ANTIKYTHERA/AIGILIA: WAR, PIRACY AND MERCENARY MILITARY 'SERVICE'

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Key words: arrowheads, sling bullets, catapults, crossbow, ballista, piracy, Antikythera shipwreck.
Summary. *The fortified city at the northern end of the island of Aigilia (today's Antikythera) had a relatively short life span –* ***from the seventh decade of the 4th c. BC until the beginning of the fourth decade of the 1st c. BC –****, for about 270 years. The island was part of the Cretan city of Phalasarna and its position in the center of the Kythera strait allowed it to control the sea routes* ***from the northeastern Mediterranean*** *and the* ***Black Sea*** *to the* ***western regions of the Great Sea****. The occupation of Phalasarna and Aigilia with the state pirate activity created many enmities and exposed the island to* ***many external attacks****. These attacks left their mark on the city's ground. A lot of battle evidence is preserved, such as* ***bronze arrowheads and spearheads****,* ***lead sling bullets****,* ***catapult balls*** *and* ***iron crossbow arrowheads****. These finds will be presented from which historical conclusions can be drawn****.***

The small island of Antikythera, 24Km^2 cannot sustain a sizeable human community. It has a further important disadvantage for the settlement of a peaceful group of inhabitants; its terrain is pyramidal and**,** in contrast to Kythera or some other islands, it has no areas hidden from the indiscriminately hostile and avaricious eyes of the sea passers-by **(Fig. 1)**.

Nevertheless, the island's strategic position on the sea routes between the Aegean and the West, as well as the course of the marine currents, make it a desirable place of settlement, to control not only the maritime traffic between the Aegean and the West, but also, mainly, between the Peloponnese and Crete **(Fig. 2)**. As it is concluded by the philological and archaeological evidence the expenses of the construction of a fortified city-military base were subsidised by the Persian Empire with the intermediate Spartans, in an attempt to create a network of anti-Macedonian bases in order to organise a counterattack against Alexander the Great in the Aegean. The disappearance of the Persian Empire and the dismemberment of the newly formed Alexander's empire changed the status quo in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean (Sekunda 2004-09; Tsaravopoulos 2004-2009, p. 331; Tsaravopoulos 2012, pp. 208-09).

It is apparent from the excavation that during the Hellenistic period of 'life' in the fortified city at the northeast tip of Antikythera, the Kastro **(Fig. 3)**, when shipping had developed and the largely similar – and with ethnically the same elite – kingdoms of the successors of Alexander the Great vied with each other for domination, war was the order of the day on Aigilia.

The wars left their traces also on the fortification walls of 'Kastro'.

In the northernmost part of 'Kastro' there are no remains of houses. It was constructed mainly in order to control and secure the defense from the north, as well as to create – as in all forts – space to accommodate an allied army or the populace of the countryside, in the event of invasion **(Fig. 4)**.

The fort is ipso facto a defensive construction and, in time of war and siege, is affected by the offensive actions of the assailants and besiegers.

The fortification walls of Kastro, survive along their entire length, at many points destroyed either by earthquakes or human agency **(Fig. 5)**.

In some parts very well preserved with all the material in situ waiting for reconstruction **(Fig. 6)**, in others being preserved as it was incorporated in modern constructions **(Fig. 7).**

The Weapons

During the excavation, which was carried out for the last twenty years, remains of weaponry were found almost daily on the surface of the 'Kastro' site and signs of continuous warfare were visible in the area around it.

The finds that have remained at the site yield information predominantly about the clashes on the island itself, and far less about the inhabitants' campaigns at sea or in other places.

The number of stone points or arrow heads, of prehistoric times, which have been found on the surface, is significantly large. Many of flint and even more of obsidian. These projectiles are not limited to the 'Kastro' site, but are encountered all over the island (Bevan and Conolly 2013, pp. 56-65) **(Fig. 8**).

No traces of settlement on Antikythera in prehistoric times have come to light. There are two explanations for this: either that the settlements of those years, in the rare periods of relative external security, were small and scattered, as today, or the presence of people on the island at that time was temporary or seasonal, and it was visited by hunters, who did not create installations of long duration.

From the time span between the prehistoric period, around the mid-second millennium BC, until the years of Alexander the Great, neither weapons nor other documents of human presence have been identified on the island (Bevan, Conolly 2013, p. 68**)**.

