

Methone on the Peloponnese: a Naval Base without a Harbour? In Search of the Byzantine Port in Historical Sources

While studying the Byzantine castle and the port of Methone, as well as that of Korone, I always had the feeling that the popularized images of both these Venetian castles were deceptive: producing descriptions, images, which, although difficult to do, had without fail to be deleted from my memory – as they had nothing to do with what I was aspiring to study. This is, of course, true of many other cases of monuments that survive in a subsequent, modified form. Yet the image of the more recent castle of Methone is so indelibly imprinted on the mind that, however hard we try to discard it, to forget it, we find it almost impossible and it all but hinders the archaeological study of the area in question. Even more alarmingly though, I found this to be the case with the unproven perception prevailing in various studies on the timelessly noisy and bustling Byzantine port, where numerous ships transported a multitude of products, and where travellers, merchants, sailors found refuge – thronging the quays or awaiting more favourable winds to set sail for Constantinople, Asia Minor and Palestine or the ports of Italy. And although there is a core of historical truth in the writings of some modern historians, I want to state in advance that I consider these views on Byzantine Methone excessive and in some cases erroneous; they are projections on Byzantine years of an earlier situation, namely from Roman and Late Roman times, but mainly from the Venetian era, from the 14th century onwards. In the Middle Byzantine period, reality at the port of Methone was very different and diverse.

Before looking at the sources, we shall begin our presentation of the topic with the existing archaeological studies that deal with the ancient or Byzantine port installations in Methone. It is striking that, due to a lack of data, the greater part of the research on the works falls on the Venetian and Ottoman phases of the port and the castle. Consequently, scholars have dealt little with the Byzantine port, as the lack of archaeological data prevents this, and research has unfortunately not progressed much beyond Andrews' initial findings¹. We should, however, point out that important data not so much on the Byzantine port as on the bay of Methone

was provided by underwater research in the area during the 1960s, when a submerged prehistoric settlement from the Middle Bronze Age, 2000 to 1600 BCE, covering an area of about 120 stremmas, was discovered. Also located, although already in full view, were two moles to the east of the castle, a submerged jetty of an ancient port, parallel to the castle, and another more recent, perpendicular to the castle, built in 1890 (fig. 1, 1a). Again, it is not certain that the first mole is a remnant of the ancient port and ultimately it was dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD, a phase that progressively leads us to the Early Byzantine port of Methone². The depiction on a coin from Methone minted under Caracalla, an assarion from c. 198-205, is believed to show this Roman mole, and it may be the oldest image we have to date of the port of Methone (fig. 2): »Obv.: Laureate, draped and cuirassed bust of Caracalla, Μ ΑΡΑΥ ΑΝΤΩΝΙΝΟΝ. Rev.: The harbour of Mothone, shown as a semicircular colonnaded wharf with, at each end, a square distyle building containing a statue; at the centre of the harbour, statue of Tyche to left; at the harbour entrance, galley with rowers to right, ΜΟΘΩΝΑΙΩΝ«³. Indeed, a mole is shown and a port in the form of an theatre and in the entrance a ship with sailors and in the centre or entrance of the port stands a statue. However, the underwater research that continues even today in the bay at the port has provided nothing of additional interest on the Byzantine era; on the remains of the ancient jetty (surrounding an area of 200m east to west and 330 north to south) only small-scale Byzantine interventions, difficult to date, have been discovered, while mainly structures from the Venetian occupation have been located. The only significant research on the phases before Venetian times, the primarily Byzantine phases of fortifications in Methone with mandatory references to the port, has been presented at a recent conference⁴. Lastly, various publications repeat over and over again that the Byzantine port occupied the site of the ancient one and that the anchorages of ancient Methone, just like the Medieval ones, were never safe as they were exposed to the strong south-westerly winds from the Ionian Sea, and that sometime later the Venetians,

1 Andrews, *Castles* 58-83, on ancient and Byzantine ruins and the port 58-59. 74.
2 Kraft/Ashennbrenner, *Paleographic Reconstructions* 29-31. 36-37. – Papachatzis, *Pausaniou Messēniaka* 162-168 n. 5. – Lianos, *Limenika erga* 130-131. – Spondylis, *Symbolē* 30-34. – See also Nanetti, *Opere difensive di Methone* 6-12.

3 Imhoof-Blumer/Gardner, *Numismatic Commentary on Pausanias* 68 no. 1. – Price/Trell, *Coins and their Cities* 208 fig. 484. – Papachatzis, *Pausaniou Messēniaka* 166.

4 Kappas/Mamaloukos, *Paratērēseis* 41-42. – Kappas/Mamaloukos, *Paratērēseis* 2.



Fig. 1 Methone from the air: **A** 1953. Two moles to the east of the castle of Methone, a submerged old jetty, parallel to the castle, and another, perpendicular to the castle, built in 1890. – **B** 2010. – (A photo K. Andrews, Castles 62 fig. 61; B photo by courtesy of Penelope Matsouka).



Fig. 2 Methone with its port on an assarion c. AD 198-205 minted under Caracalla. – (From Imhoof-Blumer/Gardner, Numismatic Commentary on Pausanias 68 no 1. Price/Trell, Coins and their Cities 208, fig. 484).

having pinpointed the problem, tried to solve it by constructing a semi-circular mole⁵.

Given the lack of archaeological evidence and studies on the Byzantine port of Methone, we have opted for a critical review of the sources, as they currently provide the only data available, even if they are sometimes both helpful and misleading⁶. Although most of the references to Methone in the sources are well known, the new questions we shall ask and the new approaches and readings we shall attempt may lead to new insights. The consciously chosen rhetorical question in the title addresses a historical truth, ultimately puts the study into perspective and even announces its outcome. Obviously there has always been a harbour, but what kind of port, what was its main use and status in each period? To give an answer, however, presupposes that we have agreed on the definition of the Byzantine port and harbour. What is a Byzantine port, especially in the Middle Byzantine period, and how does it relate to the ancient and modern definitions? To what extent do terms like *limēn* that we find in Byzantine texts correspond to a port city, an artificial or a natural anchorage? Was Me-

thone during the Byzantine period perhaps not a busy trading centre, as assumed, but the most important natural anchorage, the headquarters of the Byzantine fleet, a kind of naval base, due to its geomorphology and location, which differed from many other ports in the Byzantine Empire and, of course, in the Peloponnese? Furthermore, in which epochs? After all, was the problematic harbour less used in Byzantine times and the wider bay of Methone more, as some of the sources tell us? So let us try, for the first time, a critical review of the information we have on the topic in question.

Methone is in the fortunate position of having many different headlands, bays, islands and rocky islets, reefs and ledges, both in the immediate vicinity and at some distance (as far as Pylos and Korone). Founded at the extreme south-western point of Pylia, it was built on a small triangular point of the coast in the bay bounded on the south by the islands of Oinousses and especially the island of Sapienza, and on the north by the entire length of the coast (namely from the castle to the point known as Kokkinia, where the island of Nisakouli or Kouloura lies). With a port protected only from the west by the walls of the triangular fortress, it was for a long time one of the most important communication stations on the northern Mediterranean route, being an anchorage and a safe harbour for the naval fleet and those sailing from Western Europe, mainly the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, to the eastern Mediterranean. During the late Roman and Byzantine periods, Methone, away from the fortified part, extended to the north and north-east outside the walls and beyond the harbour, an area referred to by locals as Palio-Methone, Old Methone. Numerous Byzantine monuments from all periods can be found in the area north of Methone, east of Mount St. Nicholas, where the Paleo-Christian cemetery of St. Onouphrios is located (containing rooms and tombs carved into the natural rock of porous

⁵ Spondylis, Symbolē 30-37.

⁶ Vorderstrasse, Port without a Harbour 15-26. – Veikou, Byzantine ports and harbours 39-41.

Fig. 3 Satellite image depicting the geomorphology in the area of the Gulf of Methone in the Peloponnese (Greece): **1** Methone. – **2** Harbour. – **3** littoral of the bay (Roman wall, kiln and sherds). – **4** eroding cliff (mosaics, sherds, Byzantine ruins). – **5** Palioi/Ailiades. – **6** Roso Choma/Kokkinia. – **7** Nisakouli/Kouloura. – **8** Sapienza. – **9** Limni Papa (Beacon). – **10** Mount St. Nicholas. – **11** St. Onouphrios. – **12** Agaki (St. Basileios Middle Byzantine church). – **13** Palio Methone. – **14** Early Byzantine basilica. – **15** Lykotomaro. – (Background courtesy of Google Earth).



stone). This cemetery is believed to be a link in the chain of catacombs on that sea route connecting the east to the west, from the island of Melos to Sicily, and it has many features in common with the corresponding cemeteries⁷. In addition, Byzantine churches, tombs, and cisterns lie to the east of Mount St. Nicholas and to the north of Methone, at the sites known as Lykotomaro and Agaki, while remains of settlements can be found all along the coast to the east of the Castle to Kokkinia and Palioi Ailiades⁸ (fig. 3). Consequently, Methone, built in a particularly strategic position in the central Mediterranean, on the passage linking the east to the west, took advantage of its position with a port and a castle, an obvious and well-known function that I believe will become clear below when reviewing the evidence provided by the sources. I think that schematically we can speak of four distinct periods in the history of the Byzantine port and naval base of Methone, with similar as well as very different features according to the age:

a) the first period from the 4th to the 6th century, when Methone continued to play an important role within the unifying Mediterranean framework of Late Antiquity,

b) from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 9th century, a transitional period without information about Methone, but we can deduce elements of reorganisation and defence,

c) from the 9th to the 11th century, a period of prosperity, military and ecclesiastical organisation of the Peloponnese, of control of the seas around Methone and military action against the Arabs of Crete and Africa,

d) the Latin intervention during the time of the Komnenos dynasty was the last Byzantine occupation of Methone and a disastrous time for the castle and the port.

