They were described in the British press as 'entirely naïve', being physically and culturally vulnerable, mainly as a result of the social crisis caused by the loss of traditional customs brought on by tourism and contact with the outside world (Ramesh, 2006). However, this phenomenon has deeper roots. A handful of radiocarbon dates suggests that the islands were initially colonised two thousand years ago (not 60,000 years ago, as previously reported), possibly as a result of expansion across the Indian Ocean (Cooper, 2002). Zarine Cooper, who has devoted her lifetime to studying the archaeology of the Andamanese, suggests that their initial hostility to outsiders (including cannibalism) and cultural conservatism may have been in reaction to slave raids in the past, and therefore *contact* with the outside world rather than isolation. In a further twist, British colonisers, who first arrived here in 1789 (Krishnakumar, 2009: 106), brought with them diseases, which severely curbed the indigenous population. Forest clearance has also deeply impacted on the Andamanese way of life. The 1951 census counted just 273 individuals, a dramatic decline from 4,800 in 1858 (ibid: 112). The surviving population falls short of the minimum size to sustain an endogamous population. The Andamanese have gradually absorbed Western habits and modified their cultural identity, so that the Indian authorities believe their 'stone-age' culture can be saved only by ensuring their isolation, even though the Andamanese have never been truly isolated. Social interaction and adaptation can be a survival strategy, though cultural traits are lost and identity changes as a result.

In an alternative scenario, cultural identity can be preserved, in spite of external influences, and even exile and deportation (cf Anderson, 2006). Population size is an important consideration here, as larger groups are more resilient. Piana degli Albanesi is a locality in north-central Sicily inhabited by a community of about 7000 Sicilians of Albanian descent. The town was founded in 1488 by a group of refugees from central-southern Albania, fleeing a Turkish invasion. The town was originally named *Hora* ('the town') and until 1941 as "Piana dei Greci", as the settlers' orthodox religion was identified as Greek, and was changed to "Piana degli Albanesi" by Mussolini as Italy

was at war with Greece (La Rosa, 1993: 241). The inhabitants still maintain their original Albanian dialect, rites, and traditional costumes, which are proudly displayed at times of communal celebration, especially for Easter and weddings, while in their daily lives the people are fully integrated within Sicilian/Italian society. Here (peaceful) social interaction has not inhibited the maintenance of the original identity, which has been incorporated into a wider cultural network.

Conversely, cultural resilience can be a strategy to oppose imposed interaction and displacement. The inhabitants of Diego Garcia, an atoll in the Chagos archipelago in the middle of the Indian Ocean, are a case in point. The Chagossians (1,500 individuals) were deported in the 1960s–70s by the British, who struck a deal with the Americans so that an American military base could be constructed on the island (Sand, 2009: 114). The population was subsequently ravaged by high suicide rates, as depression, homesickness, and lack of integration ensued when the islanders were relocated to the Seychelles and then to Mauritius. Sand has defined this forced decolonisation "a human rights black-hole" (ibid: 114). Notwithstanding the environmental impacts caused by the nuclear militarisation of the island (ibid: 121), the displacement of the population has had tremendous consequences on the islanders' culture. In April 2006, 102 Chagossians were allowed to visit Diego Garcia for a week, to tend to graves and visit their birthplaces (Pilger, 2006). The plight of the Chagossians continues, as they are still fighting for their right to return to Diego Garcia, which is becoming increasingly uninhabitable. In spite of this, the Chagossians are clinging to their cultural identity, expressing it through traditions and songs, as a strategy to maintain social memory with the hope of returning one day to the motherland.

What the three modern examples have in common is the idea that identity is strongly associated with a feeling of belonging to a community, a feeling that is entwined with *sense of place* rather than with isolation. As Barrett has put it, "staking a claim upon a place in the world is also staking a claim upon [their] identity" (2005: 136). This is sometimes reified through cultural individualism, as is the case of the prominent display of Albanian costumes and traditions in Sicily at specific times of year, but can also be understated, as is the case with the Chagossian people, who express their community identity through songs and story telling, something that we clearly miss from the archaeological record and that is inevitably bound to limit severely our understanding of past identities. Having clarified the link between identity and sense of place, I will now consider what island settlement practices in prehistory tell us about changing identities in the past.

