

NATALIE ABELL. 2021. *Keos: results of excavations conducted by the University of Cincinnati under the auspices of The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Volume 12. Ayia Irini: Area B*. Atlanta (GA): Lockwood Press; 978-1-948488-57-0 hardback \$99.50.



Alongside Phylakopi on Melos and Akrotiri on Thera, the harbour town of Ayia Irini on the north-western coast of Kea remains one of the most important settlements of the Cycladic later Bronze Age. Located in an enviable position at the northern edge of the Cycladic archipelago, and within sight of the southern coasts of both Attica and Euboea, it was a vital node in those Bronze Age maritime networks which connected Cycladic communities with others on Crete and the Greek mainland (and further afield). It remains a key vantage point from which to view socio-cultural change in the Aegean. Excavation of the site, under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA), was begun in 1960 and concluded by 1976. The ground for the current study was prepared by the late Aliki Halepa Bikaki, director of the Area B excavations, and it is to her memory that the volume is dedicated, but it is Abell's diligent untangling of the legacy record, and her knowledge of Bronze Age Cycladic pottery, which return Area B into the light, 60 years after it was first uncovered.

The volume presents deposits associated with Late Bronze Age House B and an adjacent alleyway, AB. Terraced into the hillside at the south-eastern edge of the settlement, House B consists now only of a north-western line of six basement rooms. Architectural remains here exceed several metres in height, but the south-eastern portion of the building has been lost entirely to the transgression of the Gulf of Ayios Nikolaos, which would have been several metres lower during the Late Bronze Age. Earlier deposits now lie below sea level. The occupation of House B belongs to a period of significant external social and political influence in the Cyclades, *c.* 1700–1400 BC, Late Cycladic I–II (Periods VI–VII in the Ayia Irini sequence), and its history is closely linked to the fortunes of the settlement at large.

Much of the text is dedicated to the presentation and analysis of Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age pottery, alongside a smaller number of other artefact types, of which some appear elsewhere in the *Keos* series. A focus on the resolution within this assemblage of a fine-grained provenance at the scale of the single centre or micro-region, and of technological and technical choice within the *chaîne opératoire* of pottery manufacture (p. 8–9), is symptomatic of the more general current thrust in Cycladic, and Aegean, archaeology toward the bottom-up analysis of networked relationships between communities, and the circulation of material culture and cultural and technological knowledge.

In the identification of provenance, the low availability of published Middle and Late Bronze Age Cycladic sites is keenly felt. Despite detailed macroscopic, petrographic and chemical (WD-XRF) analyses (Chapter 3; Appendices III–VII), the lack of comparative data precludes the association of many of a large number of fabric groups with likely production units; similarly so, several Cretan subtypes. Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify diverse interactions at multiple scales subsuming various Aegean producers, and consumption patterns in House B that echo those of the wider community.

Much of the early Late Bronze Age (Period VI) pottery is locally manufactured. Of the imports, around a quarter come from Melos or Thera—sources still indistinguishable petrographically, despite best efforts. Other Cycladic producers contribute roughly the same number of vessels as those on the Greek mainland, most of the latter probably reaching Ayia Irini via micro-regional networks permeating Attica and/or Euboea (p. 199–201). Cretan products comprise roughly half the number again; changing fabric types signposting the modification of relationships maintained by Ayia Irini with producers there. In the following period (VII), over half of Area B imports come from the Greek mainland and the Saronic island of Aegina—then a major production centre. Cycladic imports represent around a fifth of the total, Cretan, less than a tenth. At the same time, local production on Kea itself perhaps becomes more complex, reflecting a wider Aegean trend toward the intensification of regional production, ceramic commercialisation and longer-distance exchange (p. 223–226).

Technically, Keian production appears rather conservative, characterised by homogeneity in the use of particular raw materials, processing activities, firing practices across shape and ware categories, and a remarkable technological stability through the Middle and Late Bronze Age (p. 150). Vessel forming techniques appear to vary not as a function of social or cultural norms, but simply as the result of individual choices taken about how best to do things (pp. 203 & 223–224). Even the potter's wheel, arriving in the Cyclades first via Middle Bronze Age Cretan networks and initially associated explicitly with Minoan or Minoanising shapes, over generations may have been reframed as a local technology in the minds of Keian producers, who subsequently adopted it for wheel-coiled and wheel-thrown production of an expanded pottery repertoire. Ayia Irini has, of course, contributed much to discussion of 'Minoanisation' in the Cyclades, and the processes through which island communities engaged with Cretan ideas, technologies and material culture. The theme is woven throughout, with House B offering further perspective on the balance of local and non-local practices within the settlement, and those engaged in them.

Abell achieves a valuable, detailed and methodical study, destined for endless revisitation. A narrative summary (Chapter 8) spotlighting Ayia Irini on the Aegean stage provides the easiest entry point for those unfamiliar with the site, and the complex ceramic landscape of the Bronze Age Aegean, although total newcomers are likely to meet with a challenge; *Area B* is, unapologetically, for ceramicists first, and all others second. Nor is it the story of House B as much as that of Ayia Irini's community; the activities of House B proving secondary to those of the larger *chaîne opératoires* of pottery production and exchange, the identity of House B, and its occupants, realised only indirectly, as part of the larger

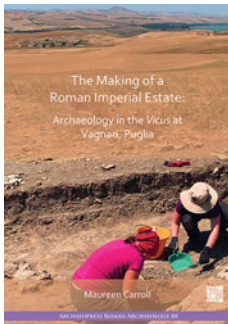
whole. The difficult record has surely proved limiting in this regard, though perhaps to no great disadvantage, when such interesting stories were being played out at scale.

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MAUREEN CARROLL (ed.). 2022. *The making of a Roman imperial estate: archaeology in the Vicus at Vagnari, Puglia* (Archaeopress Roman Archaeology 88). Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-205-4 paperback £58.



This edited book presents the results of the University of York’s excavations at Vagnari (2012–2019), located close to the route of the important Via Appia, in southern Italy. It is the final project report and the volume is presented in a ‘standard’ format, featuring introductory chapters on the project (Carroll) and the topographical and landscape contexts of the study area (Small and Wigand, respectively), followed by individual sections on the structures and phasing, and then specialist reports on the various finds and analyses carried out (e.g. material culture, environmental records). The volume features 23 chapters and six appendices comprising the inventory lists and catalogues of finds, according to their class of material.

It is not possible in the available space to discuss each chapter; instead, I focus on general points of interest that emerge from the project.

The investigations at Vagnari are of considerable historical interest for two reasons. First, the nature of the site—a Roman village (*vicus*)—is a type of settlement that has been little explored archaeologically. Specifically, this vicus lay at the centre of an agricultural estate that, from the early first century AD, belonged to the emperor. Whilst the surviving writings of Roman jurists and land surveyors contain information on villages, only a handful of these have been excavated: for example, the vicus Falacrinae, in central Italy (De Santis & Gasparini 2009) and the [vicus Augusti Laurentium](#), near Ostia (Claridge 1998). Second, Vagnari is situated in Apulia, an area that during the third and second centuries BC witnessed dramatic change, including the Roman conquest, the Hannibalic war, and subsequent conversion of property into *ager publicus* (public land of the Roman State). The project therefore offered the opportunity to investigate, archaeologically, “the impact of this annexation” (p. 7).