During the first period from the 4th to the 6th century, Methone continued to retain the features of the communication and transport hub of Late Antiquity between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. The sources, although not providing detailed descriptions of the port or other relevant data, generally refer to the passage of pilgrims or travellers or simply speak of moored ships, mainly of the naval fleet, most likely in the bay of Methone⁹. We shall selectively give some examples. In his history (written in about 390), Ammianus Marcellinus does not allude to the port, nor does he describe the city, yet he does furnish us with a brief but unique description of his passage through Methone (*Mothonen oppidum*), revealing that he saw the hulk of a ship two miles inland from the coast, where it had been swept by the tidal wave that followed the great earthquake of 365¹⁰. It is believed that the said tidal wave must have caused significant damage in Methone, as it carried a ship inland, and we know that this huge earthquake of 365 destroyed most monuments in ancient Messene¹¹. Saint Hieronymus in the *Life of St. Hilarion* (written in about 390) refers to a Jewish merchant, a clothes-dealer, in Methone (before 365) who knows and informs Hilarion's pupil Hesychius that his teacher is in the port of Pachynus in Sicily (today Portopalo), while the *Epitaphium Sanctae Pavlae*, written in 404, alludes to the saint passing through Methone in 385 during his journey to the Holy Land¹². Unlike Ammianus Marcellinus, who claims to have been an eyewitness, the ref-

7 Pallas, Saint Onouphrios 147-154. – On the corresponding cemeteries and their position on the Mediterranean maritime routes, see also Laskaris, Monuments 460-471.

8 For much of what is presented here we refer to the entries and the bibliography in the forthcoming work: Anagnostakis, Messenia, entry Methone. – See also Pallas, Saint Onouphrios. – Pallas, Ereunai. – Anagnostakis, Paraktioi oikismoi. – Kavvadia-Spondyli, Pyliia.

9 Gagtzis et al., Peloponnēsos kai notia Italia 480-486. – Avraméa, Péloponnēse 43-44. 132-133. – Anagnostakis, Messēnia, entry Methōnē.

10 Ammianus Marcellinus 26, 10. 19: *Ingentes aliae naves extrusae rabidis flatibus culminibus insedere tectorum, ut Alexandriae contigit: et ad secundum lapi-*

dem fere procul a litore contortae sunt aliquae, ut Laconicam prope Mothonen oppidum nos transeundo conspeximus diuturna carie fatiscentem. Avraméa, Péloponnēse 43-44.

11 This can be deduced from the monetary evidence in destruction layers that have repeatedly been discovered during excavations conducted by professor Themelis in Messene, see bibliography Anagnostakis, Messēnia, entry Messēnē.

12 Hieronymus, Epistulae 165 no. 108 (Epitaphium Sanctae Pavlae) § 7. – Hieronymus, Vita s. Hilarionis col. 50A. – Gagtzis et al., Peloponnēsos kai notia Italia 480. – Avraméa, Péloponnēse 44. 132-133.

erences to Methone made by Hieronymus should not lead us to assume the author's presence there. There is no reference or description of the port in the *Life of St. Hilarion*, although the Jewish merchant who had probably visited or had contact with Sicily and the pupil Hesychius who leaves Methone for Pachynus imply trade and travel between Methone and Sicily.

The most important account we have for this first period is that of the historian Prokopios, who reports that in Methone, during the campaign against the Vandals in 533, Emperor Justinian's general Belisarios »anchored (*hōrmisen*) the ships and disembarked (*apebibasen*)« the entire army¹³. The same sea route (Maleas – Tainaron – Methone – Zakynthos – Sicily – Libya) was probably travelled in reverse by the Byzantine fleet on its return journey after the victorious outcome of the campaign in 534. Prokopios' narrative informs us that Methone had been designated as the meeting place for the ships of the fleet at the beginning of the campaign, i. e. for the meeting of the ships under Valerianos and Martinos (who had already left Constantinople, most probably to do reconnaissance), and with the main body that followed shortly afterwards¹⁴. It should be pointed out that the Byzantines tried not to divide the fleet, and Belisarios himself made sure to »keeping his whole fleet together at all times as it sailed and finding a harbour in the same place, for he knew that if a large fleet in particular was buffeted by strong winds, it was inevitable that many ships would be left behind and scattered at sea«¹⁵. Methone as a meeting place for the ships indicates the special function of the place, probably of the bay and not of the port. After all, where did 500 transport ships and 92 dromons moor for about two months, when it is explicitly stated that Belisarios »anchored the ships and disembarked the whole army«? Where did about 48 000 soldiers and sailors (probably not all the sailors disembarked at the same time) and 6000 horses disembark? What role did the port of Methone play in this story? Was it therefore a trading and potentially a naval port, like most Byzantine ports? The place where the fleet was moored and anchored invites speculation. The bays on the island of Sapienza and other bays in the gulf of Methone were not excluded, even those sheltered from the south-westerly winds affecting the area¹⁶: these were winds that constantly caused problems with the sand dunes in the port, despite the protection afforded by the construction of a breakwater

and the wall of the castle to the west. Prokopios though provides us with a uniquely detailed description of a moored fleet and the life of the expeditionary force in the region of a Peloponnesian port during the Early Byzantine period. We have studied this topic in at least four of our papers and we shall not present it again¹⁷. The bread Belisarios had brought from Constantinople went bad and caused the poisoning and death of 500 soldiers. According to Prokopios, the number of dead could have been even higher, but Belisarios prevented this by ordering that the bread produced there in the country (*epichōrious artous*) to be furnished to them. It is just worth mentioning that around Methone, although research excavations are limited, no Late Roman constructions have been discovered that could have been storehouses (some buildings that are difficult to date have been found and the remains of an aqueduct on the coast¹⁸). Many hypotheses could be put forward about the role that the port of Methone played in supplying this large army¹⁹. It is also worth pointing out that there was always a major problem with the water supply (Methone has always been supplied with water from a few wells and cisterns) and the amount of water that could be provided to a large fleet was very limited. Prokopios described Methone as a dry place in summer with a very hot climate, and the fleet ended up bunkering water from Zakynthos on its way to Sicily²⁰.

Besides the question of supply and trade, archaeological research in early Byzantine Messenia has discovered abundant pottery in many coastal settlements without harbour facilities, in villas, farmhouses, in the bays without built harbours, in coves and islets (Philiatra coast, Dialiskari, Prote Island, Romanou, Pylos Bay, Phoinikous, Nichoria, etc.), but also in some Messenian harbour towns such as Kyparissia-Arkadia or Korone-Petalid (fig. 4). These are seaside settlements where products from the Peloponnesian and Messenian hinterland, but also from outside the Peloponnese, from the Aegean, Asia Minor, Egypt, were traded²¹. Some of this pottery was certainly transported or forwarded to all these places via the port and bay of Methone, and in this case Methone acted as a »gateway community« in terms of the interregional movement of goods and people²². It may be worth mentioning here that in the north-west, very close to Methone, at the southern tip of the cove known as »Limni Papa«, an early

13 Prokopios, Wars 3,13,10: ὤρμισεν καὶ ἀπεβίβασεν ἅπαν τὸ στράτευμα.

14 On the role of Valerianos and Martinos, see Anagnostakis, Wine, Water, Bread, and Love Affairs. – Anagnostakis, Stratiōtiko didymo.

15 Prokopios, Wars 3,13,1-2: Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐφρόντιζε Βελισάριος ὅπως τε ὁ ξύμπας στόλος αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα πλέοι καὶ ἐς χωρίον ταῦτόν προσορμίζοιτο. ἦδει γὰρ ὡς ἐν μεγάλῳ στόλῳ, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἦν τραχεῖς σφίσιν ἄνεμοι ἐπιπέσοιεν, ἐπάναγκες ἀπολείπεσθαι τε τῶν νεῶν πολλὰς καὶ σκεδάννυσθαι ἐς τὸ πέλαγος, οὐκ εἶδέναι τε αὐτῶν τοὺς κυβερνήτας ὁποίας ποτὲ τῶν ἐμπροσθεν ἀναγομένων ἔπεσθαι ἄμεινον. – See also Theophanes, Chronographia 189. 226-228.

16 On the most likely way of mooring ships in the bay of Methone and the islands opposite and probably in the bay of Pylos, see Anagnostakis, Paraktioi oikismoi 155-160.

17 Anagnostakis, Paraktioi oikismoi 155-158. – Anagnostakis, Wine, Water, Bread, and Love Affairs 27-35. – Anagnostakis/Angelidi, Pane pubblico, pane che avvelena 635-641. – Anagnostakis, Stratiōtiko didymo. – Tsivikis, Messenian Bread.

