I really wanted to title this paper: Is Cyprus an island in Late Antiquity? but, I decided that the title was probably just too silly. After all, most of us will accept that islands and insularity are contingent phenomena. On the one hand, we recognize that, in the short term, the consequences of insularity are real. We need to look no further than the plight of Polynesian islands like Tuvalu which will soon succumb to rising sea levels. [slide] On the other hand, in my home state of North Dakota, there is an area around the small county seat of Watford City that is sometimes called the “island empire” presumably because its traditional chora is bounded by the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers. In other cases, insularity sheds valuable light on distinct historical situations, such as Cold War West Berlin or the poetically named Île-de-France. In other cases, such as Manhattan, the paradigm of insularity seems less useful in understanding the nature and history of the place.

Islands in antiquity demonstrate a similar variability. Alexander the Great’s famously compromised the insular character of the city of Tyre. The pseudo-island of Pelops with its many insular valleys, found the narrow isthmus easier to fortify than, as Nero discovered, to cut with a canal. [slide] Near-coastal islands in the Saronic and Corinthian Gulf could be, at least in the historiography of the past half century, both islands of refuge during times of social and political disruption as well as assemblages of resources, “goat islands,” that local populations could tap during times of demographic and economic expansion. Likewise, the island of Kythera, off the south coast of the Peloponnesus, can be
an abandoned desert for a Middle Byzantine holy man, a hunting ground for Peloponnesian elites, and a vibrant extension of Cretan and Mainland Greek culture and society. In short, islands and insularity take on many guises.

While our general notions of insularity tends to be contingent, island archaeology generally considers insularity a fundamental and persistent characteristic of a particular place. Braudel observed that the culture of Mediterranean islands oscillated along a continuum from conservative isolation to innovative syntheses. Cyprian Broodbank similarly noted that insularity could take on many forms: from isolated and inward looking to connected and outward facing. Recent work by Andrew Bevan and James Conolly documented the entire 20.8 km² island of Antikythera using intensive pedestrian survey. They sought to understand this rugged island over the long term and their work recognized elements of persistence, resilience, and fragility as well as isolation and integration in its human occupation. Horden and Purcell, considering Mediterranean islands more generally, emphasized their connectivity and argued that islands, like Mediterranean society more broadly, existed primarily at the level of the microregion. Microregions with their distinctive microecologies may be islands, parts of islands, or parts of the mainland and share equally in the dense webs of connections that defines the character of the Mediterranean area.

In short, island archaeologists foreground matters of chronological and spatial scale. In particular, attention to the “longue durée” has tended to frame arguments for insularity and set into relief the more conservative and innovative periods of island societies. The size of islands makes it possible to present well-defined examples of microregional adaptation.

The diverse approaches to insularity, scale, and connectivity have influenced the recent proliferation of studies dedicated to the islands of the Roman and Late Roman periods. On the one hand, these volumes have revealed remarkable archaeological landscapes across the Aegean, in the Balearics, and on Crete and
Sicily, and offered richly documented microhistorical perspectives on the past of these islands. At the same time, many contributors to these conversations have been content to examine the archaeology on various islands more than island archaeology per se. By opening a selected windows into the archaeology of Cyprus is an island in the Late Roman or Early Byzantine period, we can reflect on the utility of island archaeology both at the spatial scale of Cyprus and the temporal scale of the 5th to 7th century.

