

# ISLAND ON A PENDULUM: NAXOS BETWEEN ISOLATION AND CONNECTIVITY

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*δοκεῖ δὲ μέγα τι εἶναι καὶ χαλεπὸν ληφθῆναι ὁ τόπος*

*Arist. Ph. 212a8*

## ABSTRACT

Naxos, the largest island of the Cyclades, in the center of the Archipelago, swayed over time between the two ends of the pendulum of insularity, namely between isolation and connectivity, in almost every aspect of human life (society, politics, economy, art, worship etc.). The article examines the position and importance of the island in the Archipelago but also its interaction with the neighboring mainland. It seeks the identity of its inhabitants and whether it differed from that of neighboring islands. It is a diachronic study based on the methods of Historical Archaeology, extending from the Early Iron Age to the end of the Roman period. In this respect, the limitations imposed by the material remains of the past can be overcome by the exploitation of textual evidence in conjunction with evidence found in the landscape and the natural resources.

The starting point is the image of Naxos in myth and literature as a place chosen for the upbringing of gods (i.e., Zeus' and Dionysus') or as a deserted landscape of abandonment and pain (in the case of Ariadne). The article specifies which of these traditions are of local origin and which are panhellenic. Subsequently, local history issues related to the aspect of insularity are examined, such as: the trade of Naxian goods, the spread of Naxian coins, the mobility of Naxians as individuals (artists, professionals, pilgrims, etc.), products imports, the participation in alliances (i.e. Delian

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League, Second Athenian League, Nesiotic League), issues of colonization and mobility of Naxians in general etc.

KEYWORDS

Insularity, Island Archaeology, Naxos.

## 1. Prologue

Naxos has a prominent position in the context of insularity in the ancient Mediterranean world. It is the largest island of Cyclades in the center of the Archipelago, almost in the middle of the maritime routes that connected mainland Greece with Minor Asia and the Near East. Moreover, even for a short time, its presence was not limited to this specific geographical area, but it extended further west, to Sicily by means of colonization. Therefore, it is postulated that Naxos must have gained a privileged role in various developments at the local, regional, or even transregional level.

Thinking about *insularity* we should keep in mind the whole of the aspects that characterized Naxos as an island;<sup>2</sup> these aspects depend on its physical and anthropogenic environment and their constant interplay with the islanders. Among the objectives of this paper is to define the position and importance of Naxos in the ancient Greek world; to discern phases of isolation, connectivity or in-between states, in combination with the factors that caused them; to find out if, at last, Naxians had forged a distinct identity that differentiated them from the rest of the islanders and beyond, as well as its characteristics.

This diachronic study, extending from the Early Iron Age to the end of the Roman period, is based on the methods of Historical Archaeology. In this respect, the limitations imposed by the material remains of the past can be overcome, to a great extent possible, by the exploitation of textual evidence in conjunction with evidence found in the landscape and the natural resources. Especially the literary sources convey an almost authentic picture of Naxian insularity, coming from both Naxian and non-Naxian writers. This study comprises six short narratives focusing on important aspects of Naxian insularity.

## 2. In the beginning is... geography

Herodotus (5.31) is the first ancient author who includes Naxos in the Cyclades island complex,<sup>3</sup> where it has remained geographically and administratively till today. In the regionally organized Athenian Tribute list of the year 443/2 (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 269*), Naxos is recorded in the unit named *Νεσιοτικῷ φόρῳ*, that is “the tribute of the islanders”. This unit

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<sup>2</sup> For answers to the question “*what is an island?*”, see Kopaka (2009, especially p.182-185); Constantakopoulou (2007, p.10-19).

Generally, about insularity: Broodbank (2000); Constantakopoulou (2007); Dawson (2019).

<sup>3</sup> For a full list of ancient Greek and Roman authors discussing this aspect, see Sfyroera (2011, pp.40-41 no.31). A comment for the word *Cyclades* in the ancient Greek Literature in Broodbank (2000, p.69).

comprises Cyclades together with the *poleis* of Euboea, Lesbos etc. Naxos is absent from the Homeric poems.<sup>4</sup> Its oldest reference in literal sources can be traced in an epigram of Archilochus (fr. 325, 7th cent. BC) about two Naxian great men.

*Naxos* is the name of the island.<sup>5</sup> It is considered as a prehellenic toponym (Oikonomides, 1988); it does not mean anything specific. Because of this, ancient authors tried to give some explanatory interpretations; for example, according to Diodorus (5.51.3) Naxos was named after its Carian first king named Naxos. Other names listed in literary sources include: *Strongyle*, *Dia*, *Dionysias*. Following Kopaka's (2009) proposition that islands' names, toponyms etc. reveal something of their specific character, let us first focus on names referring to its geography. Henceforth, the name *Strongyle* (*Στρογγύλη*, Diod. 5.50.1) could reflect the view of ancient and later geographers that the island's shape was circular. Indeed, in maps charted by 16th cent. European travelers, Naxos was depicted with an almost circular shape (Sfyrroera, 2007, figs 1-4). According to G. Plinius Secundus (*HN* 4.22.67) Naxos was also named *Kallipolis*, that is an island with a beautiful *polis* and *Mikra Sikelia*; since it was the strongest and most excellent (*κρατίστη*) island of the Cyclades (Agathemerus, *Geographiae informatio* 25). Finally, the comparison of Naxos with a vine leaf (e.g., *Scholia in Aratum* 236; more literary sources in Sfyrroera, 2011, pp.50-51 no.47) is rather related with the spread of the cult of Dionysus on the island.