In the Hellenistic period, the situation changed. Apart from the fortification which does not necessarily signify martial activity at the site, the abundant remnants of used or lost weaponry indicate that the island, and particularly the 'Kastro' site, was witness, over and over again, to serious military conflicts during the Hellenistic period. In the fortification walls only some points with indications of destruction and makeshift repair of the fortification wall can be considered to have been caused by human military activity **(Fig. 9, το τείχος στο δυτικό με την καταστροφή)**.

The specimens of weaponry are dispersed over the entire surface of the fort and, of course, in its environs.

Bronze Points (Arrowheads)

To date, over 100 bronze arrowheads, both complete and parts, the majority of which was 'used', have been found on the surface and in the excavation. Not unexpectedly, the majority are of the so-called Cretan type and in a way to the type called by Petrie *ribbed barbed* with a small relief triangle, on the surface, where the blade meets the stem, for extra reinforcement (Petrie 1914 pp. 33-36, pl. 41/nos 125-132; Snodgras 1999, pp. 81, 98, 124**) (Fig. 10, 11)**.

Numerous too are the iron heads from spears and, mostly, from ballistras or crossbows, which proliferate towards the end of the Hellenistic period. Iron is, of course, a hard metal, but very susceptible to oxidation (rusting), which is why very few iron projectiles survive in relatively good recognizable form. Their type in Antikythira seems to be similar with the bronze ones but not barbed **(Fig. 12)**.

Lead sling bullets

The other weapon which uses throwing objects-munitions is the sling.

The large number of lead sling bullets of different shapes found on Antikythera **(Fig. 13)** offer much information about martial events at 'Kastro'. Most of them have serious impact damage **(Fig. 14)**.

Other finds related to the lead sling bullets and found quite often at 'Kastro' are the lead discards from their production in makeshift foundries that frequently operated, while the battle was in progress. Two inscribed lead sling bullets that had not been removed from the mould and at least eight parts of such multiple moulds have been recovered from various areas of 'Kastro' (Tsaravopoulos 2021) **(Fig. 15)**. The finding of them reveals that the particular battle from which they remained was, in all probability, the last one fought by the defenders, their last battle, because the lead of which they were made was not re-used to make other such bullets. Metal, even lead, remaining in the workshops of making sling bullets was never thrown away.

From the different types of sling bullets found, **and more from the inscribed ones**, it can be surmised that both attacking armies and allied armies of the defenders were more than one during the two and a half centuries or so of the city's existence.

Judging by the inscriptions on many of them, it is clear that a great number of lead sling bullets found belong to a 'royal' army which had attacked the city They had the inscription *ΒΑCΙΛΕΩC*. The sling bullets found inside the fortification were impact damaged and only two others found outside the fortification were unused, intact, a proof that the attack of the Basileus' army was against the City. (Tsaravopoulos 2004-09, pp. 332-335; Tsaravopoulos 2012, pp. 209-10) **(Fig. 15, 16)**.

Two lead sling bullets without traces of impact damage, which were found inside the 'Kastro', in a level of the 3rd c. BC, carry the inscription *παρά Φαλασαρνίων*, confirming, as it can also be seen from the coins and the stamped amphora handles, that the island belonged to the territory of the nearby Cretan city of Phalasarna (Tsaravopoulos 2004-09, pp. 337-338; Tsaravopoulos 2012, p. 210) **(Fig. 17)**.

One sling bullet bears a name, Podaithos, and a symbol, the Caduceus, the symbol of Hermes, showing that there was acting on the territory of Aigilia, as defender with an army from the eastern Cretan city of Latos. It is known from epigraphic testimonies that in the internal disputes between the Cretan cities, Lato sided with the cities allied with Phalasarna. (Inscriptiones Creticae I, Cnossos 6; Tsaravopoulos 2012, pp. 211-212) **(Fig. 18)**.

Another known inscribed name on two sling bullets, is the name *ΛΑΣΤ* which with some difficulty can be completed as *Λαστ*[ένης from Knossos, who was the last general of the independent Cretans in the first half of the first c. BC and the two inscribed sling bullets most probably refer to a military unit of the Cretan general. These sling bullets have come to light *extra muros*, in a sanctuary, without traces of impact damage.

In 74 BC the army of Knossos and the allied cities, under *Lasthenes* command, imprisoned a whole Roman legion which attacked the island with its commander Marcus Antonius who died in Crete.

The Romans after the defeat of the Cretan army in Knosos, did not find Lasthenes or his body and were anxious as they were not sure, if he was still alive, preparing a new revolt.