18 Spondylis, Symbolē 33-35. – Kavvadia-Spondyli, Pylia 222.

19 See the comment by N. Oikonomides on supply and warehousing, Anagnostakis, Paraktioi oikismoi 157 n. 64.

20 Prokopios, Wars 3, 13. – Anagnostakis, Wine, Water, Bread, and Love Affairs 27-35. – On the Byzantine cisterns and tanks in the area, see Pallas, Ereunai 78-84, Kavvadia-Spondyli, Pylia 222, and in general in Messenia, Germanidou, Rock-Cut and Underground Cisterns of Messinia. – According to Pryor/Jeffreys, The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ 354, »few ports in the Eastern Mediterranean were on large rivers and many had no river at all and were dependent upon wells. Some did not even have those, for example, Methone, which depended on cisterns«.

21 Davis et al., PRAP 459-467. – Alcock et al., PRAP 167. 170. 176 n. 88. 202-203. – Anagnostakis, Paraktioi oikismoi 140-155. – Anagnostakis, Messēnia.

22 On the Byzantine harbours as gateway communities, see Veikou, Byzantine ports and harbours 49-52. – See also in general Vroom, From one Coast to Another 353-392.

Byzantine beacon tower, a fire signal station, has been discovered, directly related to navigation and probably used also in later years. A solid, circular structure has been preserved with holes low down in the sides that appear to be auxiliary air ducts to help fuel the fire. The structure is thought to belong to a network of signal fires or beacons (*vigla*) situated along the coast from the north towards Methone and then heading to the southeast²³. Methone's dominance as a naval base, meeting, and supply point for the Byzantine fleet and concurrently as a trading and commercial hub is widely highlighted in the sources of the following centuries.

For the next period, from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 9th century, we have no accounts of harbours and moorings in the area we are studying, but the same is true for almost the entire Peloponnese. However, it cannot be ruled out that Constans II (641–668) passed through Methone during his campaign in Italy after leaving Athens (if he did ultimately circumnavigate the Peloponnese as is assumed²⁴), to get to Taranto in 663. Moreover, as we shall see below, the commercial route Methone-Taranto is also mentioned in later sources²⁵. In the years 722–723, the pilgrim and Bishop of Eichstätt Willibald coming from Sicily and across the Adriatic (and in our opinion probably via Methone and definitely via Maleas) arrived in Monemvasia (*ad urbem Manafasiam in Scлавinica terra*) and, and, leaving Corinth »to the left« (as he states), headed for Ephesus, where he venerated John the Theologian. From there, he walked to Phygela.²⁶ It can be seen from the sources that, apart from the confusion between Tainaron and Maleas²⁷, ships passing through Tainaron, Maleas and Monemvasia had almost always previously passed through Methone (in the case of Willibald's voyage, only Sicily and the Adriatic before Monemvasia were mentioned). An early example, apart from that cited earlier concerning Belisarios' fleet, is the voyage of St. Paula, who, according to the *Epitaphium* written by St. Hieronymos, began her pilgrimage in Rome, passing through Sicily (Messina), Methone and then Maleas and Kythera²⁸ (fig. 5).

If one can hypothesise about the journeys of Constans II and Willibald possibly passing through Methone, some more probable than others – what are we to say when written sources and archaeology do not provide evidence that would allow any speculation (unless they are temporary and acci-

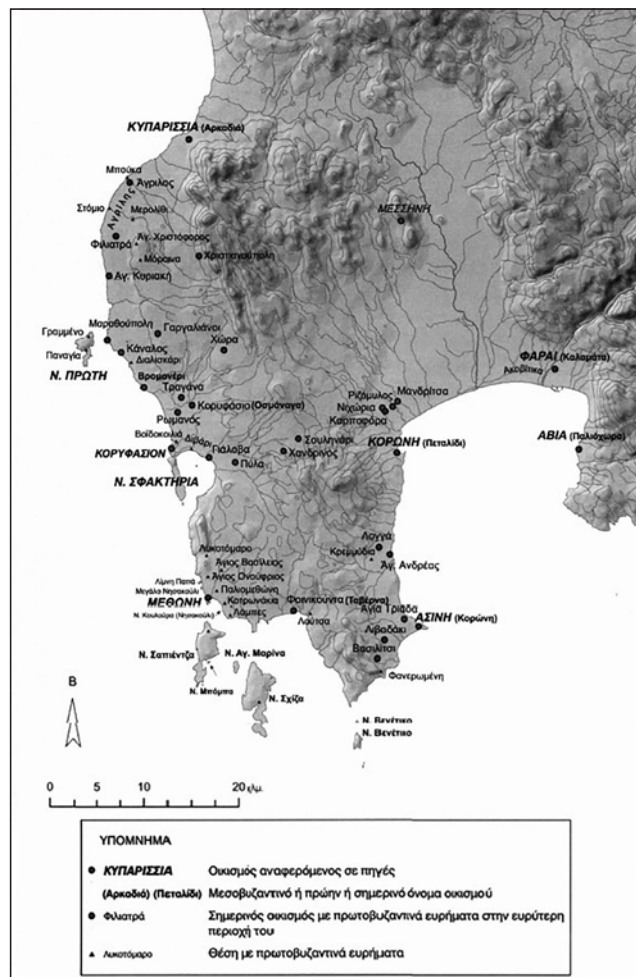


Fig. 4 Coastal settlements and ports of Messenia in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period. – (From Anagnostakis, Paraktioi 159).

dental archaeological investigations)? The Byzantine port of Methone belonged in this category during the so-called transitional or dark ages. I believe that theories of absolute Slavic control and Byzantine decline in the Western Peloponnese are untenable, as it has been more and more convincingly suggested that Patras, Methone, Asine-Korone and Kyparissia-Arkadia may have been under constant pressure, but were probably never abandoned to the Slavs. During the same period, Methone, although not mentioned and even being

23 Spondylis, *Symbolē* 35–36. – Kavvadia-Spondyli, *Pylia* 222. – Biris, Chōra, *Pylos, Methonē* 178–179. – Biris, *Methonē* 155–156. – Anagnostakis, *Messēnia*, entry *Methonē*.

24 Cosentino believes Constans passed through Methone, see Cosentino, *Constans II* 593–594. – See also Gangzis et al., *Peloponnēsos kai notia Italia* 477–478.

25 Von Falkenhausen, *Taranto* 459–460.

26 Vita Willibaldi 93–94. – Kisliger, *Sightseeing* 460–461. – Kalligas, *Byzantine Monemvasia* 42, considers that Willibald's ship came directly from Sicily to Monemvasia, a statement we find hard to believe. Moreover, it has been claimed that ships could either cross the Ionian Sea from the Sicilian Channel or the Straits of Messina directly to Modon, or alternatively follow the coasts of Calabria, Apulia, and the Balkans, almost always taking the coastal road, Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War* 92–94, and the map on p. 14 with the sea-currents, the trunk routes, and prevailing winds in the Mediterranean. Neither do we agree with the interpretation given in Gerolymatou, *Agores* 154 and Gerolymatou, *Emporikē drastēriōtēta* 357–358, that Willibald's ship put

ashore on the left-hand side of Choo (identified with Kos) the Corinthians they had taken from Monemvasia. The phrase *inde navigantes in insulam nomine Choo et demittebant Chorintheos in sinistra parte* has elicited numerous interpretations, and the island Choo has been identified with Kea, Kos, Chios. I believe the excerpt should be translated »on leaving Monemvasia they passed Corinthians (the city of Corinth) on their port side as they sailed for Kea or Kos or Chios«. Talbot interprets it correctly but translates Choo as Chios. »Sailing from Syracuse, they crossed the Adriatic and reached the city of Monemvasia, in the land of Slavina, and from there they sailed to Chios, leaving Corinth on the port side«, Talbot, *The Hodoeporicon of Saint Willibald* 151. This was of old the principal interpretation, Meyrick, *Life of St. Walburge* 51. Kea was adopted by Malamut, *Illes de l'empire* 539. 555.

27 On this confusion, see Avramēa, *Magne byzantini* 53–54. – Anagnostakis et al., *Chōros kai enōtēta* 77–78.

28 Hieronymi, *Epistulae* 165 no. 108. – Gagzis et al., *Peloponnēsos kai notia Italia* 480–482. – Avramēa, *Peloponnēsē* 43–44. 132–133.



Fig. 5 Byzantine ports, coastal sites and settlements in the Peloponnese (Greece) mentioned in the text: **1** Methone. – **2** Oinousses Islands (Sapienza, Schisa etc). – **3** Phoinikous. – **4** Korone-Asine. – **5** Korone-Petalidi. – **6** Nichoria. – **7** Five Rivers. – **8** Kalamata. – **9** Bay of Pylos. – **10** Koryphasion-Pylos. – **11** Romanou. – **12** Dialiskari. – **13** Island of Prote. – **14** Coast of Philiatra. – **15** Kyparissia-Arcadia. – **16** Pondikou. – **17** Patras. – **18** Corinth. – **19** Hierax (Gerakas). – **20** Monemvasia. – **21** Maleas. – **22** Kythera. – **23** Skala (Elos/Laconia). – **24** Tainaron. – (Background courtesy of Google Earth).

