

A Light in the Darkness: Monastery Lighthouses in the Aegean Sea and Surrounding Coastal Regions

On August 15th, 797, the Empress Eirene blinded her son Constantine VI and, according to the Chronography of Theophanes, this unholy act resulted in the darkening of the sun, which stopped sending its life-giving rays to earth for seventeen days. The medieval chronicler used this meteorological device to express the gravity of the event rather than to record a meteorological phenomenon¹. However, this reference is interesting, because it is connected with a serious impact on navigation: the sunlight disappeared, so that ships lost course and drifted about. The loss of visual contact with the sun and with the other celestial bodies was disastrous for the ships, since, according to the classical practice of navigation during antiquity and the Middle Ages, ships travelled with the sun and the moon as their guides to determine directions: the sailors »followed the roads of the sky and oriented the direction of their below path without making an error the roadless journey«, as Stephen the Deacon, a 9th-century hagiographer, vividly noticed². Therefore, Emperor Leo VI (886-912), an »arm-chair sailor«³, in his *Taktika* advised the admiral in charge of a naval force to know the movements of the wind and the signs the sun and moon so that the sailors and their ships would be safe⁴.

Navigation took place primarily during the day and ships followed the coastline with coastal itineraries⁵ and from anchorage to anchorage, as is evident from various texts, such as the *Katarche* or *Horoskopion* of the year 475⁶, the *Stadio-*

dromikon for the Cretan campaign of 949⁷ and later in the portulans⁸. In emergencies, however, ships also sailed at night when the sky was clear and the moon was full. In these cases, the ships sailed away from the coast and the islands⁹.

Travelling by sea needed much effort and skill, because »the waters do not have marked roads, because it is in the nature of water not to keep the marks of steps or the traces of vehicles«, as Stephen the Deacon pointed out, recording feelings of uncertainty mixed with fear of sea travel.

For those sailing at night, things were much worse. The likelihood of something unexpected and dangerous happening while sailing on the waves at night was greater, and the travellers' fear was correspondingly high. The combination of night and sea, especially in stormy seas, caused fear and despair among the travellers who hoped for a light on the horizon to save them.

The 4th-century polymath theologian Gregory of Nyssa rhetorically described such circumstances: »those who are at sea and have deviated search for a torch burning high or for a summit to appear at dawn to bring their ship back on the right track«¹⁰. Michael Psellus provided another relevant stylistic image, mentioning the lighthouses and their practical use in his work on the Crucifixion¹¹: »in conditions of severely rough sea, the lighthouses guide the castaways with their light, they summon them close to them and they receive them favourably in calm ports. Thus, the lighthouses with the

1 Theophanes, Chronography 472, 18-22: ἐσκοτίσθη δὲ ὁ ἥλιος ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ἰζ' καὶ οὐκ ἔδωκε τὰς ἀκτῖνας αὐτοῦ, ὥστε πλανᾶσθαι τὰ πλοῖα καὶ φέρεσθαι, καὶ πάντας λέγειν καὶ ὁμολογεῖν, ὅτι διὰ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως τύφλωσιν ὁ ἥλιος τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἀπέθετο. – See Rochow, Theophanes 269. – Cf. Yannopoulos, Περιβάλλον 285-286. – A special study on unusual natural phenomena in Byzantium is provided by Telelis, Phenomena I 363-364.

2 Stephen the Deacon, Life of Stephen the Younger 109: τῆ θέσει τῶν ἀστέρων προσέχοντες, τὴν προκειμένην αὐτοῖς ὁδὸν διοδεύουσιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀνωθεν δρόμων σοφῶς τὴν κάτωθεν τεκμαιρόμενοι τρίβον, ἀπλανῶς τὴν ἀτριβὴ πορείαν ὁδεύουσιν. – The text was written probably in 809, see the comments of the editor M.-F. Auzépy, Life of Stephen the Younger 9.

3 As he was characterized by modern scholars: Pryor/Jeffreys, Δρόμων 160.

4 Leo, Taktika 19, 9-13: προειδέναι διὰ τῆς τῶν φαινομένων ἀστέρων καὶ ἐν ἀστροῖς σημείων πείρας, καὶ τῶν καθ' ἡλίον τε καὶ σελήνην γινομένων σημασιῶν. – See also Demétroukas, Naumachika 38.2.