Naxos was in the center of the Aegiis landmass that connected mainland Greece with Asia Minor. The slow sinking of Aegiis through a complex sequence of geodynamic processes that lasted for millions of years, resulted in the current form of the Aegean archipelago, with Naxos in the middle of the Cyclades complex (Korres, 2021, p.322). It is the largest island (429,79 km<sup>2</sup>) with a 148 km-long coastline (Evelpidou, 2020, p.2). It has the highest peak of Cyclades, the mountain *Zas* (1001 m.). Its geological structure is characterized by a variety of rocks and minerals (Dalongeville & Renault-Miskovsky, 1993, pp.12-14; Sfyrroera 2011, pp.531-532). Most of Naxos' landscape is mountainous. The highest ridges are found along a central axis that crosses the island from north to south. The western and central areas are characterized by smaller or bigger plains with low hills. Moreover, the western coastline is smoother providing better berthing

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<sup>4</sup> A plausible explanation of the omission of Cycladic islands and Ionians in general from the epic in Crielaard (2009, pp.49-50); another opinion in Gounaris (2005).

<sup>5</sup> A thorough analysis about the name of the island and its unique *polis* in Sfyrroera (2018, p.326).

opportunities (Dalongeville & Renault-Miskovsky, 1993, pp.12-14; Sfyroera, 2018, p.328).

Observing the geomorphology in relation to the distribution of habitation, one can ascertain that habitation patterns had been influenced by the geomorphology, with inhabitants being concentrated over time in specific areas. To this date, the southwestern areas of the island remain sparsely populated for a variety of reasons (e.g., limited road network). However, a closer look reveals that in the Early Bronze Age most of the habitation sites were found along the southern coasts (Fotou, 1983, pp.20-46; Vlachopoulos, 2016, pp.117-118). This dispersal of habitation may not have allowed land communication with the sites e.g., in the west of the island, but it was suitable as a part of a maritime network connecting Naxos with the smaller islands in the southeast.<sup>6</sup> Since the Middle Bronze Age, the majority of sites have been situated in the northwest and central parts of the island; meanwhile during the Late Bronze Age habitation gradually moved to the north and to the western coasts, without deserting the south.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the landscape in its western/northwestern part has been transformed due to the more intensive exploitation and habitation in conjunction with major geological changes (e.g., the sinking of the Grotta coast where the Mycenaean city had been developed).

The advantages of the western areas of the island were such that they became a place of attraction for the Neanderthals who reached Stelida following coastal and/or marine routes during their travel from Anatolia to southwestern Europe. Stelida is a double-peaked hill (currently at 152 m. above sea level) in the southwest of the modern city of Naxos, providing abundant sources of chert, a siliceous raw material which is ideal for the manufacture of flaked stone tools (Carter, 2019). This evidence of Middle Pleistocene activity in the central Aegean Basin has provided new dimensions to the notion of insularity (e.g., the importance of geomorphology and natural resources).

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<sup>6</sup> As has been thoroughly explained by Broodbank (2009, *passim*).

<sup>7</sup> Hadjianastasiou (1989, p.206). A detailed catalogue and map of Bronze Age's sites in: Fotou (1983).



**Figure 1:** A panoramic view of the modern city of Naxos and its surroundings (photo taken from Saint Ioannis Chrysostomos monastery, copyright A. S. Sfyroera).

The oldest remains of habitation in the west, at the site where the only *polis* of the island was diachronically developed, are dated back to the Neolithic era. Even assuming that the original occupation was more or less accidental, its advantages were indisputably proven over time (Sfyroera, 2018, p.328).<sup>8</sup> According to Aristoteles (in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 8.40) in the Archaic period most of the rich Naxians lived in the *polis* whereas the rest lived scattered (*κατὰ κώμας*) in the hinterland. Archaeological evidence<sup>9</sup> has proven that the Naxian *chora* was an important field for the development of habitation alongside the *polis*. As the described form of *kata komas* habitation is not entirely clear, it is hypothesized that a smaller or larger nucleus of settlement, consisting of houses or simple shelters, could constitute a *kome*, or perhaps one or more farmsteads with a central building and associated shelters.

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<sup>8</sup> For an analytical review on the geographical formation of the *polis* and its topography, see Sfyroera (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Such as surface surveys (e.g., Treuil, 1983; Énard-Cerceau *et al.*, 1993) and excavations of cemetery (Charalambidou, 2018), sanctuaries (Gyroulas: Lambrinoudakis & Ohnesorg, 2020; Melanes: Lambrinoudakis, 2005), great technical projects including the aqueduct (Lambrinoudakis & Sfyroera, 2010), farmsteads (Kreeb, 1988), towers (Charalambides, 2003; Haselberger, 1972) etc.

The large area of the island, its geological variation and geomorphological alternations, the water sources and the torrents<sup>10</sup> that balance the low rate of rainfall, all resulted in the wealth of its natural resources. There was plenty of land suitable for all kinds of cultivation: from fruit and olive tree orchards to vegetables and grains, and also for raising livestock. Literary sources inform us about famous, local (and therefore desirable and exportable) products, such as wine (Ath., *Deipn.* 1.56; 2.39), almonds (Ath., *Deipn.* 2.39), and goats (Ath., *Deipn.* 12.57). The forests provided timber for shipbuilding (Brun, 1996, p.49). The abundant and easily accessible marble deposits favored the development of monumental sculpture and architecture in the Archaic period. The marble together with the emery, the main raw material of its processing, both became exportable resources.<sup>11</sup> Naxos' sufficiency in material goods (*autarkeia*) and its prosperity in some periods can be attributed to these rich and diverse natural resources. For this reason, the island was named *lipara* by Pindarus<sup>12</sup> (*Pyth.* 4 v.88).