No secure information about the armies involved in military activity on the island can be extracted from the other inscribed lead sling bullets, because none of them have come to light elsewhere and the names do not help the secure identification with armies of other places. However, the fact is that the lead sling bullets are of great number and of different kind (Tsaravopoulos 2004-2009, pp. 335-36; Tsaravopoulos 2012, pp. 210, 212) **(Fig. 19)**.

Catapult projectiles.

Use of the catapult began at the same time as, or slightly earlier than, the ballista or the crossbow.

I contend that a detail observed on the towers of the eastern fortification wall was related directly to their use as catapult emplacements. Visible on these towers is a vertical groove on the outer stone blocks that form the angle with the fortification wall **(Fig. 20)**. What role did these grooves on the external face of the fort play? One explanation is that they most probably consolidated the infrastructure of the catapult that was installed on the tower. If the size of the large projectiles is taken into account, then it becomes apparent that the thrust torque of the catapult necessitated its fixing to the ground, so linking it with the solid structure of the tower.

Stone balls of various sizes – ammunition for a catapult – are found dispersed all over the fort. Very large ones, about 20-30 cm in diameter **(Fig. 21)**, are found intact on the surface in the city, and more medium-size ones, about 10-15 cm in diameter **(Fig. 22)**, are found also intact. The examination of these projectiles reveals that they were made of local rock, and it is not surprising that they are still intact as they were intended to be fired at attacking ships and those on the ground are the ones that the defenders did not use.

The attacks on 'Kastro' were made from the sea and it was difficult for ships to transport huge stone balls, and probably not medium-size ones either. However, ships did carry ballistas and catapults that used smaller stone balls, many of which were found broken or in pieces. All of them have breakages that show that they hit hard surfaces **(Fig. 23)**. The catapult was used more to hit fortification walls and buildings, rather than people. The strong impact on a stone surface can smash the projectile to such an extent that pieces of it would not be recognizable. Most of the small projectiles were found in the excavation or on the surface behind the western fortification wall, which was vulnerable, located near the sea.

Body protective war material

The above examples are of attacking weapons used against people or buildings. Remains of swords or other weapons for close combat fighting have not been found. Likewise, remains of metal cuirasses, greaves, helmets or other accessories for the bodily protection of the warriors have not been found or identified.

What has remained in large number at 'Kastro' are nails with broad head, shaft of square cross-section and with relief on the inside of the nail head **(Fig. 24)**.

Such nails are found everywhere at the 'Kastro' site (for the use of such nails see Tsaravopoulos 2010-13, 187-198; Tsaravopoulos 2016). They are what has remained from the leather/hide or other covering of the shields, the principal protective weapon after the metal breastplates (Polybius 6, 33, 3-4).

Shields, wooden lined with leather, were often destroyed in the battle and their parts were scattered in the area, making their gathering up to recycle the metal almost impossible.

Associated with martial activity on the island, especially when mercenaries were employed, was money – that was, coins. They were the basic means of paying the mercenaries. Those mercenaries belonging to units active on the island or in raids launched from the island would certainly have 'hoarded' their remuneration and, since they did not spend it on Antikythera, hid it away. If these men were killed or did not return from campaigns, who would have known where to find the hidden hoards? With the turning over of the soil in recent centuries, when the terraces for cultivation were created, many of these 'savings' were scattered. That is why coins are found over almost the entire extent of the inhabited space of the fortified city. Since investigations so far have been limited mainly to surface cleanings, no coin hoards have yet been revealed.

For most of the Hellenistic period, Aigilia was part of the territory of Phalasarna, and it is thus logical that the payments were made in coins issued by that city **(Fig. 25)**. The coins – most of silver – of other cities are far fewer and most probably come from booty acquired on campaigns.

Which, however, are the martial adventures that are recorded in the inscriptions, on the fortification walls, and in the military material that has remained at the site?

The interpretation of the dedicatory inscription *IG VI 948* that was found by Stais in 1888, in the sanctuary of Apollo at Xiropotamos, indicates that the island 'participated' or was intended to participate in the overseas expedition of the Persian fleet in the Hellespont (Curt. 3, 9.3), under the command of Aristomenes from Pherai in Thessalia who offered a statue to the sanctuary of Apollo in Aigilia, the ancient name of Antikythera (Stais 1889, pp. 338-39; Sekunda 2004-09, pp. 597-598).

The building of the fortifications on the island cannot be considered as merely a precautionary measure for its defence. Rather, the project should be included in the desparate offensive/counter-offensive effort of the Persian Empire to attack Alexander from the rear.

Which conflicts is possible to identify from the material remains left on the ground?