5 Pryor/Jeffreys, Δρόμων 341. 354. 388.

6 Dagron/Rougé, Trois horoscopes 120-122.

7 Huxley, Portulan 295-300. – Koder, Aigaion Pelagos 102-103. – Pryor, Σταδιοδρομικόν 77-108. – Pryor/Jeffreys, Δρόμων 264-266.

8 Avramea, Land 79-82.

9 One of the ships that carried the Byzantine representatives for the Synod of Lyons (1274) managed to be kept safe from the storm in Malea, because it sailed away from the coast. ἀνώθουν πρὸς τὸ πελάγος τὴν τριήρη: Pachymeres, History II, 507. – See also below n. 77.

10 καθάπερ οἱ ἐν πελάγει τῆς εὐθείας τοῦ λιμένος παρενεχθέντες κατὰ τὸ φανὲν σημείον τῆς πλάνης ἑαυτοῦς ἐπανάγουσιν ἢ πυρσὸν ἰδόντες ἀπὸ ὕψους αἰρόμενον ἢ κορυφὴν τινος ἀκρωρείας ἀναφανείσασιν: Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Moses, 11.6-9 and 13.2-4.

11 Much of his life Michael Psellos lived in Constantinople, where the sea is not far from any part of the city. Moreover, the writer was familiar with travelling by sea since he had close associations with the Bithynian coast. He originated from Nikomedeia, took the monastic habit in the monastery of Horaia Pege (Ὠραία Πηγὴ) on Olympos in Bithynia and owned also three monasteries there, Kellia, Monokastanos, Smilakia. – See Auzépy, Les monastères 441-442. 451. – Kravari, Évocations 75-77. – On the other hand, his stay on the Cycladic island of Andros is considered fictitious: Kedrenos 2/170. – See Lemerle, Humanisme 149.

calm ports save people one after another and relieve them of their suffering»¹².

Two ways of reading can be discerned in the above passages. Our authors, as well as many others who used the same literary motif of the lighthouse, used it with a symbolic meaning, because the theme is appropriate for several rhetorical images with many kinds of approaches to it¹³. Regardless of their metaphorical expressions, Byzantine writers undoubtedly rendered the word »lighthouse« in its literal sense, depicting its real function to guide the sailors toward the right direction and guarantee a safe arrival to the harbour. Thus, they demonstrated the beneficial sight of the lighthouse for the navigators diachronically.

By far the best evidence for the function of a lighthouse comes from the most famous one since antiquity, that of Alexandria, which Procopius of Gaza (465-528) described in his panegyric for the emperor Anastasius I (491-518). Praising the imperial interest in restoring the lighthouse eroded by the sea, the orator used this opportunity in order to stress its contribution to the safety of navigation and furthermore depicted in a unique way sea-travellers' sentiments upon seeing the lighthouse: »the flame it emits comforts the sailors, as well as announces their arrival to the shore, and at the same time shows the captain where to steer his ship without incurring further danger. On the other hand, the sailors applaud and cheer with joy upon seeing the lighthouse, because the arrival to the town causes them bliss for the salutary end of the journey«¹⁴.

For coastal cities with great commercial activity and well-organized harbours, like Alexandria, we find a lot of evidence for lighthouses. In Constantinople with more than one busy harbour since the early Byzantine period¹⁵, there was a Pharos near the Great Palace and the port of Boukoleon¹⁶. Besides its practical use to indicate a port protected from rough water, it constituted the final point of the line of beacons transmitting messages from the borders of Asia Minor¹⁷.