At first sight, one might argue that Naxos, being the largest Cycladic island with a single *polis*, is a typical case for performing insularity studies. However, its size and diversity are such that it cannot be perceived as a unified, whole entity. One could identify sub-geographical units that may function differently and variedly – e.g., the inhabitants of the coastal zone did not share the same way of life with the mountain dwellers of the inland. As a result, there is more than one form of insularity on the same island. Unfortunately, the inadequacy of archaeological evidence does not allow exploring all of them.

### 3. Naxos in the myth: a place of abandonment and despair vs an inviting and safe shelter

According to the oldest version of the myth of Ariadne in *Nekyia* (*Od.* 11, vv.321-325), the daughter of Minos was killed by Artemis on the island *Dia* (*Δία*) – after she got there with Theseus.<sup>13</sup> The poet Callimachus (4th-3rd cent. BC) is the first to mention that *Dia* was the oldest name of Naxos (fr. 274) – an information that is repeated by many subsequent authors (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.45-46 no.41). According to Diodorus (5.51.1-2) the island was named *Dia* by the giant brothers Otus and Ephialtes, the sons of Poseidon

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<sup>10</sup> Literary evidence about springs and a river of wine in: Sfyroera (2011: p.22 [at no.6]).

<sup>11</sup> On the importance of marble for the Naxian economy: Kokkorou-Alevras (2003).

<sup>12</sup> According to The Online LSJ *λίπαρά* means “fat, rich, fruitful” in this case.

<sup>13</sup> *Δία* or *Dia* is also today the name of a very small uninhabited island located just 7 miles northeast of Heraklion. Of course, it is not possible to know what Homer had exactly in his mind when referring to *Dia*.

who were also known as Aloades. They were the second in succession kings of the island following the first Thracian kings. Before Aloades, the island was called *Strongyle*. Therefore, we could conclude that *Dia* was the name attributed to the island in the myth. The attribution of this name to Naxos was a result of the integration of the Homeric tradition of Ariadne's death on the island *Dia* with the prevailing version of the myth that she had been abandoned on Naxos by Theseus (first reported in Eratosthenes, *Cat.* 1.5, 3rd-2nd cent. BC;<sup>14</sup> full literary evidence about Ariadne on Naxos in Sfyroera, 2011, pp.39-40 no.29). The association of Naxos with the island *Dia* could be facilitated by the fact that in the Homeric text, Aloades are mentioned immediately before Ariadne (*Od.* 11, vv.305-320). As stated in the literary evidence, they died and were buried in Naxos (first met in: Pind., *Pyth.* 4 vv.156-158; full evidence in: Sfyroera, 2011, p.43 no.36). According to *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, *Dia* means “heavenly”, “of goddess”. According to a scholiast of Callimachus (*Etymologicum Magnum* p.266) *Dia* is derived from the genitive of the name of Zeus (*Ζεύς, Διός*), and it was chosen because of the tradition of the upbringing of the god on the island.

The dominant features of the island in the myth are those of a deserted place,<sup>15</sup> a place of abandonment and pain, due to the myth of Ariadne's.<sup>16</sup> In Nonnus' work *Dionysiaca* (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.137-141 nos.215-226), Naxos is an uninhabited place,<sup>17</sup> immersed in silence and loneliness, where the daughter of Minos finally died. However, it is the place where Ariadne was courted by Dionysus. Naxos was also a romantic place for the amorous union of Poseidon with Amphitrite according to scholiasts of Homer (e.g., Eustathius, *Od.* 1.114). Finally, Naxos is also represented as a dark place of revenge and death. As we have seen, Artemis killed Ariadne there. During a deer hunt, herself (e.g., pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.55) or her brother Apollo (*Od.* 11 vv.318-320) are thought to have murdered the menacing brothers Otus and Ephialtes using a plot; nobody could oppose the Aloades.

The second central characteristic of the island is that of a hospitable refuge. Occasionally it is the blessed place for the upbringing of gods and heroes. According to

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<sup>14</sup> According to the aforementioned text of Eratosthenes, the marriage of Dionysus with Ariadne took place on *Dia*. In addition, he cites that she had been abandoned by Theseus on Naxos. Therefore, *Dia* and Naxos are the same island.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., ἐρημία ναυτική according to Alciphron (4.19.10).

<sup>16</sup> These characteristics are also found in newer literary works, such as R. Strauss's opera “*Ariadne auf Naxos*” with H. von Hofmannsthal's libretto.

<sup>17</sup> ἐρημός (Nonnus, *Dion.* 47 v.354).



the prevailing narrative, Dionysus was born and/or raised up on its mountains.<sup>18</sup> The local historian Aglaosthenes stated that Zeus also grew up there (Eratosth., *Cat.* 1.30). Hera entrusted her son Hephaestus to the Naxian craftsman Kedalion to learn the art of coppersmithing; he was born as a result of the illicit relationship of Zeus with Hera (Eust., *Il.* 3.646). Another case is that of Hermes who hid Ares on Naxos after releasing him from the shackles imposed on him by the Aloades (Eust., *Il.* 96-97). Last but not least, the fratricidal Voutis from Thrace took refuge in Naxos in search of a new place of residence after his expulsion from his homeland; he became the first king of *Strongyle* (Diod. 5.50.2-3).

