

Minoan Influence in Laconia via Kythera

The “Minoanization” of the Aegean has long been a debated topic among scholars. It has still not been resolved as to whether the Minoans were more of an influence or an imposition on other Aegean cultures. However, one area of certain Minoan influence is the island of Kythera south of the Peloponnese. This island has been an area of interest for scholars investigating Minoan colonization since Kastri was first excavated in the 1960s (Coldstream 1973), and the island’s Minoan colonization has been further confirmed by surveys (Broodbank 1999). More importantly for this paper, however, is the evidence of Minoan religion which directly follows Minoan religious evidence found on Crete itself. The most obvious example of this parallel is the Agios Georgios peak sanctuary near Kastri. Archaeologists have found votive offerings at this site that rival those found at Juktas, Knossos’s main peak sanctuary (Sakellarakis 1996:87).

The issue this paper will address concerns the relationship between Kythera and Laconia in the southern Peloponnese. It has been established by previous scholars that there is Minoan influence on Laconian pottery (Rutter 1979), but this paper investigates the possibility of Minoan religious influence in that region as well. Initially I anticipated that Kythera’s culture would be a convergence between Minoan religious influences and later Mycenaean religious influences because of the island’s ideal geographic position between the two main cultures, but I have since discovered that the real area of overlap is Laconia. Kythera was only under Minoan religious influence, never under any significant mainland religious influence (Sakellarakis 1996:88). Also, there is a connection between Agios Georgios’s votive offerings and sources of raw material in Laconia (90). It is certainly possible that the final product may have also been produced in Laconia, which suggests a deeper cultural connection between this area of the mainland and Minoan Kythera. Even if there is little Minoan religious impact in Laconia, this is equally

intriguing because there is Minoan religious influence in other places of mainland culture, such as Ayia Irini on Kea. A lack of religious influence in a region that has clear connections with a Minoan colony would be surprising. A ceramic connection between Laconia and Kythera is important, but it is only one line of evidence for a Minoan connection via Kythera. This paper will use ceramic evidence as well as other material evidence, such as votive offerings and material resources, to further explore cultural connections between Laconia and Crete using Kythera as a Minoan link to the mainland.

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