What about smaller ports that were not organised by the state and were located on dangerous coasts? Information on the lighting infrastructure at (due to their morphology) dan-

gerous coasts along busy and important sea routes is rarely found, as Byzantine authors only occasionally referred to the actual lighthouses, such as the lighthouse of Cherson on the Crimea. Describing the severe storm that the exiled emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711) had to face when sailing by boat in the surroundings of Cherson, the Chronography of Theophanes referred to the lighthouse of Cherson. Through this narration, we may explore the physical space and the environment of this maritime area that was exposed to strong winds and was hardly accessible¹⁸. The lighthouse of Cherson was located close to the so-called Nekropela (today Karkinitic Bay¹⁹), a point of strategic value for the Byzantines, as is clear from its remarkably detailed geographical description in the political manual of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus *De Administrando imperio*. The imperial writer points out also that it was a hazardous place »utterly impossible for a man to pass through«²⁰, thus verifying Theophanes' words about the particular weather and spatial conditions in the region.

Several years later, in connection with the attack of the Rus in 941, a fortress of great significance guarding the approach to Constantinople from the Black Sea is mentioned. It was situated at the entrance of the Bosphorus, at the so-called Hieron²¹ and according to the narrative sources, this maritime stronghold was equipped with a lighthouse. It was a »settlement upon which a torch was placed showing the way to those travelling at night«²².

It seems logical that indications for lighthouses are to be found for strategic points along the maritime routes, which were not easily accessible and exposed to strong winds. Such lights could serve to predict the imminent risks at sea marking dangerous coastlines, tricky reefs, and safe entries to harbours, as Eustathius of Thessalonica realistically describe them²³. However, how trustworthy is the evidence for light devices along the hazardous coastlines of the Byzantine seas? Do Michael Psellos' and several other Byzantine authors' simple rhetorical commonplaces describe the lighthouses? Did proper lighthouses actually exist in the Byzantine maritime space, or did other structures function

12 μάλλον δὲ ὡς περ τινὲς πυρσοὶ τοῖς ἐν ζάλη καὶ κλύδωνι ναυαγοῦσι γεγόνασι καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς κατάραντες εὐμενῶς ὑπεδέξαντο καὶ δαδουχίσαντες ἐν ἀκλύστοις λιμέσι καθώρμισαν. καὶ οἱ μὲν τοῖσδε πρὸς σωτηρίαν ἐξήρκεσαν, οἱ δὲ ἐκείνους τῶν δεινῶν ἐξηρήκασιν: Michael Psellos, In Crucifixionem 137,504-138,508. – Psellos used the 4th century Church Fathers as models of style, but Gregorios of Nazianzos was his favourite, see Papaioannou, Michael Psellos 54-56.

13 Byzantine writers often describe the mutable and unpredictable life of a human who earns his or her salvation through God; his representatives on earth, the saints, function as lighthouses of salvation for humans. See for instance Theodoros Stoudites, Epistle 545,6-9: καὶ ὡς εἰς σχεδὸν πυρσοὺς ὑπερλάμπων τῶν ὑφαιμένων διαθείεις τῶν ἐν ἄστει, πολλοὺς μὲν φωτίζων μωπαζόντας ἐκ φωτολειψίας, πλείους δὲ προσάγων τῷ θεῷ. A figure of considerable knowledge was regarded as a far-seen beacon by Michael Choniates, Epistle 152,48-51: ἄλλη τελευτήρας φιλοσοφίας χρώμενος, ἵνα τῷ κατὰ σὲ αὐτὸν ὑποδείγματι ὅσα καὶ τηλεφανεῖ πυρσῷ ἐπὶ λιμένα τοῦ καλοῦ καθορμίζοις τοὺς ναυαγοῦντας ἐν τῷ κοσμητικῷ τούτῳ κλύδωνι. – For the specific words used by the Byzantine orators for the purpose of better comprehension, cf. Trapp, The role 137-149.

14 πύργος γὰρ ἄγαν ὑψηλός, παλαιὰς ἔργον εὐδαιμονίας, ἐπ' ἄκρου τοῦ λιμένος ἀνέχων ἐγείρει φλόγα τοῖς ἐκ πελάγους σωτήριον καὶ παραμυθεῖται τοὺς ἐκ θαλάττης, προμηνύων τὴν πόλιν. Πρὸς τοῦτον κυβερνήτης ὄρων ἰθύνει τὸ σκάφος

καὶ τὴν ναῦν ἀπείρατον σῶζει τῶν παρακειμένων κινδύνων· οἱ δὲ ναῦται πρὸς τὴν θέαν ἠδόμενοι κροτοῦσιν εὐθύς, καὶ δεικνυσιν ἄλλος ἄλλῳ, καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἔχειν κατεπαγγέλλονται, καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἠδονὴν ἅμα καὶ σωτηρίαν τοῖς ἀφικνουμένοις χαρίζεται: Procopius of Gaza, Panegyricos 20,19.24-20.3.