Even the casual scholar recognizes that the deep past of Cyprus reflected its insular character. The discovery of the bones of a distinctive species of dwarf hippopotamus (*Phanourios minor*) speaks to the distinct character of evolution in island settings. At the same time, scholars have sometimes called Cyprus a “matchbox continent,” alluding to the island’s size as well as its geological and ecological diversity. Others have preferred more terrestrial metaphors for Cyprus describing it as a “crossroads” between the Aegean basin and the Levantine Coast, and Anatolia and Egypt. Following the Bruadelian paradox, Peter Megaw, for example, famously considered the architecture of the island as either “Metropolitan or Provincial,” Bernard Knapp has argued for the “hybrid character” of Cypriot culture in the Bronze and Early Iron Age, and, recently, Jody Gordon has employed the concept of globalization to define the development of the island in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Each of these approaches has recognized, albeit with varying degrees of specificity, the continuum between distinctive isolation of Cyprus and the changes introduced through contact with extra-insular forces. For scholars of Late Roman and Early Byzantine Cyprus, the island’s proximity to the Levantine Coast and the Aegean made it a strategic asset to the Byzantines as well as to the Persian and Arab raiders whose long term material impact on the island remains more assumed than proven at least in the archaeological record.

Any effort to consider the question of whether Cyprus was an island in
Late Antiquity, then, has to address the issues of both chronological and spatial scale. Since most models of insularity expect an oscillation between connectivity and isolation over time, it’s hard to think that the study of Cyprus over a relatively narrow time period of a few centuries will produce evidence for its distinctly insular character.

Spatial scale, however, is another matter. As one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean, Cyprus has significant environmental variation with the ore rich Troodos massif and the Kyrenia range framing the central plain of the Messaoria. Differences in geology, rainfall, proximity to the coast, access to arable land, and vegetation has given rise both to the remarkable biodiversity of the island as well as considerable variability in the ways that groups sought to exploit and adapt to the environment. For much of the history of the island, the understanding of settlement has emphasized the relationship between copper ore-bearing veins in the Troodos mountains, fuel for processing the ore, water and arable land to support communities focused on extractive industries, and the sea for export. In many ways, this network of relationships which activated the geological and environmental diversity of the island left their permanent imprint on the settlement of the island into Late Antique and Early Byzantine period. The cities of Cyprus which dotted the semi-arid lowland plains along the southern coast of the island, optimized access to the sea, arable land, and ore rich veins in the Troodos.

The rest of my paper today will consider how attention to matters of insularity might inform how we think about two particular sites in the larger context of Late Roman and Early Byzantine activity on Cyprus.

[slide] First, the site of Polis in the Chrysochous valley of western Cyprus which traces it origins to the Bronze Age. It stands near where the Troodos mountains and their mineralogical resources descend to the sea. The modern Limni mines with their ancient predecessors provide a dramatic reminder of the
significant role that copper extraction played in settlement. The modern village of Polis stands atop the Iron Age site of Marion which Ptolemy I destroyed in 312 and Ptolemy II Philadelphos refounded as Arsinoe in 270. During the Roman period, the city appears to have quietly prospered, it became the seat of a bishop in the Late Antiquity, and it remained a significant village into the Medieval and Modern periods.

Nearly a century of excavation around the modern village of Polis-tis-Chrysochous has revealed the remains virtually every historical period. The last 30 years of work by the Princeton Cyprus Expedition has produced, among many other things, two Early Christian basilicas and a number of related buildings of Late Roman and Early Byzantine date. A team comprised of R. Scott Moore and Amy Papalexandrou has been studying and publishing the architecture and ceramics from these buildings.

[slide] Of course, not all sites are cities, even in the densely urbanized Cypriot landscape. The second touchstone for this paper is the ex-urban site of Pyla-Koutsopetria which stands about 10 km to the east of Ancient Kition just within the borders of the modern Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia and on a stretch of coastal plain associated with the modern village of Pyla. A pass through the village of Pyla connects this coast to the Mesaoria plain.

The site is overshadowed, both literally and figuratively by the well-known Late Bronze Age site situated on the height of Pyla-Kokkinokremos excavated largely by Vassos Karageorghis and, now, Jan Dreisen. A fortification dating the end of the Cypro-Classical or Early Hellenistic period stands on the height of Pyla-Vigla and is currently being excavated by a team led by Brandon Olson, Tom Landvatter, and Scott Moore. That fortification is likely associated with the border zone between the city of Kition and Salamis. In the 1990s, Maria Hadjicosti led a team of excavators to open two areas on the coastal plain which revealed the apse of an basilica-style church and a well-appointed annex. In 2004, a team led by myself, Scott Moore, and David Pettegrew, conducted intensive pedestrian survey across the entire plain which produced a remarkable
assemblage of Late Roman ceramics. We also conducted one season of additional excavation around the church annex.