An inscription found on Rhodes in 1932 (Jacopi 1932, 169, Segre 1932, 452-461) referred to a campaign against Aigila/Antikythera. The destruction layer of the first half of the third century BC, is the testimony of this attack **(Fig. 25)**. Should the small broken catapult balls, mentioned above, made of stone that is 'not Antikytheran', be attributed to the activity of the '*καταπαλταφέτα*' (catapultist, artilleryman) honoured by the Rhodians in this inscription? A bold supposition, but it is not impossible!

It is known from Plutarch (Cleomenes 31,1) that in 222 BC, after the defeat of Kleomenes the 3rd at Sellasia, the Spartan king came to the island, but not as an attacker, which means that the lead sling bullets with the inscription *ΒΑCΙΛΕΩC* (of king) – implying that the unnamed king tried or, rather, failed to capture the island – cannot be attributed to him. Judging from the shape of the lead sling bullets, the attacking '*basileus*' was most likely Nabis, who was looking for bases to control the passage from the West to the Aegean (Tsaravopoulos 2004-09, pp. 334-35; Tsaravopoulos 2012, pp. 209-10)

The Roman presence had started to become intense and dangerous!

Of the other armies involved in the island's events and the officers whose names can be discerned on the inscribed lead sling bullets, only for one can his city of origin be identified confidently.

The official referred to on the lead sling bullets, by the very rare –if not unique– name *Podaithos* (SEG 26, 4) **(Fig. 18)**, and the dating from the inscription which mentions him or one of his descendands, reveals perhaps that his army participated to the last war which ended the existence of the fortified city.

The last war and the *Antikythera Shipwreck*

Which, however, was the last war in which the island was embroiled in the first half of the first century BC and which brought habitation of it to an end for several centuries?

The first step towards answering this question is to examine the general geopolitical situation in the area at that period.

In the early first century BC, as in the preceding centuries, the safest route from the Aegean to the West passed through the Elaphonisos (in antiquity a peninsula with the name *Ὄνου Γνάθος*) strait, between Laconia and Kythera, which was relatively far away from the 'piratical' action of the Cretans, but not out of range **(Fig. 26)**.

At the entrance to the strait, at a very short distance from the easternmost coast of Kythera, there is a rocky islet that has suffered much from earthquakes, Mikri Dragonara (or Antidragonera), on which there was a *locus sanctus* dedicated to Poseidon Gaiechos. When the sea was calm, ships arrived at Mikri Dragonara on their voyage from the Aegean, the Euxine Pontus, the northern shores of the East Mediterranean, and the Italian Peninsula, to leave votive offering for the god, who was at once Gaiechos and Pelagios (Tsaravopoulos, Fragou 2014).

The failed attack by the Romans under Marcus Antonius (Cicero, *Philippicae*, II,44 ff.)**,** in 74-73 BC**,** initiated a bloody war that ended with the subjugation of Crete in 67 BC. Crete was the only Greek land that had not yet been conquered by the Romans.

Two years after the terror endured by the Roman establishment and the extensive destructions caused by the Spartacus revolt from 73 to 71 BC, a ship that was carrying not only the very important Mechanism, but also superb artworks (Shipwreck 2012) tried to sail towards Rome. The sculptures, new and older, show that they were intended to refurbish destroyed and looted elite villas or even civic building complexes on the Italian Peninsula. It is known that at that period, as earlier, there was great admiration for the Hellenic culture, and it was fashionable to commission works from Greek lands to be sent to Rome. Moreover, from personal effects brought up from the wreck, it is evident that the ship was also had on board people of high social status. Beginning with the coincidence of the date of the shipwreck (*terminus ante quem* 69 BC), and the onset of the Romans' war against Cretan piracy and the final attack on the island under Caecilius Metellus (69 BC), in seeking the reason for, or rather investigating the cause or causes of the shipwreck, three factors should be taken into account:

1. The great distance of the shipwreck site from the safest route between the Aegean and the West, which passed through the Elaphonisos strait.

2. The fact that some vases for personal use, which came to light in the sanctuary on Mikri Dragonara, are of the same provenance and the same date as many of those found in the shipwreck, leads to the conclusion that in all probability this ship, or another ship coming from

the same eastern Aegean coast towards Italy, dropped anchor for a short while at the sanctuary of Poseidon, where the sailors made various offerings.

3. There are no other shipwrecks in the area where the ship with the Mechanism was found, an indication that its presence must be due to reasons other than the known weather conditions.