15 Müller-Wiener, Bildlexikon 57-63.

16 Guillard, Études I 105-107. 285. 311. 315-317.

17 Theophanes Continuatus 280: ὁ ἐκ τοῦ Φάρου φανὸς διὰ τοῦ παπίου ἐδήλου τὴν τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐκδρομὴν: Pseudo-Symeon 682. – For other lighthouses, see Koukoules, Βίος V, 377-378.

18 Theophanes, Chronography 373: ἀποπλεύσας διέβη τὸν φάρον Χερσῶνος. εἶθ' οὕτως παραπλεύσας τὰ Νεκρόπηλα τὸ στόμιόν τε τοῦ Δάναπρι καὶ τοῦ Δάναστρι, κλύδωνος γεγονότος, ἀπέγνωνσαν πάντες τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν.

19 Mango/Scott, Theophanes 522.

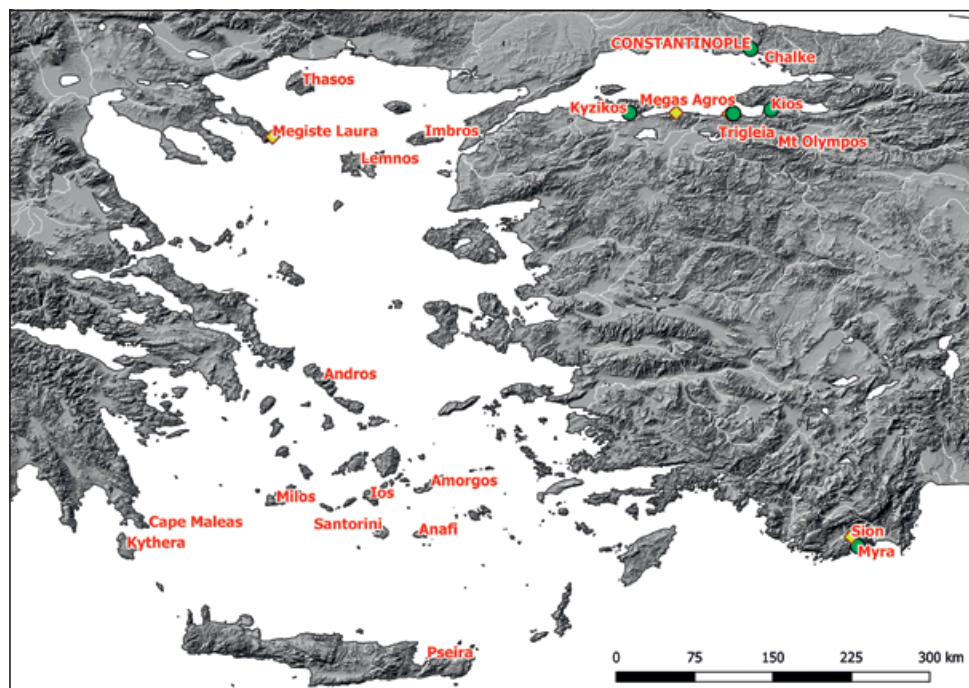
20 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, DAI ch. 42.68-69. – Commentary DAI 155.

21 Ahrweiler, Fonctionnaires 246-249.

22 Theophanes Continuatus 476.

23 Καὶ ἐν τοῖς πυρσομοίνοις φανοῖς εἴωθε γίνεσθαι, ὡν ἐκλαμπόντων ἀνωθεν ποθεν [...] λιμένες εὐάγκαλοι διερμηνεύονται καὶ βράχεια κινδυνώδη καὶ βράχια καὶ σπιλάδες ἐκκλίνονται καὶ ἕτεροῖα σωτηριώδη γίνονται: Eustathios of Thessalonike, Epiiskopsis 198. 230.