Related to the feature of the hospitable shelter is the trait of the protected anchorage under difficult weather conditions. Traveling from Athens to the coasts of Asia Minor, Nileas, the son of Kodros, was forced to dock in Naxos due to bad weather conditions (Aelianus, *VH* 8.5).<sup>19</sup> Thucydides (1.137.2) attests that Themistocles also tried to dock in Naxos for the same reason during his travel to Persia.<sup>20</sup> Of the many characteristics attributed to Naxos in the myth this is the only one that corresponds to reality. The privileged position of the *polis* on the western, smooth coast of Grotta was reinforced by the double mooring capability of the two natural inlets in the west and north, on both sides of the peninsula *Palatia*. Consequently, ships were able to easily approach the *polis* even if strong winds were blowing from any direction – although these were more often from the north. In addition, the island occupied a central position in the Aegean Sea, being in the middle of the maritime route from mainland Greece to the East. Because Naxos was a rich and resourceful island, it was considered an ideal station for supplies.<sup>21</sup> It was readily recognizable at sea, even from a great distance, because of the presence of mount Zas, the highest peak of Cyclades.<sup>22</sup> For travelers approaching the island (from the end of the 6th cent. BC), the monumental doorway of the unfinished temple of Apollo on Palatia would be another landmark – mainly in difficult weather conditions. The seamen's

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<sup>18</sup> A lot of crucial events of his life took place on Naxos; a full list of the relevant literary evidence in: Sfyroera (2011, pp.23-24 no.9).

<sup>19</sup> This narrative is part of a story of Athenian inspiration about *Ionian migration*. It may be considered a starting point for a discussion about the composition of the island's population. Naxians were Ionians (as many other Cycladic inhabitants and beyond), although they did not accept their origin in their local narratives; this controversy is discussed in detail in: Sfyroera (*in press a*).

<sup>20</sup> See also Sfyroera (2011, pp.121-123 no.182), for chronological correlation issues that sometimes called into question the truth of the incident.

<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly it has a central place in maritime routes diachronically, see Purcell & Horden, (2000, pp.141-142 and map M12).

<sup>22</sup> For a study on maximum visibility in the sea see: Brugge (2017).

knowledge of the smooth west coastline of the island and its sheltered double port, made Naxos a reference point in travels to and from the East.

To conclude, the image of Naxos in the myth consistently shares a common feature, that of isolation, precisely because it serves the need of the protagonists to take refuge on the island. Undoubtedly, no one gets abandoned or looks for a hiding place or shelter in a crowded place. This notion is partly consistent with our common perception of islands as places of loneliness, misery, and poverty. However, this negative image, mainly found in pan-Hellenic rather than local narratives,<sup>23</sup> was at odds with reality. Even its mythological names (*Dia*, *Dionysias*), as authorial creations, ascribe some qualities to the island, in contrast to its official name, Naxos, which bears no particular meaning.

#### *4. Staying (?) at home in the age of the great expansion*

The *polis* of Naxos was formed relatively early. It had been shaped from the geographical standpoint shortly before the end of the Geometric period. The process of its geographical emergence and formation can be witnessed through the archaeological findings in the *polis* and its surroundings.<sup>24</sup> With regard to its political formation, archaeological finds have revealed that the Naxian society went forward with its transformation from a cluster of *geni* to a unified state after the middle of the 8th cent. BC. The worshipping practices of some eminent families at the Metropolis square and the sanctuary of Yria were adopted gradually by the entire community (Lambrinoudakis, 2001, pp.14-15). As concerns the third parameter, i.e., that of the territory, its *chora*, the *polis* of Naxos, as the only *polis* on the entire island, had no problems consolidating or extending its borders. In other regions of mainland Greece similar controversies led to confrontations and even to warfare; the conflict of Chalcis with Eretria over the Lelantine plain is an outstanding case. Nevertheless, insularity had sometimes its own disadvantages, as in the case of islandic neighbors (the rivalry between Naxos and Paros is a characteristic example).

The formation of ancient Greek *poleis* and colonization are almost contemporary phenomena. Naxos' involvement in colonial expansion is limited, although it could be

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<sup>23</sup> Only the narrations of Aglaosthenes about the upbringing of Zeus and Diodorus' about the Thracians are likely based on local versions of the myths.

<sup>24</sup> A detailed presentation of the geographical formation of the *polis* of Naxians in: Sfyroera (2018, especially pp.327-333).

reasonably assumed that it had all the means for such an expansion, i.e., ships and maritime knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Naxians in collaboration with Chalcidians founded their only *apoikia* in the west in 734 BC. This was an early period of search and experimental approaches for identifying new places of residence and trade. The *apoikia* was named *Naxos* and it was the first Greek colony in Sicily. The reduced interest of Naxians in the establishment of colonies is reflected in the absence of a certain cult of Apollo Pythios,<sup>26</sup> which is observed in other islands of the Cyclades with colonial activity, such as Andros (e.g., *IG XII Suppl.* 245) and Paros (e.g., *IG XII 5* 110, 134).

The reasons for this deficit should be sought in particular features of Naxian insularity: there was plenty of land suitable for a variety of uses and abundant natural resources. The only shortage was probably that of metals. The majority of the population would make a living from agriculture, livestock raising and fishing. As concerns the Naxian aristocrats (named *pacheis*, *fat people*<sup>27</sup>), they based their wealth, power and authority primarily on land ownership and also on commercial activities. Naxians and Chalcidians maintained longstanding ties, as indicated by significant quantities of Euboean pottery found in Naxos. Two crucial common elements of both *poleis* were the strong aristocratic character of their landowners'-based society and the emergence of new competitive social groups. The voluntary departure of dissatisfied and/or ambitious and adventurous citizens from both *poleis* alleviated (even temporarily) the tensions and strengthened them (a thorough analysis in Sfyroera *in press b*).