Returning to the environment of warfare through which the ship had to pass, I believe that it must surely have followed the safe route via the Elaphonisos strait (Laconia and Kythera were controlled by the Romans), which means that any 'sinking' would not have drawn it so far off course. Its arrival and sinking at the coasts of Antikythera seems very strange.

To conclude, it seems that the wrecked ship, found at a short distance from the northern coast of Antikythera, was victim not only to Antikytheran-Phalasarnian warriors (corsairs who took part in the clash between Crete and Rome), but also – due to the temporal coincidence of the wreck – to the start of the attack by Metellus' legions on Crete.

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[1] Unfortunately, for reasons beyond the author's control, the article published in the Polish periodical 'acquire' a different title, as: '26th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities', which was the author's job position.

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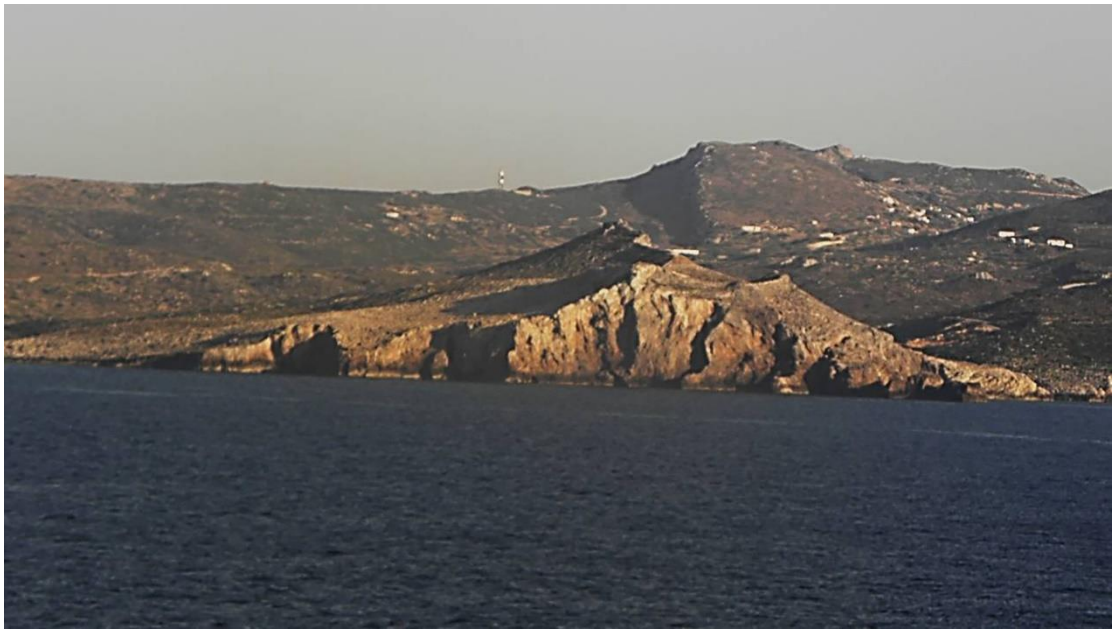

Fig. 1 The island of Antikythera/ Aegilia. View from the North.

Fig. 2 The island of Antikythera controls the passage from the Eastern to the Western Mediterranean Sea.