in a state of neglect, remained without doubt a compulsory transit route for sailors and travellers whom we know to have been travelling from other points on the southern Peloponnesian coast. Since the 7th century, Late Roman coastal installations with natural harbours around the Gulf of Pylos and the region of Five Rivers at Nichoria in the North West Messenian bay, into which navigable rivers flowed, experienced a decline. So, after a period of thriving Late Roman facilities, with many *villae* and pottery indicating links with the entire Mediterranean, we see coastal settlements with some kind of anchorages being abandoned, with the population withdrawing into the hinterland and settling in fortified places²⁹. Although the role of environmental changes due to alluvial processes (Coryphasion-Pylos, Five Rivers) cannot be overlooked, human geography and action are crucial in these changes. The case of the abandonment of the unfortified seaport of Korone-Petalidi (with an ancient harbour and a not very strong acropolis) is typical; from the 7th century onwards, according to the archaeological data so far, there is no evidence of any activity at the site until the 10th century. The population of the area most likely sought refuge further south in the very old fortified and safer town of Asine, which was renamed Korone and also had a harbour³⁰. This indicates the inhabitants' new more conservative, cautious, defensive

way of confronting the sea and its shores, brought about by the absence of protection and the lack on the part of the central authority of any guarantee of the security enjoyed by the coasts over the previous years. Clearly, this does not mean that the population's recourse to large fortified harbour cities excludes the use of small coastal stations, a prevailing pattern of dispersed settlement that ports have followed since the 7th century³¹. During the 7th and 8th centuries, along the entire Messenian coast, probably only Methone and Kyparissia, which was renamed Arcadia, and later Korone-Asine, albeit to a lesser extent, retained the character of port cities with their ancient artificial harbours, whose condition, however, we are not in a position to know. From the late 8th and especially the early 9th century, after the provincial military organisation of Nikephoros I, a new period of relative security began with three active port cities in Middle Byzantine Messenia, Arcadia, Korone-Asine and Methone, with the last two becoming bishoprics under the metropolis of Patras. (fig. 4, 5).

The following period, that is the 9th to 11th centuries, began with Methone, Korone and Patras gaining central importance and being considerably strengthened as cities, bishoprics and ports, especially under Nikephoros I (802-811). In this way, he tried to promote seafaring and trade in the Empire, but above all to enforce the Byzantine military presence in the Ionian and Adriatic Seas, in Southern Italy and in the central Mediterranean. This is the time when Methone, like the other ports in the region, initially acquired a mainly defensive and later an offensive character for the Byzantine Empire. The ecclesiastical and administrative reorganization in the »theme« of Peloponnese and the maritime »theme« of Kephallenia essentially created a defensive and potentially offensive zone in the greater area of the Ionian³². Within this grouping, however, Methone has a peculiarity. Despite being protected by the islets and the islands of Oinousses, functioning as gigantic natural breakwaters, it is exposed to any kind of maritime, natural, and man-made dangers, unlike other major ports on the Byzantine Peloponnese and in Greece, such as Naupaktos, Patras and Corinth, Euripos-Chalkis, Demetrias, etc. which are relatively protected within internal seas or in deep bays (fig. 6). It should be noted that we know today that to the Southeast, not very far from Methone, lies the most abyssal sea of the Mediterranean where the Oinnousai Pit is located, an underwater abyss with a depth of 5121 m.

Due to its position in the 9th century and particularly from 872-878, Methone suffered raids from the Arabs of Crete, while from 879-881 it was attacked by the Arabs of Africa. It periodically served as a base for sallies by the Byzantine fleet, which under the admirals and commanders of the Byzantine

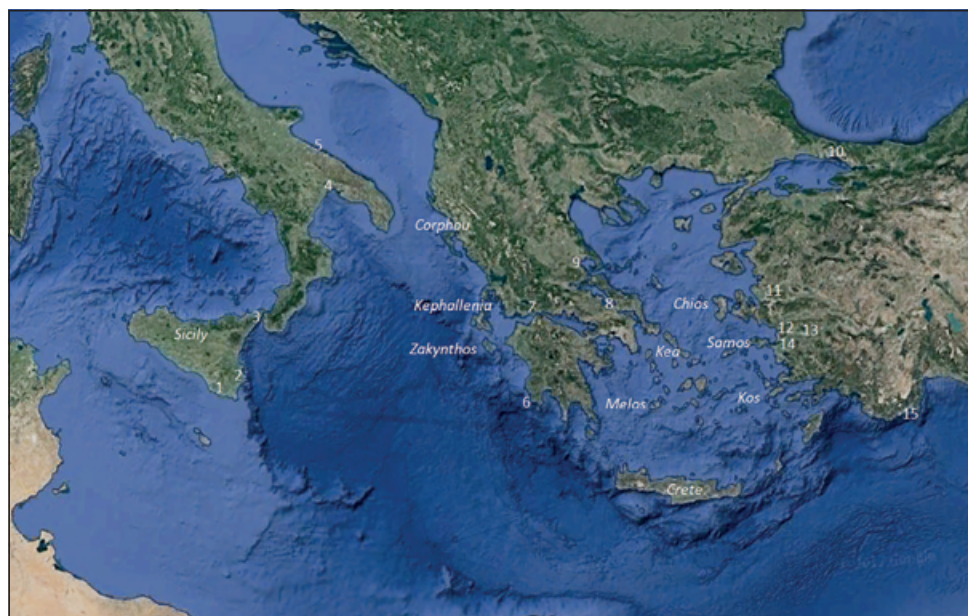
29 Lukermann/Moody, Nichoria and Vicinity 78- 82. 97-112. – Rosser/McDonald, The Byzantine Occupation: Introduction 353-356. – Davis et al., PRAP 454-494. – Alcock et al., PRAP 147-209. – Anagnostakis, Paraktioi oikismoi 143-149. 154-155. – Kosmopoulos, Messēniakē gē 408-414.

30 Anagnostakis, Metonomasies 45-59. – See also Anagnostakis, Messēnia, entry Korōnē-Petalidī, and Korōnē-Asinē.

31 Veikou, Byzantine ports and harbours 45-48.

32 Soustal/Koder, Nikopolis and Kephallēnia 50-59. – On the army and the fleet during the reorganisation of the western part of the empire and especially in the Peloponnese and Kephallenia with the presence of oarsmen Carabisiens and Mardaites, see Treadgold, Byzantium and its Army 66-75.

Fig. 6 Byzantine sites, ports and harbours mentioned in the text (apart from those on the Peloponnese):
1 Pachynus (Porto Palo). – **2** Syracuse. – **3** Messina. – **4** Taranto. – **5** Bari. – **6** Methone. – **7** Naupaktos. – **8** Euripos-Chalkis. – **9** Demetrias. – **10** Constantinople. – **11** Smyrna. – **12** Ephesos. – **13** Theologos. – **14** Phygela. – **15** Myra. –
 (Background courtesy of Google Earth).



navy (*droungarios tou ploimou*) Niketas Ooryphas and Nasar successfully dealt with Arab aggressiveness in the area³³. The sources repeatedly mention the mobility of the Byzantine fleet in the Peloponnese and in Methone, but without any reference to the operation or use of their ports, which is implicitly assumed. Besides, Byzantine sources rarely give a description of a specific port, and it is our task, insofar the text allows, to extract information from brief references to sailings and moorings, or from the context. As regards the events of 880, the 10th-century historian Joseph Genesios alludes to the fact that the emperor sent the patrician and admiral Nasar on a naval expedition (*naustolia*) to Methone³⁴. Correspondingly, Konstantinos Porphyrogennitos in the *Vita Basilii* mentions that »The emperor [...] outfitted many (*plēthos*) triremes, biremes and other fast-sailing vessels and dispatched the commander of the navy with an impressive force (*dynameōs adras*) [...] Nasar speedily sailed off, enjoyed favourable winds, and reached Methone in a short time«³⁵. At first glance, one might think that this fleet has docked at the port of Methone. But this is impossible, as according to some accounts Nasar's fleet consisted of many ships, about 45 or more, a number that corresponds to the *plēthos* and »impressive force« mentioned by Porphyrogennitos. A fleet of 45 vessels is referred to in the *Life of St. Elias the Younger*, while 140 ships are specified in a later Arabic source (Al-Bayan al-Mughrib), information considered to be exorbitant³⁶.

Again, the question arises, as in the case of Belisarios' fleet, where did this fleet drop anchor? Perhaps the question is ultimately superfluous if the assumption that this fleet could be received by a port is excluded (as it clearly must be) from the frame of the research.

It is commonly known in research (and we know of numerous other cases in the same era) that prior to or during operations a large Byzantine fleet would gather or anchor in natural bases, in bays. A few examples suffice. One of the most characteristic is the report that in 878 a relatively large fleet moored at Hierax (ancient Zarax and later Gerakas) in the Peloponnese, just above Monemvasia, during Adrianos' campaign to support Syracuse under siege by the Arabs. Genesios relates in fact that Adrianos with a large fleet, literally a fleet with many men (*polyandron nautikon*), reached the Peloponnese and docked at a port (*limeni proslimeneuetai*) called Hierax, while Porphyrogennitos reports that Adrianos had the ships cast anchor at Monemvasia in the harbour called Hierax (*en tōi limeni tōi kaloumenōi Hierakos prosormisas tas naus*)³⁷. In addition, corresponding massings of fleets took place during the campaigns against the Arabs of Crete in the Aegean seaports of Asia Minor, opposite Samos at *Kēpoi*, at the mouth of the Maeander river in 866, or at Phygela in the bay of Ephesos and present-day Kusadasi in 911 (about 177 vessels) and in 960 under Nikephoros Phocas with the enormous number of reportedly 3300-3360 ships³⁸.

33 Vlysidou, Symbolē 301-315. – Pryor/Jeffreys, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ* 65-66.

34 Genesios 84.2-6 Book 4 § 34.

35 *Vita Basilii imperatoris* 220 §62. 8-10: μετὰ δυνάμειος ἐκπέμπει ἄδρα, τριήρων τε καὶ διήρων καὶ ἄλλων νεῶν ταχυναυτουσῶν πλῆθος ἐξαρτυσάμενος.