Colonisation and identity

Through colonisation, identity is transferred from one place to another. So how does the act of colonisation affect identity? Rockman (2003: 17–19) has explained that this will depend on whether colonisation takes place in an empty space (where the main challenge is learning about the new environment) or in an already inhabited space (where the relation between colonisers and colonised is important: is it a relation of dominance or side-by-side cohabitation? How does this influence the cultural identity of both?). Prehistoric Mediterranean colonists are generally assumed to have come from the nearest mainland to inhabit empty islands. They were either small bands of hunter-gatherers or small farming communities, in which case colonists are often characterised as 'scouting agents' or 'pioneers' (cf Irwin, 1992; Broodbank, 2000). Colonisation

resulted in 'asymmetrical relationships', in the sense that some communities were more reliant on others for survival in terms of resources and population pools (for a detailed discussion see Broodbank, 2000 for the Aegean islands and Weisler,1995, 1996 for Mangareva and Pitcairn islands in the southern Pacific). Colonisation and settlement provide insights into identity, as shown by the development of divergent paths: upon colonisation parent and offspring population will gradually diverge (the so-called 'founder effect' already discussed), leading to the establishment of 'transformed landscapes' (eg Malta, Lipari, Cyprus).

Abandonment and identity

How does abandonment affect cultural identity? Does it strengthen or weaken identity? Does abandonment affect ancestry, memory, tradition, social affiliation? The study of abandonment is interesting in many respects, but principally because it gives an insight into people's thresholds of resistance. The inhabitants of smaller islands, for instance, may decide to move on, faced with limited opportunities and lack of resources, and lured away by better prospects on the mainland or nearest large island. Although moving on physically, they may remain mentally attached to their place of origin, by asserting their sense of belonging to a specific place (eg through story-telling, festivals, place names, etc.). The strength of the association with the place of origin is likely to depend on the cause of abandonment. If it is caused by physical threat (such as a natural catastrophe or violent invasion), human resilience can be surprising and appear irrational, as people are either reluctant to leave as they see no way out, or are stubborn enough to return in order to rebuild. When abandonment is a settlement strategy or a choice, people anticipate or perceive a better future elsewhere and are capable and willing to move on (both physically and mentally). Clearly there are many other causes for abandonment that cannot be discussed here. But the point to be made is that the will to become integrated into a new society may prevail on the desire to assert strong individuality. This may result in the loss of cultural traits, in order to avoid any isolating effects.

Past identities

My study of island abandonment (for details see Dawson, 2005 and Dawson, 2008; only a brief summary is presented here) focused on twenty Mediterranean islands and analysed the duration of their prehistoric settlement in relation to their size, resources, distance to nearest mainland and time of initial occupation.

The analysis showed that on islands smaller than 10 sq km, occupation periods were shorter (c1700 v 2000 years) and abandonment periods were longer (c1800 v 1000 years) when compared to the general trends. On islands with obsidian sources (volcanic glass, a desirable resource in prehistory) (vis Lìpari and Pantelleria, located north-east and south-west of Sicily, Palmarola in the Tyrrhenian Sea, and Melos in the Cyclades, see Figure 1) occupation periods were much longer (c 2250 years) than abandonment periods (c450 years). Distance had no obvious effect on settlement longevity, while the timing of the initial colonisation had a more obvious effect: islands colonised early (6th-4th millennium BC) generally experienced initial occupation periods that lasted longer than those colonised later (3rd-2nd millennium BC). Initial occupation periods on islands colonised later were c800 years on average per island; whereas occupation on islands