Other Cycladic islands, including Paros and Andros, founded colonies in the Northern Aegean during the first half of the 7th cent. BC.<sup>28</sup> Although the motives of the settlers were common in both cases (search for land, timber, metals etc., and trade expansion), the conditions of their departure from the homeland are considered to be different: Parians left their island voluntarily, whereas Andrians did not, a fact that is later reflected in the relations between the *metropolis* and colonies (Tiverios, 2020, *passim*). Neither Naxians nor Chalcidians had any relations with their colony, but this does not

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<sup>25</sup> Taking this into consideration, 200 years later Naxos became the largest naval power in the Cyclades.

<sup>26</sup> The cult of Apollo Pythios in Naxos is based on a hypothesis derived from a dubious reading of the epithet on the inscription *SEG* 41, 690 ll.3-4 –according to Matthaiou (1990-91, pp.113-116). On the connection between the colonial activity of some *poleis* and the cult of Apollo Pythios: Tiverios, 2020, p.50.

<sup>27</sup> Named so by Herodotus (5.30) in his narration of the expulsion of *pacheis* by the *demos* in the late 6th cent. BC.

<sup>28</sup> Parians about 680-670 BC (Tiverios, 2020, p.42), Andrians in the middle of the 7th cent. BC (Tiverios, 2020, pp.47-48).

necessarily mean that they resembled the case of Andros. As one of the oldest examples of colonization, the founding of Sicilian Naxos had some characteristics of an experiment, especially for Naxians who had not attempted it before. In addition, Naxians seem to have had little commercial interest in such a remote region as Sicily. The trade of agricultural products, marble or emery could be conducted in their vicinity.

Compared to Naxos, the increased colonial activity of Paros and Andros could be attributed to the fact that the formation of the *polis* on these two islands was not completed as early as in Naxos, where the powerful Mycenaean city had evolved into a single *polis* (Sfyroera, 2018, pp.328-331). In Andros and Paros there were more than one important settlements during the Geometric period (Tiverios, 2020, p.42 [Paros]; p.47 [Andros]). Consequently, internal tensions and conflicts after their *synoikismos* led to colonial expansion,<sup>29</sup> to settle disputes and resolve practical issues (such as the shortage of land).

In the middle of the 7th cent. BC, the confrontation between Naxians and Parians was linked to the Naxians' attempt to take advantage of the successful pioneering action of their neighbors who penetrated Thrace and exploited the wealth-producing resources of the region – mainly metals. The defeat of Naxians was massive<sup>30</sup> (Tiverios, 2020, p.42; Tsantsanoglou, 2020). Besides, smaller interests could have brought them into conflict, such as maritime control, fishing rights etc. In general, the two islands followed different coalitions. For example, in the war for the Lelantine plain, Naxians took the side of the Chalcidians, while Parians that of Eretrians. Many conflicts would naturally take place at sea, as evidenced by the testimony of the sinking of a ship carrying Milesian ambassadors (allies of Paros<sup>31</sup>) in the Paros-Naxos strait (*IG XII 5*, 445 vv.9ff). Regardless, their rivalry was documented in the 2nd cent. BC, demanding the arbitration of Eretria (*IG XII 5*, 128 and *IG XII 4*, 1065; Sfyroera, 2011, pp.384-386 no.571). Even today, the two islands do not maintain a very agreeable predisposition towards each other. This case exemplifies the usual mode of hostility existing between neighboring islands.

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<sup>29</sup> For the Andrian colonial expansion to the north: Palaiokrassa-Kopitsa (2020, p.70 – after the *synoikismos*); Paspalas (2020, p.67 – after the abandonment of Zagora); *contra* Televantou (2020, 60 – the overpopulation of Hypsele led to the colonial expansion). In the case of Paros, Koukounaries had been inhabited until the Archaic period (lately Schilardi, 2021, p.657).

<sup>30</sup> Archilochus (*IG XII 5*, 445 v.54): ἐνίκησαν καρτερῶς τοὺς Ναξίους.

<sup>31</sup> Paros and Miletos had a very close relationship – e.g., *Hdt.* 5.28-29.

Finally, if one of the goals of the colonial expansion of Andrians and Parians was to obtain metals, then they achieved it. They issued a silver coin earlier than more prosperous Naxos.<sup>32</sup>

The answer to the question whether Naxians traveled – and to what extent – is not easy. They certainly did not travel like, for example, Corinthians, Chalcidians, Parians or Andrians. Along with their presence in Sicily and Thasos, there are testimonies on their (early) settlement in Arkesini (Stephanus Byzantius 1.275; see also Sfyroera, 2011, p.206 no.344). Although this has not been archaeologically documented so far, it can hardly be ignored as a possibility.