36 *Vita s. Eliae iun.* 36-37, § 25. 481-484. – Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* 96 n. 1.

37 Genesios, Book 4 §33.2-5: ἐξεπεπόμφει ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ Ἀδριανὸν ἄνδρα γενναῖον σὺν ναυτικῷ πολυάνδρῳ [...] ὃς κατιῶν μέχρι Πελοποννήσου Ἴερακι οὕτω κατονομαζομένῳ λιμένι προσλιμενεύεται. – *Vita Basilii imperatoris* 238 §69.15-

16: κατήλθεν ἄχρι Πελοποννήσου, ἐν Μονεμβασίᾳ δὲ ἐν τῷ λιμένι τῷ καλουμένῳ Ἴερακος προσορμίσας τὰς ναῦς. – Anagnostakis, *Adrianos* 208-209 n. 26. – Yet it is considered »extremely improbable, meteorologically impossible in fact, for a fleet to be prevented by contrary winds from rounding Cape Maleas into the Ionian Sea for 50 continuous days«, see Pryor/Jeffreys, *The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ* 65, n. 113.

38 Genesios, Book 4 §20. – Theophanes Continuatus VI, 204-205. 475. – Constantini Porphyrogeniti *De Cerimoniis* 658. – Attaleiates, *Historia* 28.2. – Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer* 112-115.

In all these cases, the sources use terms related either to a bay refuge and shelter or to a port. Phygela is a *hormētērion* and a *katatopion*, which respectively mean a launching point, an anchorage, and a kind of entrepôt or a naval base with facilities for repairing ships³⁹. Hierax is called *limēn*, harbour, into which the fleet *proslimeneuetai*, i.e. sails into harbour, or *prosormizetai*, i.e. drops anchor, but it clearly has nothing to do with a port. It should be noted that the naval and, in this case, port terminology used by Byzantine historians is usually dictated by the level of style they choose, usually that of the ancient writers, and therefore the terminology is only minimally or partially related to the current, popular terminology, as we know it from other sources, *Taktika*, *Naumachika*, and *De cerimoniis*⁴⁰. As regards the aforementioned cases of ports, it is unclear whether they were merely starting points or permanent naval bases for the Byzantine fleet, but the ports existing there provided facilities. In contrast to the case of Hierax already called by Pausanias *eulimenon chōrion*, place with good harbour, and which is primarily a natural port, although it is called *limēn* (*autophyēs limēn*, αὐτοφυῆς λιμὴν as Malalas would say)⁴¹, the case of Methone appears to have all the features of a complex natural base as well as a constructed port, regardless of whether it is simplistically claimed that there is »no port prior to Venetian occupation« but just a fortified coastal settlement⁴². However, certain facilities for repairing and building ships in Hierax should not be overlooked, when, according to one view, Mount Parnon provided cypress wood in abundance, as another port further to the north indicates by its modern name, Kyparissi⁴³ (fig. 5). The port of Hierax, unlike Monemvasia, was suitable for mooring of a large fleet and was also a haven for simple ships, as in the case of the vessel carrying the relic of St. Nicholas from Myra in about 1087, which reportedly passed through Methone at the time; more specifically, Hierax-Gerakas is once again called *limēn* where the ship carrying the relic docks (*en tō limeni Geraka*), before putting to sea, bypassing Monemvasia and sailing to Methone to take on supplies⁴⁴.

Methone undoubtedly provided facilities to the Byzantine fleet (supplies including shipbuilding and repairs), and from

this aspect the port, combined with the bay, had a double or even triple function of commercial, transport and military nature. Moreover, as we know, maritime activity (naval and mercantile) did not necessitate artificial ports⁴⁵. Besides, fleets as large as Belisarios' and Nasar's had to have or wait for supplies, a fact that required the movement of supply boats in the bay and in the harbour. Additionally, in the case of Nasar, as in the case of Belisarios' fleet, what had happened in Methone was caused, among other things, by the fact that many soldiers had disembarked in the harbour or on the shores, and that an expeditionary force was present for a long time in a small maritime city. Therefore, as expected, major problems occurred in Methone, which after all served as a naval base where the fleet gathered, organised and launched campaigns. On this occasion, many oarsmen from Nasar's fleet deserted, a situation that urgently needed to be fixed. So when all the deserters had been caught, a plan was concocted with the involvement of the emperor to prevent further desertions and to intimidate all those rowers who refused to take part in the campaign against the Arabs. And to avoid murdering compatriots, people of the same origin (*homophylōn phonou*), thirty captured Saracens and convicted malefactors, made unrecognisable with soot-smearred faces and lowered beards and hair, were secretly transferred from Constantinople. They were impaled (*aneskolopisen*) in Methone on thirty erected gallows (*phourkas*) as if they were deserted seaman⁴⁶. Genesios says the order was given to build wooden spikes on the spot (*peri ton topon*), apparently in places (beach, port) where the punishment would be easily seen by the soldiers. He also provides information about the social stratification of Methone, revealing that neither the local nobles nor the common people (*eghōrioi archēgetai, laos koinotētos*) and not even the commander of the fleet were let in on the secret of this ingenious plan⁴⁷.

Regarding the nature of the facilities Methone provided to the Byzantine fleet, as already noted, there is no information from the sources and archaeological research that Methone had storehouses and dockyards (*exartyseis* as the Byzantines called them⁴⁸) for repairing ships. This however must not be

39 The word κατατόπιον and the verb λιμενεύω and λιμενεύομαι or προσλιμενεύομαι are of Byzantine origin and are used only by writers from the Middle Byzantine period and later. We know that in 721 Willibald visited Phygela, as we have already said, as it had taken over from the port of Ephesos which had become unusable due to silting, Foss, Ephesus after Antiquity 123. See also Preiser-Kapeller, Harbours and Maritime Networks 5. Later in the 13th century, it is called *emporion*, place of trade. On *emporion* and *katatopion*, Gerolymatou, Agores 276-278.

40 On this subject, in addition to the notes and introductions in the editions of *Naumachika*, see Ahrweiler, Byzance et la mer 409-439. – Koder, Lebensraum 70-73. – Pryor/Jeffreys, The Age of the ΔΡΟΜΩΝ.

41 Pausanias III 24.1 called it *Zarax eulimenon chōrion*, place with good harbour. – Ioannes Malalas, Chronographia chapter 11 § 3 (p. 205, ln. 34), in which an ὄρμητήριον, a base, is described as αὐτοφυῆς λιμὴν, a natural port. – Ahrweiler, Byzance et la mer 420-421. – In ancient and Byzantine literature, ports are described accordingly as natural or manmade, artificial. – See also Gertwagen, Artificial ports.

42 Gertwagen, Artificial ports 166-167.

43 Kalligas, Byzantine Monemvasia 53-54. – Kalligas, Monemvasia 10-13. 28. 107. – The later name Porto Botte (the harbour of butts, wine casks) could

indicate the continuous exploitation of wood from the area for shipbuilding and other carpentry.

44 Anonymous, Translation of the relics of St Nicholas p. 444. 20-22. – Gagtzis et al., Peloponnēsos kai notia Italia 481-483. – Kalligas, Monemvasia 22.

45 Gertwagen, Artificial ports 164.

46 Genesios 84, Book 4 § 34. – Vita Basilii imperatoris 222-224 § 62 (φοῦρκας στήναι [...] ἀνεσκόλοπισεν 224 § 62. 42-43). – Vasilev, Byzance et les Arabes 97. This desertion has been explained as being caused not by a fear of the Arabs, as Byzantine historians report, but as an act of opposition, mainly defiance and disagreement with the policy of the emperor Basileios I towards the West, see Vlysidou, Symbolē 301-315. – Vlysidou, Ypochōrēsē 308-314.

47 Genesios 84.8-26, Book 4 §34: διατέτακται περὶ τὸν τόπον ἀνασκοπισμὸν ἰδρύσασθαι ξυλουργήματος καὶ τοὺς δραπέτας ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀνασκολοπίσαι [...] καὶ μὴ τινα τῶν ἐγχωρίων ἀρχηγετῶν εἶτε λαοῦ τῆς κοινότητος, ἀλλὰ μῆτε αὐτὸν προηγέτην στρατοῦ τῶν ὁμοίων τῆς ἐχεμυθίας ἀπολιμπάνεσθαι· καὶ δεσμῶται πάντες ἀνήρητοιο σκόλοψιν. – On archontes of maritimes themes and of naval bases, Ahrweiler, Byzance et la mer 53-90.

48 On *neōria* and *exartyseis*, Ahrweiler, Byzance et la mer 420-425.

ruled out. We know that after the oarsmen had been brought to heel and the Byzantine fleet had sallied forth against the Arabs, engaging in a naval battle off the western coast of the Peloponnese between Zakynthos and Kephallenia in the summer of 880, Nasar burnt the Saracens' fleet with Greek fire, »War Fire« (*polemikōi pyri*)⁴⁹, and brought the ships that escaped the fire, and that could have been damaged and needed repairs as prize to Methone. These prizes were presented by Nasar as a thank offering to the church of God in Methone (*charistēria edōrēsato*)⁵⁰. I believe that the reference to the church of God in Methone (*en Methōnē tou theou ekklesia*) most likely points not to a specific church but to the church in general, namely the diocese of Methone. On the contrary, some scholars believe that it refers to the episcopal church of Methone, the church of St. John the Theologian⁵¹. John the Theologian is mentioned and depicted on the seals of the bishop of Methone⁵², and it must be borne in mind that the initial choice of the Theologian as protector could be related to the fact that Methone has always been a port of call on the pilgrimage sea routes that led to the port and to the centre of worship of St. John the Theologian at Ephesos. I believe that the important character of Methone as the naval base of the Byzantine fleet, much more important than that of Korone or other ports in the Western Peloponnese, is revealed by the gratitude shown by this special gift of ships made by an admiral.

