

ANCIENT HISTORY

Minoan Speech

The significance of anchors is that they reveal quite a lot about Minoan society; uncovering economic activity, occupations and religion of the Minoans.

Only a few anchors were actually found on the Minoan sites: two in Kommos, one in Akrotiri, one in Knossos, two in Malia and six on a Minoan ship. They were a roughly triangular limestone slab with rounded top and bottom pierced by 1 or 3 roughly rounded holes. On average these anchors were 0.7m in length, 0.57m in thickness and 74 kg. Sources themselves are relatively reliable as the evidence is unequivocal and generally agreed on by most archaeologists.

The stone anchors are evidence of Minoan Economic activity. Many studies of anchors have concentrated on issues of trade and interconnection and Thalassocracy of the Minoans. Underwater archaeologist George Bass believes it is reasonable to suggest that some anchors were carried by ship as items for trade, evidenced by the Ulu Burin merchant vessel, the only example to date of a prehistoric wreck with its cargo largely intact; carrying at least 24 anchors. Archaeologist Louise Hitchcock supports his view through her discovery that in some instances stone anchors were engraved with mason's marks, most being Cypro-Minoan signs that Cypriots would have stamped on products being exported for trade. Joseph W. Shaw extrapolates on Hitchcock's idea in his article on stone anchors to suggest that the two Kommos anchors were brought and left at Kommos either by Minoan or Cypriot traders for commercial exchange as evidenced by the stamps.

Anchors could also be used to track the location of ports used the period as proposed by underwater archaeologist Dan McCaslin. The port of Ugarit in the Eastern Mediterranean is one example as evidenced by the findings of Andrew Miall who compared microphotographs of Kommos stone anchors with those from Ugarit. He noted that the limestone's making up the Kommos anchors are very similar to one's from Ugarit, "It is possible that they could have come from the same location." This then leads to information about Minoan trade routes through the location of anchors found in the sea bed throughout the Aegean which were often discarded if caught on a reef or rocks as proposed by Watrous. Traders from Eastern Mediterranean could have travelled along the Levant coast to reach Crete and returned through direct sailing to Egypt and home.

Occupations are also of significance through the discovery of anchors. We see the stonemason's trade through the details of the anchor itself: the rounded holes were probably cut with a chisel as there is no evidence of circular scorings to show that any of the holes were drilled. They would have needed men to remove the stone from cliffs as well as sailors to manoeuvre the ships that held the anchors.

Many archaeologists have identified anchors as being a religious symbol in Minoan culture. Dan McCaslin supports this view, suggesting that anchors possibly had talismanic properties, making them sacred to their vessels. This is evidenced in a beautifully carved pierced porphyry-style octopus anchor, 40 cm high, elaborately carved with 2 octopuses and found by British archaeologist Arthur Evans in the Labyrinth at Knossos. He noted that the artifice is so elaborate, that it may have been intended for cultic use; supported by archaeologists Costis Davaras, claiming that it was a votive offering to the Minoan Sea Goddess as revealed by the stone seals depicting the Mistress of the Sea holding up two anchors.

In conclusion, the findings reveal multiple roles of anchors and diverse interpretations of what it reveals about Minoan society. Economic activity is suggested significantly, along with religious roles and occupations that the Minoans had.