The distribution of Naxian Geometric pottery in the Cyclades and Mediterranean has shown that its exports were rather sporadic. It has been assumed that the most frequent purpose of Naxians' travels was pilgrimage to certain sanctuaries (at Delos, Siphnos Samos) rather than commercial exchange. Outside the Aegean, a limited number of Naxian pottery coexisted with large quantities of Euboean, indicating that it was mainly transported with Euboean ships (Kourou, 1994, pp.291-292). Nevertheless, the well-studied pottery and the minor objects-findings from the sanctuary of Yria bring before our eyes “cultural and commercial relations” of Naxians in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean (Simantoni-Bournia, 2021). To conclude, Naxians may not have been considered ambitious seafarers nor good travelers, perhaps due to the conservative nature of their society (Simantoni-Bournia, 1994).

##### *5. Prosperity derived from the sea? The ambiguous Naxian thalassocracy*

The Archaic era was a period of growing prosperity for Naxos. Herodotus refers to Naxos, narrating the events that led to the Ionian revolution at the end of the 6th cent. BC.<sup>33</sup> He praises Naxos by conveying the words of Milesian Aristagoras in front of Artaphrenes, brother of Darius the king.<sup>34</sup> Thus, according to Aristagoras, “Naxos was indeed an island of no great size, but it was otherwise a beautiful and noble island lying near Ionia. Furthermore, it had a store of wealth and slaves”. In addition, “Paros, Andros, and the rest islands of those that are called Cyclades were dependent to Naxos”. It is also

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<sup>32</sup> According to Liampi Andrians issued silver coins in 530-550 BC (Liampi, 1998, p.220), Paros in 525-520/515 BC (Liampi, 1998, p.253), Naxos in 520-490 BC (Liampi, 1998, p.249).

<sup>33</sup> 5.28.1: καὶ ἤρχετο τὸ δεύτερον ἐκ Νάξου τε καὶ Μιλήτου Ἴωσι γίνεσθαι κακά.

<sup>34</sup> For further details, see Hdt. 5.30ff.

mentioned that Naxians had eight thousand men that bore shields, and many “long ships”, that is warships (Hdt. 5.31).<sup>35</sup>

No matter how much of Herodotus’ narrative could be doubted or considered excessive, it is important because for the first time, it places Naxos in an insular network and it is notably proclaimed that it surpassed all the other islands in prosperity.<sup>36</sup> Archaeological research confirms Herodotus’ testimony and supplements it with new evidence of prosperity. In summary, a series of major, mainly public projects testify to the economic potential of the *polis* (and also of some of its citizens) and the existence of a strong central government. Such works include the Temple IV with an altar at the sanctuary of Yria (ca 580 BC), the (unfinished) temple of Apollo on Palatia (second quarter of the 6th cent. BC), the all-marble temple at Gyroulas (530-520 BC), the 11 km-long aqueduct carrying water from the fountains of Melanes to the *polis* (second quarter of the 6th cent. BC). We can also add to this list the colossal statue of Dionysus and two over-life statues of kouroi, all abandoned unfinished at the marble quarries (Apollo and Melanes, respectively) and finally a significant number of various sculptures found in Naxos (Sfyroera *in press c*, with further bibliography).

However, it seems that Naxians did not simply indulge in making great works on their island. They sought to promote the power and greatness of their *polis* beyond the limits of their island, in areas where more people had access to and where Naxian influence and the admiration of others would be more prominent. In the middle of the 6th cent. BC. Naxian authority on Delos peaked, gradually decreasing towards the end of the century. In the first quarter of 6th cent. BC Naxians dedicated the colossal statue of Apollo and transformed the neighboring *Oikos of the Naxians*, making their two votive offerings coexist harmoniously. At the same time, the number of votive sculptures of Naxians doubled. In the first quarter of the 6th cent. BC Naxians dedicated two sphinx statues to the sanctuaries of Apollo at Delphi and Colonna (Aegina) (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.806-808 – with further bibliography).

All these magnificent works of architecture and sculpture had a strong monumental character. They reflected the perception of Naxians for themselves, both as a society and

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<sup>35</sup> According to The Online LSJ μακρὰ πλοῖα were the “ships of war”.

<sup>36</sup> Hdt. 5.28.1: Ἡ Νάξος εὐδαιμονίῃ τῶν νήσων προέφερε.

as individuals. Monumentality in the Archaic period was the strongest societal expression for Naxians.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, these monumental works required high intellectual skills for their inception, design and implementation. This knowledge could have been gained by Naxians over the years thanks to their longstanding experience in marble processing. However, it could have also been a result of their acquaintance with large-scale projects during their travels in the Near East, especially in Egypt (Kokkorou-Alevras, 1994) or through their alliance with other Greek cities that had created similar infrastructures.<sup>38</sup>

Much later sources (Eusebius Caesariensis, 4th cent. AD)<sup>39</sup> refer to the Naxian naval rule towards the end of the 6th cent. BC. According to Eusebius, Naxian *thalassocracy* was established after that of Lacedemonians and before that of Eretrians and lasted for 10 years, that is 510-501 BC (Fotheringham, 1907, p.86) or 516/5-507/6 (Miller, 1971, p.6). In spite of objections surrounding the accuracy of this list, the information on Naxian superiority aligns with Herodotus' testimony and archaeological evidence.

The exact character of Naxian thalassocracy remains uncertain. Certainly, they owned a significant number of ships, including warships and also commercial vessels.<sup>40</sup> The Naxian aristocratic fugitives (*παχέϊς*) and their allies asked the Persians for 100 ships in order to launch an attack against their compatriots, return to Naxos and regain their power (Hdt. 5.31.4). It is reasonable to assume that the requested number of Persian ships was proportional to those owned by Naxians. Eventually, although Persians helped them by offering 200 ships, the aristocrats failed to conquer the *polis* after a four-month siege (Hdt. 5.34). In addition, the comic poet Aristophanes cites that there was a type of Naxian ship named *kantharos*,<sup>41</sup> just like the vase symbol of Dionysus who was Naxians' *poliouchos* god. Not coincidentally, the archaic silver coins of Naxos depicted a *kantharos* vase as the emblem of the *polis* (Sfyroera, 2013, with older bibliography). This

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<sup>37</sup> This idea is further analyzed in Sfyroera *in press c*.