Apart from highlighting Methone as a naval base, information was transmitted during this period about travellers whose ship passed through or who landed there, without the sources referring to a specific port. This was also the case with St. Blasios in the late 9th century (896/897), who, on his voyage from Rome to Constantinople was forced by the captain to disembark together with his fellow passengers in *Mothone*. On arrival in Methone, the captain probably received a more interesting offer and the ship, which then continued to Demetrias presumably for commercial reasons, was captured by Arabs. In this incident Methone was a port of call on the sea, travel and trade route Italy – Methone – Demetrias – Constantinople⁵³.

So, from the time of Nikephoros I up to the 11th century, Methone was mainly a naval base (sometimes by chance and sometimes permanent, according to the needs and operations of the navy) – namely a port of call where the Byzantine fleet often took refuge during its expeditions against the Arabs in the West and where it probably made use of the

port facilities. This facet of its character is the main reason why since the 11th century, it was constantly a target until the final destruction of the castle and apparently of the port by the Venetians, when part of the Byzantine war fleet seems to have been permanently based in Methone, causing problems to the pirates and Western ships for their uncontrolled actions⁵⁴. This convenient position of Methone, well-stocked for a fleet base, is perhaps reflected by an Arabic geographical treatise, well-known in its English translation as the *Book of Curiosities*, written in the first half of the 11th century. The descriptions of coastal towns and islands in the Byzantine Empire, while giving the lengths and breadths of bays and referring to seas and castles, hardly ever mention ports and anchorages. The only exception is the reference to two naval bases protected from the wind, one of which is called a port and is located in the sea of *Mathūnah* (of Methone). More specifically, it states that in the bay of Methone lies the island of *Muzawwad* with a port sheltered from the winds. Needless to say, though, each leeward and sheltered bay that is suitable for mooring can be considered a port, a safe anchorage, as seen in the case of Hierax-Gerakas. Moreover, according to the translator, the Arabic name of the island of Muzawwad indicates a »suitable« or »convenient« or »well-stocked place« and this probably refers to the island of Sapienza with its bays⁵⁵. Some other sources of the 11th century report or allude to the port of Methone: the port is alluded to in the chrysobulls issued by the Komnenos dynasty (from 1082 onwards) which gave privileges to the Venetians for their free trade and movement (with references to tax exemptions in ports, namely to *pacti limen(i)atici*, *poriatici* or *porteatici*)⁵⁶. In about 1087, it is briefly mentioned that the ship carrying the relic of St. Nicholas from Myra to Bari passed through Methone after an intermediate stop at the port of Gerakas (*en tō limeni Geraka*)⁵⁷. Unlike Gerakas, which is called a port (*limēn*), the port of Methone is not mentioned; it is simply stated that the travel supplies were purchased from Methone. Thus, in this case, we are informed indirectly about a port town in the role of a place of supply.

The history of Methone, of its castle and harbour, however, held an unpleasant surprise for us during the time of the Komnenoi. This is the fourth and final Byzantine period in the area, and I call it the period of destruction and desolation for Methone, about which little is known or has been studied independently. Even though we are familiar with the historical events that caused the destruction, albeit with the

49 This detail about the Greek Fire is given by Genesios, 4 § 34, ln. 44.

50 Vita Basilii imperatoris 24-226 § 63: τῆ ἐν Μεθώνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκλησίᾳ [...] ὡς χαριστήρια ἐδώρησατο. – Vasiliev, Byzance et les Arabes 97. – Vlysidou, Υποχόρησῆ 314. – Wortley, Skylitzes 150.

51 Wortley, Skylitzes 150 n. 133 (Cheynet).

52 Nesbitt/Oikonomides, Seals 85-87. – Cotsonis, Saints and Cult Centers 13-14. – Anagnostakis, Episkopes 117-118. – Anagnostakis, Monemvasia-Lakedaimōn 113-114.

53 Vita s. Blasii, coll. 666-667. – Gerolymatou, Agores 154-155.

54 Chronicle of the Morea, vv. 1690-1694. This is an important interpretation of the Chronicle of Morea which gives the reasons for the destruction of Methone in 1125 by the Venetians.

55 Book of Curiosities 486. 487. – On the bays, anchorages, Byzantine constructions and findings in Sapienza and the surrounding islands, see Kawadiah-Spondylii, Pylia 222-224. – Biris, Chōra, Pylos, Methonē 150-171. – Biris, Methonē 143-149. – On the bays and later history of Sapienza see also Nanetti, Sea of Sapienza 12-63.

56 TT I, 53 no. 23; 118-119 no. 51; 184 no. 70; 265 no. 85; 279. 469 no. 121. – I trattati con Bizanzio 40 nos. 2. 8; 130 nos. 11. 15.

57 Anonymous, Translation of the relics of St Nicholas p. 444. 21-22. – Gagtzis et al., Peloponnēsos kai notia Italia 481-483.

general statements of modern historiography concerning Peloponnesian trade and product handling (in which Methone is recorded as being part of a generally thriving trade climate in the Peloponnese and is considered a commercially active port during this period), I was unable to substantiate this data, beyond two ambiguous references. On the contrary, all the information about the entire 12th century points to a picture of neglect. There may have been already a serious problem with the state of the castle walls at the end of the 11th century, a situation that kindled the Byzantines' interest in repairs. The reading and interpretation of a fragmentarily preserved uncial inscription on a marble slab (today in the Archaeological Museum of Messenia), also bearing a fragmentarily preserved date, probably 1084/1085, refer to Normans, to *Kratiston Komnion* (in this transliteration we reproduce the orthography), and to repairs by a certain Theophylaktos. The inscription implies the construction or repair of a circular defensive wall (*toichō kyklōsas*) in a tower, fort or most likely in the castle. It probably refers to the reinforcement of the castle of Methone in an age when the Normans and the Venetians were becoming more and more aggressive in the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea⁵⁸. Robert Guiscard occupied Corfu and Kephallenia in 1084, the same time as the inscription dates. From August 1122 to the winter of 1123, the Doge of Venice Domenico Michiel led the Venetian fleet to aid the Kingdom of Jerusalem and laid siege to Corfu over winter before reaching Methone. It is not certain whether the Venetians destroyed the castle and evidently the port of Methone at that time, or whether it happened during their return journey from the Holy Land in 1124-1125. It is considered more probable to have occurred before June 1125, when the Doge had already returned to Venice, having looted several islands in the Aegean, and for sure during the period when John II Komnenos refused to renew their trading privileges that also concerned the port of Methone – privileges the emperor ultimately reinstated in 1126⁵⁹. That the Venetians destroyed Methone because the port had become an active base for the Byzantine fleet, which sallied forth to capture or harass the Venetian ships, is reported by various later sources, such as the Chronicle of Morea⁶⁰. However, a ruined port (let alone a bay like that at Methone) could still be partially suitable for small

boats. Only thus it can be explained that despite repeated references to the absolute devastation and destruction of Methone, there are reports of moorings and simple use of the harbour or its shore and obviously its bay throughout the 12th century and during the years of Frankish rule. In the following accounts of the mooring and the use of the bay or the harbour of Methone even after its destruction, we should bear in mind research findings on the use of natural havens: »maritime activity, naval and mercantile, was carried out in natural havens or harbours or along the coasts. Maritime activity did not necessitate artificial ports and the coastal settlement could have functioned as a port town«⁶¹.

In 1126, after the destruction, it is reported that Bohemond II of Antioch passed through Methone on his way from Corfu to Jerusalem, where he intended to lay claim to the principality of Antioch⁶². In the same year, according to the account of the Bishop of Catania Mauritius (1124-1130), two Normans from Sicily and one Calabrian stole the relic of St. Agatha from Constantinople and secretly took it to Italy, via Smyrna-Corinth (where they changed ship) and Methone, where they met a group of merchants with whom they crossed to Taranto. It is interesting that (even if this is due to the literary style) it is not the port that is mentioned, but the shore, the coast of Methone: *Mothonae litori applicuit*⁶³. The sea route used by the Normans that is described in this account and the presence of merchants in Methone indicate general activity in the area, indeed at a time when the castle and obviously the port had most likely been destroyed by the Venetians. The next destruction of Methone in 1147/8 is attributed to the Normans. Although only reported in later sources and confused with that carried out by the Venetians, it is believed that it really happened on account of Roger's continuing aggression on the Peloponnesian coasts in 1147/8, which, among other things, led the Byzantines into an alliance with the Venetians against him⁶⁴.

In 1160, the Bishop of Methone Nicholas in his speech to the emperor Manuel Komnenos described the triangular city, the sea girt Methone (*trigōnos, amphithalassos*) as an empty, deserted city (*erēmopolis*): »Methone is falsely called a city and it should rather be called an *erēmopolis*, without citizens, without walls and without the security (*asphaleia*) that comes from the walls«⁶⁵. In this speech, there is no mention of a port,

58 Kappas, Epigraphē 56-57.

59 Bon, Péloponnèse 82-84. – Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 79-80. – Gertwagen, Artificial ports 175.