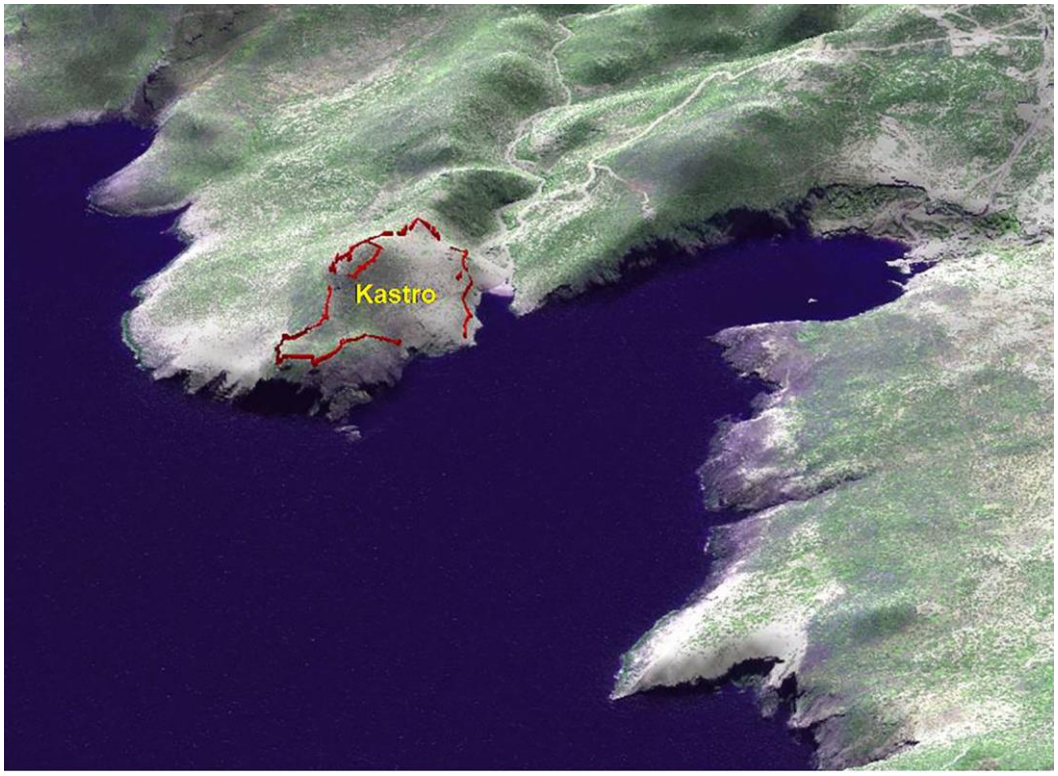

Fig. 3 Virtual image of the fortified city (Castro) in the northern peninsula of Antikythera.

Fig. 4 The northern part of the fortification without traces of habitation.

Fig. 5 A part of the western fortification wall destroyed and repaired.

Fig. 6 A fortification tower.

Fig. 7 House of the 19th century where the ancient fortification wall was used.

Fig. 8 Arrow heads from obsidian stone.

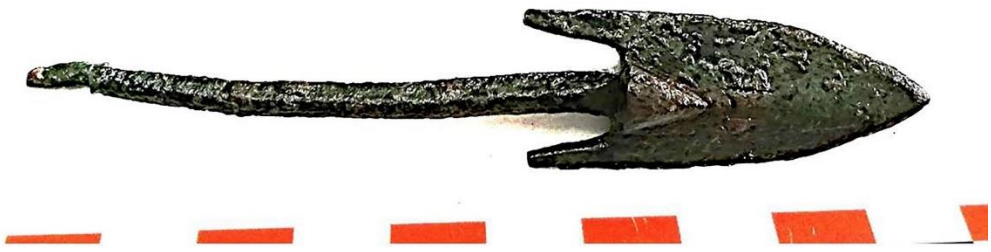

Fig. 9 Bronze arrow head found intact.

Fig. 10 Bronze arrow heads.

Fig. 11 Iron arrow heads.

Fig. 12 Lead sling bullets of different shapes.

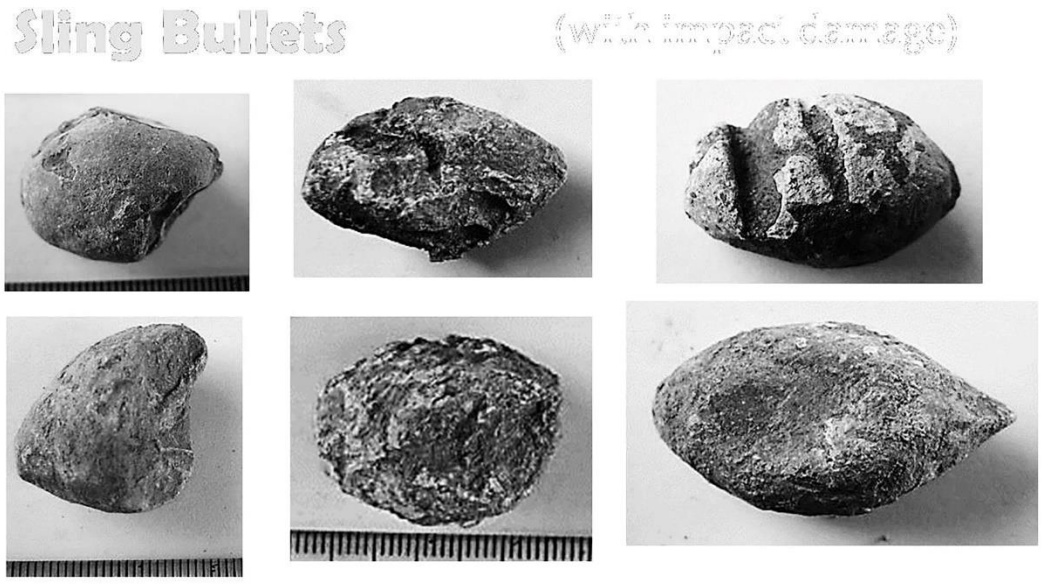

Fig. 13 Lead sling bullets with signs of impact damage.