<sup>38</sup> Similar infrastructures include the aqueducts in Athens, Samos and Megara. Of note, Naxian tyrant Lygdamis had close connections with the tyrants of these *poleis* (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.809-815 *passim*).

<sup>39</sup> The *poleis* that ruled the sea from the Trojan war to the time of Xerxes are listed on an Armenian manuscript of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (pp. 225-226). According to him, his source was a work by Diodorus, lost today (further discussion in: Sfyroera, 2011, pp.89-91 no.115). The same list is repeated by Georgius Synkellus (*Ecloga chronographica* p.247β; see also Sfyroera, 2011, pp.66-67 no.76).

<sup>40</sup> According to Van de Eijnde (2020, 55) the main type of Archaic ship was the *pentekonter*, a 50-oar ship, that served both military and commercial purposes. These ships were owned by citizens – not by the *polis*.

<sup>41</sup> τὸ δὲ πλοῖο ἔσται ναξίουργῆς κάνθαρος (Pax 143).

choice reflects both a tribute to their patron god and their strong military and commercial advantage, their navy. Lastly, despite the disasters it suffered at the beginning of the 5th cent. BC, Naxos joined the Delian League, initially contributing ships instead of money, like other naval forces of the time (Sfyrroera, 2011, pp.847 with testimonies and further bibliography). In conclusion, all these lines of evidence suggest that Naxos was an eminent naval force during the second half of the 6th cent. BC.

The exact character of the Naxian naval supremacy is vague. A possible hypothesis is that they dominated the Aegean commercially. So Naxian ships could serve commercial activities, such as trade of marble and sculptures, as it is documented archaeologically, or of some exclusive local products like emery, livestock or other agricultural products. Various findings from Yria allow the recognition of interconnections with other areas (e.g., Rhodes, Cyprus, Phoinicia, Egypt), although it is not clear whether these objects were brought to the island by Naxian or foreign merchants and mercenaries. Some of them were copied by local craftsmen (Simantoni-Bournia, 2021, especially pp.21-23). Naxian mobility and the dissemination of their knowledge and expertise are undeniable facts in the Archaic period.

Even the issue of silver coins (staters, drachmas, obols) following the Aeginetan standard towards the end of the 6th cent. BC served mostly commercial purposes. Naxian silver coins of high monetary value have been found in the most important hoards of Near East, dated from 500 to 460 BC (Sfyrroera, 2011, pp.816-821). Although the presence of Naxian coins does not necessarily imply the activity of Naxian merchants there, it confirms their involvement in a network of trade relations, where the Naxian currency had a stable place due to its reliability.<sup>42</sup>

Despite remaining questions and uncertainties, the sea and the integration of Naxos in smaller or wider exchange networks brought wealth to the *polis* and to some of its citizens.

## *6. Questioning a basic feature of insularity, that of security*

Shortly before the end of the Archaic era, Naxians were confronted for the first time with the collapse of a key feature of insularity, that is the security from hostile intrigues offered by a place enclosed by sea. The deposed aristocrats of Naxos asked Milesians for

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<sup>42</sup> On the role of Archaic coinage in Aegean -Egyptian overseas trade see Van Alfen (2020).



help (enemies of their *polis* until then). They requested 100 ships to attack the polis and return to power. Persians and Milesians besieged the *polis* of Naxians with 200 ships for four months; the *polis* thwarted the siege and its enemies departed (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.825-826). Naxos' great power, naval supremacy and possibly also the weakness of its opponents to effectively conduct a military operation against an island, are some probable causes of this outcome. The insular character of Naxos appeared to be an advantage in this early phase.

About 10 years later, when Persians campaigned against Greece, Naxos was their first stopover. Aiming at avenging the earlier humiliation of the Persian fleet, they enslaved the inhabitants, burned the *polis* and its sanctuaries, without encountering any resistance, since Naxians had abandoned the *polis* without even trying to defend their hearths (Hdt. 6.96; Sfyroera, 2011, pp.843-845).

Many other sieges of the *polis* followed. All of them had detrimental consequences for Naxians. As a member of the Delian League from a very early age, Naxos was also the first *polis* that tried to apostatize from it. Athenians, questioning Naxians' right to free choice, besieged their *polis* and forcibly returned it to the Alliance (470/468 BC; Thuc. 1.98.4; Sfyroera, 2011, pp.847-851). Naxos was besieged successfully for one more time by Athenians, in 376 BC, just before the battle of Naxos, where the Athenian fleet of Chabrias decisively defeated the Lacedemonians (Diod. 15.34.3ff; Sfyroera, 2011, pp.851-852). By that time, insularity had evolved into a disadvantage for Naxians. Naxos was an island without a strong fleet and finite natural resources. It could hardly secure immediate help from elsewhere. It was therefore vulnerable to well-organized attacks by a great naval power, such as Athens.