60 Chronicle of Morea, vv. 1690-1694.

61 Gertwagen, Artificial ports 164. – In this context Preiser-Kapeller posed some interesting questions referring to Horden/Purcell, The Corrupting Sea 391-400 »Why, for example, did some coastal settlements flourish as commercial towns without artificial ports?«, Preiser-Kapeller, Harbours and Maritime Networks 7. – See also for this period the heuristica and exegesis of the sources Nanetti, Atlante 23-29. 43-50. 92. 109. 112. 132. 134. 158.

62 Historia Hierosolymitana (1095-1127) 657. 807.

63 Epistola Mauritii Catanensis episcopi 55. – Historia translationis corporis s. Agathae 638C-D. – von Falkenhausen, Taranto 459-460. – Oldfield, Sanctity and Pilgrimage 154.

64 On this act of destruction, see Rogerus Hovedensis 199. 203 (Stubbs). 533A. 534D (Delisle) and on the hostility and plundering by the Venetians and Nor-

man on the Greek peninsula during the same period, Bon, Péloponnèse 83-84. – Ahrweiler, Byzance et la mer 240-251. – Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 79-85. 150-158. – Magdalino, Manuel I Komnenos 137. – Gertwagen, Artificial ports 175. – See also Nanetti, Opere difensive di Methone 9. – Nanetti, Modalità 261-262 n. 18. – Nanetti, Atlante 101. 123. 147, claims the presence of Normans in 1185/6 in the area of Methone and the settlement of Benedictine monks in Sapienza.

65 This description provides interesting topographical information: Μεθώνη πόλις ([...] ἦν γὰρ ὅτε πόλις ἦν, νῦν δὲ ἔστιν ἐρημόπολις, ἐρήμη πολιτῶν, ἐρήμη τειχῶν καὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τειχῶν ἀσφαλείας [...]) πόλις τὸ σχῆμα, τρίγωνος τὴν θέσιν, τὰς περὶ τὴν κορυφαίαν γωνίαν πλευρὰς ἀμφιθάλασσοσ, ὡς μόνον τὴν διατείνουσαν πρὸς ἡπειρὸν ἐπανοίγουσα., see Nicholas of Methone, Logos epinikios 1-2. We use the translation of this extract by Angelou, Nicholas of Methone XII. – On the personality and work of Nicholas, see Angelou Nicholas of Methone IX-XXIII, LXV-LXVI.

nor of a blow to the economy and trade; instead, the lack of security (*asphaleia*) due to the destroyed walls is emphasised above all. Knowing that the Eastern seaside walls of Methone were directly connected to the harbour, these words about the lack of security are another argument in favour of the academic statement linking the existence of fortified ports to security for the town and its people and not for commercial reasons or anchorage facilities⁶⁶. This description by the bishop of Methone most likely reflects the situation after the two great catastrophes, the destruction by the Venetians in 1125 and by the Normans under Roger of Sicily in 1147/1148. Although sources about the destruction of Methone reveal nothing about the port but allude only to the walls that were destroyed, the port probably had the same fate as the castle. Moreover, after such desolation caused by repeated acts of destruction by Normans, Venetians, and pirates during the 12th century, I believe that silting also contributed to the dysfunction and partial abandonment of the port, a problem that in the years that followed was described in greater detail by the Venetian administration. It is probably this neglect that is implied in the *Synaxarion of Leon the Young* (written in the middle of the century by Bishop Nicholas and preserved with subsequent additions and changes)⁶⁷. The sickened Calabrian Leo died on his way to Jerusalem »when he reached a port (*en tini limeni*) in the Peloponnese located near the city of Methone (*pros to asty Methōnēs*)« and there, at a place called Rosso Choma (*en tini topō kaloumenō Rosō Chōmati*), sailors went ashore and buried the deceased where, in the mid-12th century, Bishop Nicholas discovered the relic. Rosso Choma (meaning Red Earth) has been identified as a beach not far east of Methone, the present-day Kokkinia, a name with the same meaning due to the red earth sliding down the slope to the shore⁶⁸ (fig. 7). At Kokkinia there is a small bay within the bay of Methone and, due to landslides and coastal erosion on its shores, tombs, and the remains of buildings with mosaic floors have been exposed, parts of which have been swept away by the sea⁶⁹. In one such location, remains were found in a grave and canonized by Nicholas who wished in this way to boost the morale of the faithful in his ruined diocese. Although it is assumed that the journey, death, and burial of Leo occurred many years before the mid-12th century when the relic was discovered, the story of his burial and discovery surely reflect the maritime and topographical reality of a 12th-century catastrophe. It is also fascinating that two 12th-century sources (the one concerning the transfer of the relics of St. Agatha and the other concerning the discovery of the relic of Leo) point out that travellers disembarked not



Fig. 7 Satellite image depicting the geomorphology of the bay of Methone, between the island of Nisakouli/Kouloura and the coast of Kokkinia: **1** port of Methone. – **2** littoral of the bay (Roman wall, kiln and sherds). – **3** eroding sea cliff (**3a** Late Roman houses, mosaics, sherds, Byzantine ruins). – **4** Hagios Ilias/Palioi Aillades. – **5** Rosso Choma/Kokkinia. – **6** Nisakouli/Kouloura. – (Background courtesy of Google Earth).

in the port, but somewhere on the shore of the bay or on the beach near Methone. Probably in Leo's case, *limēn* means anchorage and refers to part of the bay of Methone, to the east of the castle and the town, and between the island of Nisakouli/Kouloura and the coast of Kokkinia.

The question arises as to the condition of the port of a ruined and desolate city and of a castle whose walls, directly connected to the port, are often described as destroyed. So did the port in this condition allow cargo ships to dock? I very much doubt it, but it cannot be excluded, as vessels could always approach the bay and small ships could use part of the port and the shore. Was there perhaps some handling of goods at other points on the coast in the bay of Methone? However, it is difficult to speak of a commercial port in the 12th century; I believe this becomes clear from the Venetian documents of merchants. Thus, throughout the entire 12th century, a century known for the remarkable development in the Peloponnese and its commodity trade, there is no mention of trade in the port of Methone. More specifically between 1088 and 1200, while there are about 50 Venetian documents containing references to the trade in Peloponnesian products and involvement in commercial affairs in Corinth (22 documents), Sparta (12 documents), the rest from Korone and Thebes, we have only one document dated 1201 concerning Methone⁷⁰. I wonder if this single one is sufficient to prove commercial activity at any scale in the port or its surrounding area: Pisan merchants sell oil in

66 Gertwagen, *Artificial ports* 174-175.

67 On the manuscripts and the text, Follieri, *Santi di Metone* 403-404. 441-443, on the persons and the locations referred to in the *Synaxarion*, 406-407.

68 *Synaxarion* Leontos 442.24-29: περί που την Πελοπόννησον ἐν τινι λιμένι καταντήσας πρὸς τὸ ἄστυ Μεθώνης διακειμένῳ [...] ἐξεδήμησεν. οἱ δὲ ναυτικοὶ τῆς νηὸς ἀποβάντες ἐντίμως ἔθαψαν τὸ τίμιον αὐτοῦ λείψανον ἐν τινι τόπῳ καλουμένῳ Ῥώσῳ Χώματι. – On the identification of the location, see Avraméa, *Géographie historique* 25-29.

69 A unique description of the landslides and coastal erosion of the shores of Methone is given by Arethas, *Marginalia* 211: καὶ κατὰ Μεθώνην πάλιν πρὸς τῆς πόλεως ἐπιεισὸν κατὰ τὸ βόρειον μέρος ὃ ὑπερτείνων τὴν πρὸς τῷ τείχει τῆς πόλεως πεδιάδα βουνὸς σπᾶσματι διαστάς μαρτύριον παρέχει τοῦ ποτὲ θάλατταν εἶναι τὰ ἐν τῷ βάθει τοῦ σπᾶσματος ἐνορώμενα λήπη κτενῶν καὶ κηρυκίων καὶ κοχλίων καὶ τῆς τοιαύτης δημιουργίας εἶδη ἐμπεπαρμένα. – On this see Anagnostakis, *Messenia*, entry Methone.

70 *Documenti del commercio veneziano. – Storia documentata di Venezia. – Nanetti, Patto* 41-42 n. 109.

Methone to Venetians and are paid for it in Constantinople according to an agreement made in Methone⁷¹. There is even earlier evidence from 1145: a marriage document in Rialto mentions various items (mainly clothing) originating from Methone, without this proving the use of a commercial port⁷².