Fig. 14 Lead discard from the foundries producing sling bullets and two inscribed sling bullets still not separated. Inscription: *ΕΠΑΙ*.

Fig. 15 Lead sling bullets with the inscription *ΒΑCΙΛΕΩC* (of the King).

Fig. 16 Lead sling bullet with the inscription *ΠΑΡΑΦ* [αλαασ] *Α* [ρ] *ΝΙΩΝ* (from the Phalasarnians)

Fig. 17 Lead sling bullet with the inscription *ΠΟΔΑΙ* / *ΘΟΥ* and caduceus.

Fig. 18 Lead sling bullet with the inscription *ΛΑΣΤ* [ένης? retrograde.

Fig. 19 A groove on the external face of a fortification tower.

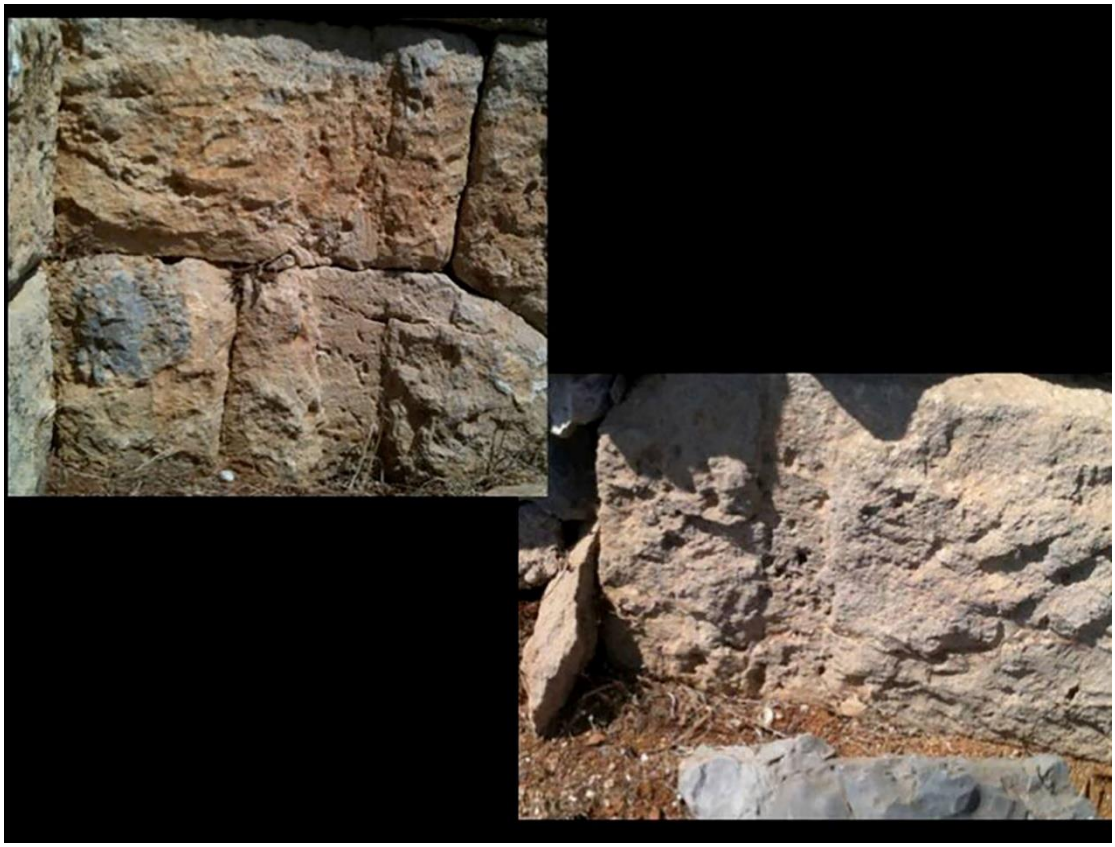

Fig. 20 Details of the grooves on the external faces of the fortification towers.

Fig. 21 Catapult stone of great size.

Fig. 22 Catapult stones of medium size.

Fig. 23 Catapult stone of small size, used from the attacking ships.