colonised earlier was 2250 years on average per island. Of the four obsidian islands, Pantelleria experienced longer abandonment and was also colonised later than the others. The fact that islands colonised later were abandoned sooner may reflect the fact that these tended to be smaller and less favourable to prolonged occupation than those occupied in earlier periods.
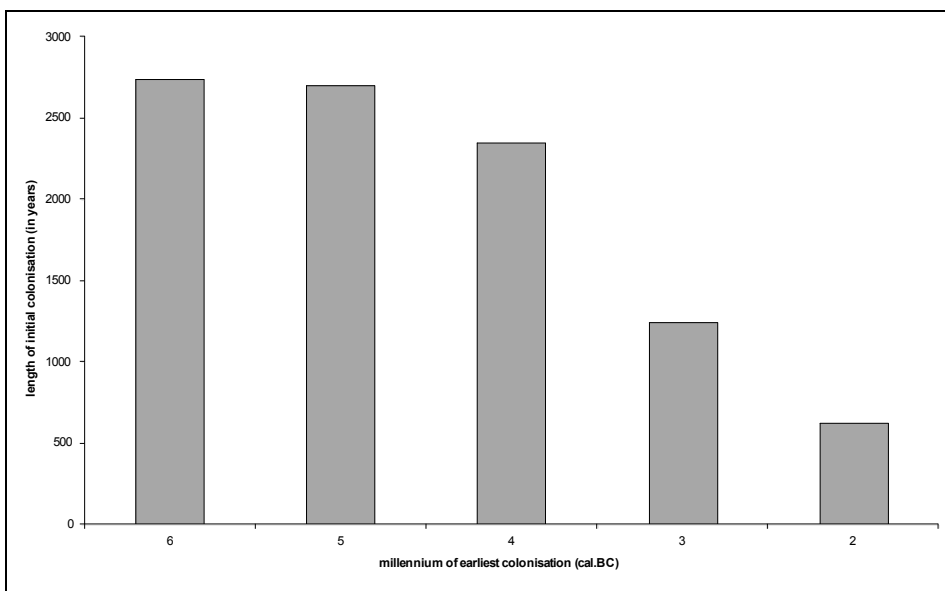

Figure 5 – Initial island occupation period decreases with later colonisation (Dawson, 2004-2006: 40)

By the Bronze Age, islands had shifted from being an agricultural extension of the mainland to becoming increasingly part of wider economic and cultural networks. Small islands were thus colonised for the first time as part of the expansion of trading networks and by and large remained occupied only as long as those networks were in existence (usually just a few centuries). It was during this period that trading interests developed in the Aegean began to expand into the western Mediterranean, as seen from a number of sites established on the Italian coasts, which have produced large quantities of Mycenaean (ie proto-Greek) pottery (Bietti Sestieri, 1988). Importantly, it was at this time that maritime transportation became easier, thanks to deep-hulled sailing ships (Broodbank, 1989: 327–9, 2000: 96; 2006: 217), which indirectly also made abandonment a more viable option than before. Permanent occupation of small islands would no longer be deemed viable in the absence of trading systems, and they were abandoned.

Final reflections: settlement and complex identities

It would seem that complex identities developed on islands where occupation was continuous and long-lasting. Abandonment also affected identity, as the resulting movement of people encouraged the exchange of cultural traits, a sort of creolisation of

the Mediterranean, or, as Horden and Purcell (2000) have put it, the "corruption" of culture. Overall, "Mediterraneanization" or "the process of becoming economically, politically, and culturally part of a larger world" (Morris, 2003: 46) had a homogenising effect on culture. The islands' abandonment and the resulting movement of people and communication were key factors. To an extent, this explains why particularly complex forms of cultural expression (such as palaces and temples) arose rarely and apparently only on islands which could support continuous settlement and which offered the opportunity for the development of culture in one place in the long term. However, continuity of settlement is not a prerequisite for complexity, as not all islands with continuous occupation developed prominently distinct cultures (eg Lipari). Although from an archaeological point of view, monumental remains are more prominently visible, we should not forget the intangible aspects of culture (eg oral history as seen from the contemporary case studies), which may not survive in the archaeological record but can be considered 'complex' in their own right. In the prehistoric Mediterranean islands, changes in technology made it increasingly more feasible for people to move and to seize opportunities if what was at hand was not deemed sufficient or if more alluring alternatives were present. The question is: as people moved, how would they perceive themselves or be perceived by others? Although this paper ultimately may not provide a definitive answer to this question, it has highlighted the complexity of the issue, which cannot be solved by recurring to generalisations or convenient island-mainland dichotomies. Time, space, and movement are critical factors in the creation and transformation of different identities. In the final analysis, Pirandello's affirmation that identity is at the same time unique, nil and multifarious is not an admission of defeat but rather a recognition of the difficulty of the task that should not however discourage us from pursuing it.

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