Even at the end of the century, visitors still report a destroyed and devastated city, as in 1191, when the English chronicler Roger of Howden notes that Methone (*Muszim* or *Muszun*) had been deserted after Roger of Sicily destroyed it because of the pirates there (*civitas deserta nunc*). He places it in fact outside the bay of Oitylo (*in exitu gulfu de Witun*) and calls it an old episcopal city (*civitas episcopalis antiqua, deserta nunc*)⁷³. In November 1198 (after the previous renewals of privileges to the Venetians in 1126, 1147 and 1187), Alexios III Angelos, hoping for the support of the Venetians, renewed their commercial privileges in the Byzantine state and apparently in the ports of Methone and Korone by a chrysobull. However, the Genoese pirate Leone Vetrano, who probably destroyed Methone in 1199, used the bases of Korone and Methone from this date onwards⁷⁴. In about 1200 (or later) an Italian portolan chart mentions the bay and city, *civitas* and *sinus Motonis, in capite occidentali*⁷⁵. Lastly, in 1204 the *cit  de Mouton* was occupied by the Franks who found it and described it as being in ruins. Villehardouin twice refers to the *port de Mouton* (I do not know if port here means anchorage, place of shelter, refuge) and tells how after Syria and Constantinople the weather and adventure brought them to an anchorage at Methone, which he describes as having been in ruins for a long time, *qui de lonc tens ere abatue*⁷⁶.

The *Chronicle of Morea*, referring to the Frankish conquest during the years 1204-1205, does not include Methone among the castles of the Western Peloponnese that have a port, and which had to be immediately seized (namely Pondikou, Arkadia, Kalamata, Korone, »four castles on the shore that also have ports (*limi nas*)«. And while it reckons that the least powerful, the insignificant (*achamnon*) castle of Kalamata had a *limi nas* (in this case it is most likely a reference to a bay, a kind of anchorage at the innermost point of a bay since a coastal settlement could have functioned as port town) and counts it among the Peloponnesian coastal

fortresses with a port, it does not include Methone. This can probably be explained either by the fact that Methone had already been occupied by the Franks or due to the great damage it had suffered. The *Chronicle* at this point states that since the Byzantines (*R maioi*) had previously kept their *pleutika*, their ships, there and obstructed or preyed upon Venetian vessels, the Venetians had destroyed the castle, which was now deserted (*er mon*) and completely ruined (*holo chalasmeno*)⁷⁷. This is a very significant testimony not so much about the generally known piracy in the region but about the use by the Byzantine *pleutika* of the port or the bay of Methone as a naval base and starting point for all kinds of naval sorties, even piratical ones. The Venetians appear in this account to have aimed primarily at destroying the port. Yet again, the case of Methone (port and castle) confirms the view that the construction and fortification of ports and town ports by Byzantines and later by Venetians are mainly an act of securing the town and its people and not for commercial reasons⁷⁸. Consequently, the destruction of ports is intended primarily to affect the security of a place and secondly its trade.

The picture of Methone presented to us by both Villehardouin and the *Chronicle of Morea* is the same as that painted by all the sources throughout the 12th century (the most typical being that of Nicholas of Methone): a picture of a ruined and almost deserted city, counting little as a port (perhaps only used if the need occurred). Of importance now were the bay and the islands, mainly Sapienza, as natural bases with a unique strategic position. However, a letter written by Pope Innocent and dated 4 November 1204 gave an account of the Genoese pirate Guglielmo Porco who, with seven ships in the port of Methone (*cum septem galeis in portu de Mothone*), plundered a Venetian vessel carrying valuable objects as gifts from the Latin Emperor of Constantinople to the Pope⁷⁹. It is presumed that the Franks repaired the walls from 1205 to 1207⁸⁰ but that the Venetians, according to later information, destroyed them again when they finally became masters of Methone in 1207: *si firent abatre a terre li murs et les forteresses*⁸¹.

Following the conquest of Methone by the Venetians in 1207, Geoffrey I of Villehardouin, the prince of the Frankish principality of Achaea, conclusively ceded Methone and Ko-

71 Documenti del commercio veneziano, no. 456. It is claimed that until 1207 the Venetians did not have a church in Methone, as they had in Sparta, Corinth, the churches there dedicated to St. Nicholas that functioned as *mercationis loca*, Borsari, Venezia e Bisanzio 56 n. 118; 103 n. 165. – Nanetti, Patto 41-42 n. 109 and 47-50. – On the implication of Methone in Peloponnesian trade, see Gerolymatou, Agores 168. 257. – Jacoby, Rural Exploitation 234-238. – Concerning the olive oil trade in Sparta, Armstrong believes that olives were processed close to Skala, an anchorage in Elos, south of Sparta, Armstrong, Merchants of Venice at Sparta 316-317 but also see objections put forward by Jacoby, Rural Exploitation 235, n. 173.

72 Storia documentata di Venezia 405. – Nanetti, Patto 41-42 n. 109.

73 Rogerus Hovedensis 199. 203 (Stubbs); 533A. 534D (Delisle).

74 Bon, P loponn se 170 n. 2. – Nicol, Byzantium and Venice 156. – Gertwagen, Artificial ports 174.

75 Liber de existencia riveriarum 113.88; 148.1256; 148.1262; 149.1297; 157.1611.

76 Villehardouin, La conqu te de Constantinople 2, 138-140 § 328-329. – Due to the geostrategic importance of Methone, the Frankish chroniclers in the first half of the 13th century refer to the Peloponnese as »the island of Methone«, *insula Montionis* (Chronica Albrici Monachi 906) or *l'isle de Mosson* (Robert de Clari, Conqu te 105 § 111). – See also Bon, P loponn se 84 n. 2.

77 Chronicle of Morea, vv. 1690-1694: τ  κ στρον η ραν  ρημον,  λο η τον χαλασμένο / τ  ε χασιν χαλάσασειν  μπρός οι Βενετικοί, διατ   κρατούσαν οι Ρωμαίοι  κει τ  πλευτικά τους / κ'  μπόδιζαν κ'  κούρσευαν τ   ύλα τ ων Βενετικών.

78 Gertwagen, Artificial ports 174-175.

79 Innocentius III, Register 234-236 no. 147. – Fotheringham, Marco Sanudo 39-40. – Polonio, Devozioni 365-366 n. 31. – Gertwagen, Artificial ports 174. – Nanetti, Patto 34-35 n. 77.

80 Nanetti, Modalit  271. – Nanetti, Patto 27-28 n. 43.

81 Martin da Canal, Les estoires de Venise § 68. – Nanetti, Modalit  268-271.

rone to the Venetians in the Treaty of Sapienza in 1209⁸². I wonder why the treaty was signed on the island of Sapienza, off Modon, in June 1209. Was it perhaps related to the condition of the castle and the port, which despite urgent repairs after 1204 were again damaged in the conflict between the Venetians and the Franks?

One and a half centuries after the Frankish conquest, a report by the Venetian Senate from April 1358 is the most convincing confirmation for the evidence of what we have presented. The Senate states that »since the beginning of our occupation, the Castrum of Modon has always been depopulated [...] because there is no port, which is the fault

of this place«: *Cum a tempore quo Castrum Mothoni fuit sub dominionem et protectionem nostram, semper fuerit male populatum vel habitatum [...] ex carensis portus deficientis dicto loco*⁸³.

I believe that this is the correct way to summarize the state of the port that the Venetians took over from the Byzantines, regardless of whether the Venetians themselves were responsible for this situation. The Senate's report that »there is no port (*portus deficientis*)« was used mainly as a challenge and a question in the title of my paper in which I attempted to study mainly through the sources the Byzantine port and castle of Methone.

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82 Bon, Morée franque 69-73. – Nanetti, Modalità 255-278. – Nanetti, Sea of Sapienza 13-14. – Nanetti, Atlante 92. 112. 134-135. 254-273. Nanetti argues that the possible presence of Normans in 1185/1186 in the area of Methone led to the settlement of Benedictine monks in Sapienza, Nanetti, Atlante 101. 123. 147.

83 ASV Senato Misti-Secreta, reg. 28, f. 43^v, in Gertwagen, Venetian Modon and its port 128.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Methone on the Peloponnese: a Naval Base without a Harbour? In Search of the Byzantine Port in Historical Sources

We have little information available on the Byzantine port of Methone. The remains that lie to the east of the castle belong to the ancient harbour, and small-scale Byzantine interventions can be observed on the jetties, whilst structures mainly from the period of Venetian rule are located there. The sources, in addition, do not provide detailed descriptions or other data and refer generally to ports or speak simply of an anchorage, a naval station or moorings for vessels from the commercial or naval fleets, most likely not in a port but in the Bay of Methone. The paper uses accounts from medieval sources up to the 12th century to determine (based also on the marine morphology of the area with its bays and havens) the nature of mooring in Byzantine Methone, as well as in SW Peloponnese in general.

Methone auf der Peloponnes: ein Marinestützpunkt ohne Hafen? Auf der Suche nach dem byzantinischen Hafen in historischen Quellen

Über den byzantinischen Hafen von Methone liegen uns nur wenige Informationen vor. Die Überreste, die östlich der Festung liegen, gehören zum alten Hafen, und auf den Anlegestegen können nur kleine byzantinische Eingriffe beobachtet werden, während sich dort Strukturen befinden, die hauptsächlich aus der Zeit der venezianischen Herrschaft stammen. Die Quellen enthalten außerdem keine detaillierten Beschreibungen oder sonstigen Daten und beziehen sich allgemein auf Häfen oder sprechen einfach von einem Ankerplatz, einer Marinestation oder Liegeplätzen für Schiffe der Handels- oder Marineflotten, höchstwahrscheinlich nicht in einem Hafen, sondern in der Bucht von Methone. Der Beitrag verwendet Berichte aus mittelalterlichen Quellen bis zum 12. Jahrhundert, um (auch basierend auf der Meeresmorphologie des Gebiets mit seinen Buchten und Häfen) die Art der Ankermöglichkeiten in byzantischem Methone sowie im Südwesten des Peloponnes im Allgemeinen zu bestimmen.