The sites of Polis and Koutsopepetria represent two different types of sites on the island: a city and an ex-urban settlement. They stand on opposite sides of the island with slightly different microecologies. At the same time, they also produced remarkably different assemblages of nearly contemporary ceramics and both feature Early Christian basilica style churches. Comparing the churches and ceramics from these two sites and placing them within the larger context of the island offers a way to consider insularity on a geographic scale by assessing, even with a limited range of variables, the relationship between sites on the island.

Ceramic Assemblages

[slide x 2] Both sites produced sufficiently substantial ceramic assemblages for some basic quantitative analysis. The assemblage from Polis largely derives from a large residual assemblage associated with the second phase of the South Basilica. This assemblage consisted of over 1000 diagnostic artifacts dated in some way to the Late Roman period with the latest material dating to the very end of the 7th or the early 8th century and consequently providing a terminus post-quem for the entire deposit.

Finewares accounted 40% of this Late Roman assemblage. [slide] The vast majority of the Late Roman fine ware — 97% — was Late Roman D ware, or, Cypriot Red Slip. While historically ceramicists identified this type of pottery with Cypriot production sites, recent work in southern Turkey by the Pisidia Survey Project identified seven CRS/LRD production centers. These kiln complexes appear to have produced most of the forms identified at both Polis and its neighbor Paphos. The assemblage from the South Basilica lacked significant quantities of African Red Slip and Phocaean Red Slip (or LRC wares)
which represent the most commonly imported fine wares both in the island and across most of the Eastern Mediterranean. The only forms of these ceramic types present are the later African Red Slip, forms 104 and 105, which probably date to the mid-6th to mid-7th century, and the common Phocaean Ware form 3 which dates a half century earlier.

The assemblage from Pyla-Koutsopetria derived from several seasons of intensive pedestrian survey and largely came from the coastal plain beneath the heights of Vigla and Koutsopetria. Like the assemblage at Polis, Late Roman D ware dominated the fine wares present, but only constituted 70% of the Late Roman fine ware assemblage from across the site. Phocaean Ware, particular forms 3 and the later for 10, constituted almost 20% of the Koutsopetria assemblage and a very diverse assemblage of the later forms of African Red Slip another 10%. Another coastal site of Maroni-Petrara, some 50 km to the west of Koutsopetria and at the mouth of the Kalavassos valley produced a similar assemblage that was approximately 80% Cypriot Red Slip.

[slide] Inland sites on Cyprus reveal more diverse assemblages. For example, at the nearly contemporary site of Kalavassos-Kopetra situated between the coast and ore deposits in the Troodos mountains, Phocaean Ware made up 37% of the assemblage and ARS less than 10% with the remaining 50% or so being LRD ware. The published ceramics from the Athienou Archaeology Project’s Maloura Valley Survey on the Mesaoria produced similar percentages. The site of Panayia-Ematousa, which is about 10 km inland from Koutsopetria, produced even a greater percentage of Phocaean ware which constituted almost 60% of the assemblage. Cypriot Red Slip made up 20% of the material and African Red Slip, 15%.

John Hayes in his study of the ceramics from the Episcopal precinct of Kourion proposed that African Red Slip became more common on the island only the in 7th century with Late Roman D ware and Phocaean Wares being more common in earlier periods. John Lund makes a similar argument for the presence
of late forms of ARS at Panayia-Ematousa observing that the peak of ARS appears in the mid-6th century. That being said, it remains difficult to disentangle 6th, 7th, and early 8th century ceramic assemblages on the island. For now, the presence of late forms of ARS, LRD, such as the so-called “well form” and Phocaean Ware, such as Form 10, suggest that these sites continued to have access to all major forms of Late Roman fineware until the end of their production in the mid-seventh century.