### *7. Living in the shadow of great powers*

Naxos fought alongside the rest of Greeks during the Persian wars (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.845-846 including literal evidence). After their end, it joined the new strong network of the Delian League, under the Athenian control. Its likely voluntary participation at first soon became mandatory (if not unbearable) especially after its failed apostasy (Sfyroera, 2011, pp.847-851 including literal and epigraphical evidence). For the years to follow, Naxos became marginalized in an informal state of isolation. It was a member of great insular networks, such as the Second Athenian League and the Nesiotic League, or later

under the Rhodian control.<sup>43</sup> As part of *Provincia Asia* (since 133 AD) and *Provincia Insularum* (since 294 AD) Naxos did not retain any important political or economic role. For this reason, it was chosen as a place of exile for Romans who had been forced into isolation (Tacitus, *Ab Excessu Divi Augusti* 15.9; see also the comment in Sfyroera, 2011, p.185 no.299 on Plutarchus' *De exil.* 602D). However, Naxos did not go through a period of crisis and decline, since Naxian society and economy remained in a quite good condition according to the archaeological evidence (Lambrinoudakis, 2018, pp.4-6; also, Sfyroera, 2011, pp.885-889).

To conclude, from the beginning of the Classical era Naxos' role and importance in the Archipelagos was extremely limited. While the image of the strong Archaic *polis* had definitely faded, Naxos never ceased to be a large and resourceful island.

#### 8. Coda

A pendulum with connectivity and isolation at its extreme positions could paint a vivid image of insularity. The island of Naxos, as the heavy mass hanging from the string, has kept on swinging diachronically back and forth in a more or less periodic motion – due to various interferences. However, it has never reached either of these extreme positions. These six short narratives capture some of the countless positions of insularity's pendulum. Naxos' geographical position and geomorphology remained unchanged – just as the pendulum is suspended from a fixed point. Nevertheless, its role, importance and interaction with the rest of the insular and mainland world were differentiated, in constant change, just like the pendulum's amplitude is never the same.

A combination of randomness (i.e., the location of the island in the center of the Aegiis landmass) and human actions have shaped the insularity of Naxos till today. Naxians had consciousness of the self-sufficiency (*αὐτάρκεια*) that their place offered them. That is why they were reluctant to travel during the colonization or believed that they could thrive outside the Athenian League. It could be argued that this feeling of autarky was a key characteristic of Naxian identity. It could also be combined with their love for monumentality. Through the latter they promoted, both inside and outside of their

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<sup>43</sup> Sfyroera, 2011, pp.852-854 (Second Athenian League); pp.864-866 (Nesiotic League); p.866 (under Rhodian control) with literal and epigraphical evidence.

island, the great perception they had for themselves and their *polis* (Sfyroera *in press c*).<sup>44</sup> These two notions were combined with a possible belief of invulnerability – at least until the last years of the 6th cent. BC.

From a more general perspective, one last comment about insularity: Despite the debatable role of isolation as a key feature of insularity, it cannot be completely rejected. No one has ever lived for a long period of time completely isolated out of necessity, with no other choice, in any part of the mainland, apart from a shipwrecked person on a deserted island. In our challenging times of the pandemic, we have witnessed how easy it is to completely isolate an island and limit the spread of Covid-19. There is a diachronic sense of protection and security that results from the lack of communication with the outside world. On the other hand, even today, there are a few days every year when communication between the islands and the mainland is impossible (due to extreme weather conditions or other factors, e.g., ship strikes). This aspect creates a strong feeling of isolation in islanders – and being one of them, I know this feeling very well.

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<sup>44</sup> About autarky and love of monumentality as principal features of Naxian Archaic society see: Lambrinoudakis 1988, 111.



**Figure 2:** Facing the peninsula of Palatia from the northern coast of Grotta in a windy springtime afternoon (copyright A. S. Sfyroera).

*Article received in: 9/12/2021*

*Approved in: 25/12/2021*

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**BALANÇANDO ENTRE AS EXTREMIDADES DE UM PÊNDULO: NAXOS ENTRE  
ISOLAMENTO E CONECTIVIDADE**

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**RESUMO**

Naxos, a maior ilha das Cíclades, no centro do arquipélago, oscilou no tempo entre as duas extremidades do pêndulo da insularidade, ou seja, entre isolamento e conectividade, em quase todos os aspectos da vida humana (sociedade, política, economia, arte, culto, etc.). O artigo examina a posição e a importância da ilha no arquipélago, mas também sua interação com o continente vizinho. Busca a identidade de seus habitantes e se ela se diferencia daquela das ilhas vizinhas. É um estudo diacrônico baseado nos métodos da Arqueologia Histórica, que se estende desde o início da Idade do Ferro até o final do período romano. A este respeito, as limitações impostas pelos restos materiais do passado podem ser superadas pela exploração de evidências textuais em conjunto com as evidências encontradas na paisagem e nos recursos naturais. O ponto de partida é a imagem de Naxos no mito e na literatura como um lugar escolhido para a criação dos deuses (Zeus e Dioniso) ou como uma paisagem deserta de abandono e dor (no caso de Ariadne). O artigo especifica quais dessas tradições são de origem local e quais são pan-helênicas. Posteriormente, são examinadas questões de história local relacionadas ao aspecto da insularidade, tais como: o comércio de bens naxianos, a difusão das moedas naxianas, a mobilidade dos naxianos como indivíduos (artistas, profissionais, peregrinos, etc.), a importação de produtos, a instalação de grupos estrangeiros de pessoas na ilha, a participação em alianças (Liga de Delos, Segunda Liga Ateniense, Liga Nesiótica) e questões de colonização e mobilidade em geral dos naxianos, etc.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

Insularidade, Arqueologia de ilhas, Naxos.