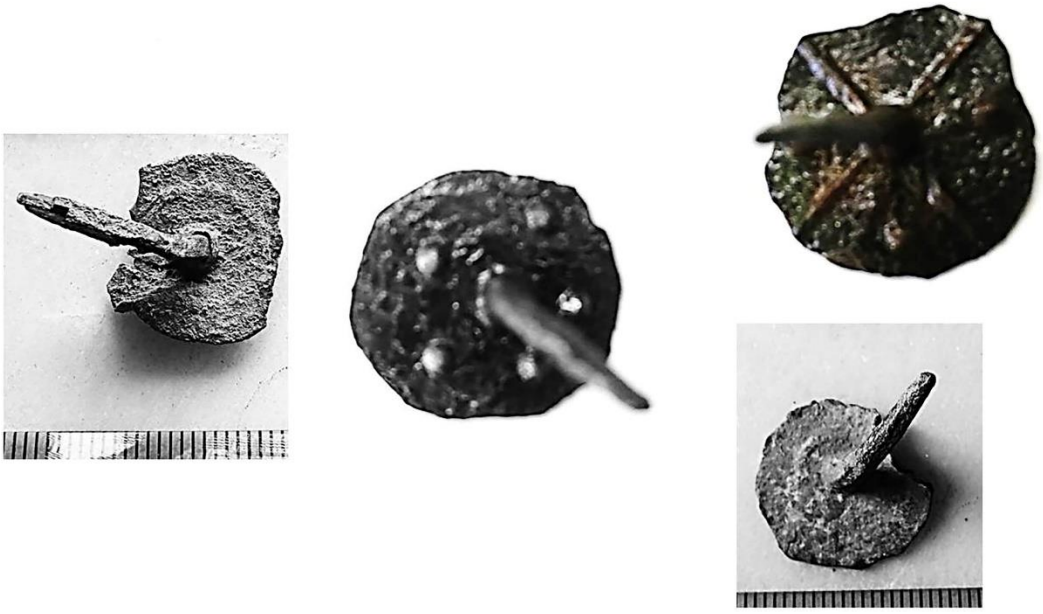

Fig. 24 Nails (pins) with broad head, with relief on the inside of the nail head.

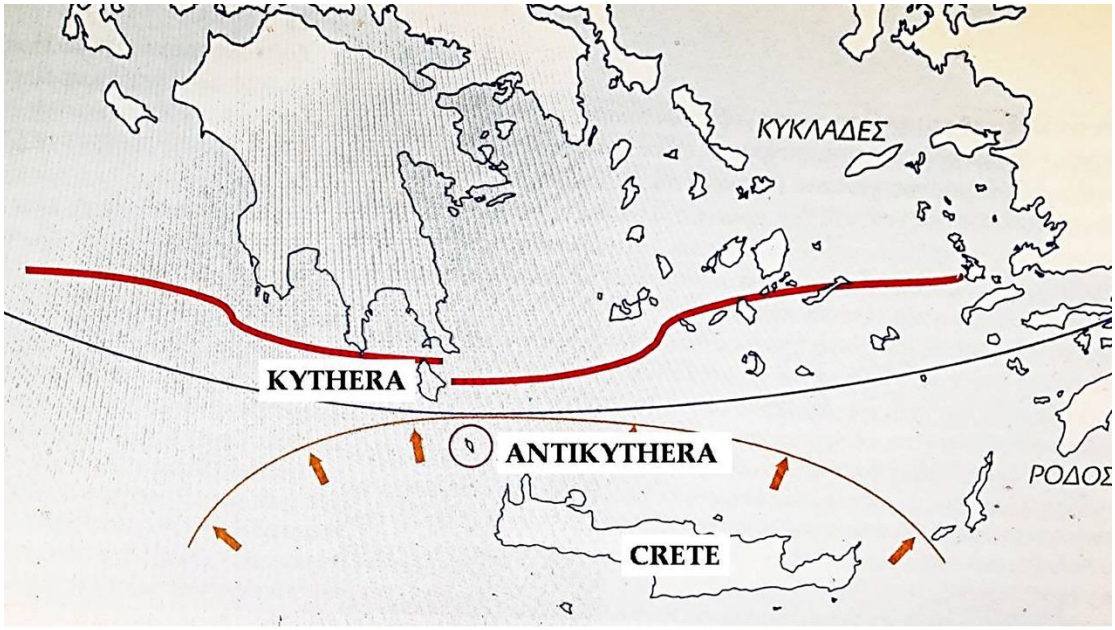

Fig. 25 Map showing the normal sea route of the ships from the Western coast of Asia Minor to the Western Mediterranean and the region controlled by the Cretan alliance in the third decade of the first c. BC.