It goes without saying that we could conduct similar studies of the utility ware assemblages form the island and the range of amphoras on Cyprus and cooking pots, particularly those associated with the production site of Dhiorios, being obvious candidates for this kind of analysis. Amphora types have long represented another lens through which to view connectivity and the study of coastal sites and several recent shipwrecks hold forth the potential to link amphora types to long distance trade, cabotage, local production, and emporia.

For our current purposes, the fine wares offer the preliminary basis for a critique of insularity in the material culture of Cyprus. The presence of imported fine ware of North African, the Aegean, and Anatolian origins reflects the densely connected character of the Late Roman Mediterranean that is common at both mainland sites and other islands across the region. The differences in assemblages at sites across Cyprus suggests intra-insular variation with inland sites seeming to produce a comparatively higher proportion of North African and Aegean wares. This may, of course, reflect the rather small sample of sites across the island, the character of the assemblages being compared, and our still developing understanding of Late Roman fine wares. The reasons for this might also be chronological, although it is hard to imagine a scenario where coastal sites through which imports moved declined before their inland destinations. Finally, it might reflect variations in taste among communities across the island as different groups assigned different values to material culture. The role of slipped fineware in public displays such as dining may have served to distinguish one community from another.
Churches

[slide] Cyprus is well-known as an island of churches. Archaeologists have revealed over 100 Late Roman to Early Byzantine churches on the island in a wide range of urban, ex-urban, village and rural settings. While the number of churches may seem exceptional, a similar, if not denser, distribution of churches is known from other islands across Eastern Mediterranean with Crete, Naxos, and Lesvos having similarly significant numbers of churches.

[slide] The two basilicas that stand along the northern edge of the village of Polis are almost certainly not the only churches at the site. These churches likely mark the northern edge of the built up area of the Late Roman and Early Byzantine city. The North Basilica was most likely a cemetery church and the South Basilica which acquired a substantial cemetery in its second phase may have stood as a marker of the city’s Christian character and as a stopping point for travelers approaching the city from the coast. [slide] The South Basilica would have been visible for travelers entering the city from the north along a road that passed through a quadrifrons arch. The presence of a nearby and decorated well-house would have added to the convenience of the church as a stop on the way into the city.

[slide] The South Basilica’s second phase saw the addition of a narthex and porch that opened onto a large courtyard on the building’s south side as well as several structural changes to the nave and aisles. This likely coincided with the use of the south aisle for interment of significant individuals suggesting that the church may have been adapted in part to accommodate local pilgrimage. [slide] The similarities between the second phase of the South Basilica and the contemporary Amathus basilica hints that the two churches served similar functions and perhaps stood as a local stops for pilgrims along the south coast of the island. This, of course, is speculation.

The conversion of the church from a wood-roofed to a barrel-vaulted basilica
at the same time as the addition of the south porch, however, locates this church amid a small group of churches that underwent a similar transformation largely clustered in the northeastern corner of the island. If we accept conventional wisdom, this modification reflected the influence of the important pilgrimage church of Ay. Epiphanios at Salamis further connecting the architecture to the flow of people along the south coast of the island. Moreover, this willingness to adapt the structure of the wood-roofed basilica to barrel vaulting appears to be a response to the collapse of wooden roofs that is particularly distinct to Cyprus. It would appear that this transformation at the South Basilica occurred no earlier than the very end of the 7th century.

We know less about the church at Koutopetria. We can say that, like the South Basilica, it stood along a major terrestrial route into the city of Kitio and was likely visible from the sea and the coast amid a small, but busy harbor town. The annex room featured gypsum slabs on the floor and the apse opus sectile pavement which is common to churches on Cyprus because the island lacked marble. [Slide] Architecturally, the apse of the church shares some features with the church of Ay. Philon on the Karpas Peninsula including its shallow, wide, semicircular shape and the presence of a lateral passage connecting the central apse to the south aisle. This may represent the influence of the church at Ay. Philon as well as the collection of churches in the immediate orbit of the episcopal seat at Salamis reinforcing the place of Koutsopetria at the intersection of an important road between Kitio and Salamis and the sea.

Linking the churches of Polis and Koutsopetria to churches in the neighborhood of Salamis-Constantia suggests the possibility of island wide connections manifest in architecture and perhaps even liturgy. It also belies the diversity of church designs present on the island. [Slide] For example the Central Basilica at Ay. Georgios-Peyia despite their geographic proximity to Polis reflect rather different traditions in design with slightly raised stylobates, a prominent central ambo, use of Proconnesian marble and proportions more in keeping with churches in the Aegean basin or even Constantinople. [Slide] In contrast the
massive and undoubtedly pilgrimage church on the Akrotiri peninsula, dating the mid-7th century, shares the prominent transept and expansive atrium with the complexes of Abu Minas in Egypt and, perhaps more remotely the massive Lechaion basilica in the Corinthia.

The longstanding debate about the “Metropolitan or Provincial” character of Cypriot church architecture reflects the variation present across the island. Some of this undoubtedly represents change over time and the lack of chronological control over many of the excavated churches on the island introduces a degree of ambiguity into any conclusions. At the same time, the presence of both perceived innovation and influence across the broader corpus of Early Byzantine and Late Roman architecture on the island demonstrates the extent to which notions of insularity have suffused our understanding of Cyprus during this period.

Conclusions

Ceramics and churches offer a micro historical lens through which to consider the insularity on the island of Cyprus during the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period. They speak to the spatial scale of insularity by drawing our attention to patterns of intra-island variation and diverse, overlapping, networks of connectivity that links sites across the island and in the broader region. The distribution of fine wares on the island, for example, suggests that access alone may not have been the only consideration for the acquisition of table ware with inland sites producing a higher percentage (and generally larger number) wares associated with the Aegean and North Africa. Church architecture likewise suggests a kind of selectivity among communities on Cyprus adopting architectural styles from both on the island and further afield. The influence of ecclesiastical architecture in the island’s northeast would appear to exert a pull on church design that runs counter to the western origins of Aegean, North Africana, and Anatolian fine wares. Some of this reflects larger trends in ceramic production across the Eastern Mediterranean, while also recognizing the regional
or even local networks of distribution. An island archaeology of Cyprus, however, juxtaposes these tensions by recognizing certain aspect of Cypriot material culture and society and locating them within larger currents of exchange, movement, and culture in the Mediterranean.

As for the oscillations between isolation and connectivity over time which are characteristic of insularity over the longue durée, a focus on a single period and the scale of a few hundred years will likely only reveal one movement of the pendular swing associated with islands. This paper has emphasized the Late Antique and Early Byzantine period, which by definition anticipates the fragmentation of the Medieval Mediterranean basin. In this context, perhaps island archaeology serves to cut beneath the foam of events (to use Braudel’s metaphor) and to identify patterns in the material culture on the island that speak to the resilience of its communities and the persistence of it connections over the longue durée.
An Island Archaeology of Early Byzantine Cyprus

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(Or, Is Cyprus an Island in Late Antiquity?)

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The South Basilica at Arsinoe
Polis-Chrysochous
E.F2
R. Maguire, *Late Antique Basilicas on Cyprus: sources, contexts, history.*
(Unpub. Ph.d. Diss. East Anglia 2012)
Fig. 1.1
North Basilica

South Basilica
R. Maguire, *Late Antique Basilicas on Cyprus: sources, contexts, history.* (Unpub. Ph.d. Diss. East Anglia 2012)
Fig. 6.1, 6.2
R. Maguire, *Late Antique Basilicas on Cyprus: sources, contexts, history.* (Unpub. Ph.d. Diss. East Anglia 2012)
Fig. 27.1
Fig. 11: Akrotiri-Katalymata ton Plakoton: linear plan of 2016.