Fig. 1 Map of the localities, cities (green) and monasteries (yellow) mentioned in the text. – (J. Preiser-Kapeller, 2020).



as lighthouses, offering services analogous to those of the emblematic lighthouse of Alexandria?

The concept of a lighthouse was suitable to complement the particular spiritual context of the Byzantine monasteries. This is reflected, for instance, in the words of Theodore Stoudites, the great reformer of monasticism, who often likened the monks to lights, following the idea of Christ as light²⁴. In the wake of the Patristic tradition, Theodore Stoudites stated that the monks shined like stars. With this standpoint, Theodore Stoudites underlined the monks' important contribution to the safeguarding and continuity of the Orthodox faith during the storm of the iconoclastic dispute²⁵. Eustathius of Thessalonica also used the same motives for the monks by playing with the ambiguities of words and presented the monks as lighthouses in use²⁶.

In a letter to John, the abbot of the monastery of Chalke²⁷, the mighty abbot of the monastery of Stoudiou used the same metaphor again, this time applied to the monastery that John had built on the island of Chalke, one of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara, a particularly busy maritime area close to Constantinople (see **fig. 1**): »The monastery you have established shines extremely brightly on the surrounding islands with regard to its location«²⁸. In this passage, Theo-

dore Stoudites focused on the monastery's location. I think that his phrase included not only a symbolic perception but also a spatial one, showing in real terms how the monastery was represented within its maritime environment. John's monastery is identified with the Monastery of the Holy Trinity (Hagia Trias), situated on the steepest slope of the island of Chalke; judging from its location it could warn seafarers about the dangerous shores, allowing for a smooth passage between the Byzantine capital and the opposite shore of Marmara²⁹. For the sailors, the Monastery of the Holy Trinity could constitute a visible sign in the sea, a cautionary warning of the dangerously steep coast.

How could a monastery function as a lighthouse in use? Answering this question requires the examination of issues related to monastic lighting and topography. Apart from its symbolic connotations³⁰, ecclesiastical/monastic lighting was abundantly used in practice. Among other copper tools that were in use in the monastery of Stoudiou, Theodore Stoudites referred to the hanging lights that existed not only in the church but also at other points³¹. Monasteries always had lights on, but during some special feasts, their illumination was even more splendid. This is confirmed by the monastic *Typika*, often mentioning the »sleepless chandeliers«³²

24 »I am the Light of the world: he who follows me will have the light of life«: John 8.12.

25 ἐπαινετός εἶ, [...] , ὅτι ἐκ πάντων μικροῦ δεῖν τῶν ἐν ἄστει καὶ πρὸ τοῦ ἄστει ἡγουμένων σὺ μόνος ἐξῆλθες προκινδυνεύων τῆς εὐσεβείας, φῶς τῶν ἐν σκότει γινόμενος, ἔλεγχος τῶν ἀσεβούντων: Theodore Stoudites, Epistle 201,10-13, p. 324.

26 Eustathius of Thessalonica, *Episkepsis* 198-199. 230.

27 *PmbZ* no. 3194.

28 Καλὸν τὸ μοναστήριον ὃ συνεστήσῃ διὰ πολλῶν κόπων καὶ ἰδρώτων καὶ τῶν κύκλωθεν νήσων ὑπερλάμπον τῆ τε θέσει τοῦ τόπου καὶ οὐκ ὀλίγοις ἐτέροις γνωρίσ-

μασιν: Theodore Stoudites, Epistle 76,10-12, p. 197 fig See Janin, *Grands centres* 72-73. – Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont* 483-484.

29 Cheynet, *L'époque* 311.

30 For the symbolic use of lights, see Galavaris, *Some Aspects* 69-78.

31 Τὰ τῶν κανδηλῶν κρεμαστήρια, πλὴν τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὰ λοιπά: Theodoros Stoudites, *Magna Catechesis* no. 20. 96.

32 *Typikon* of the Pantokrator Monastery, lines 140-148. 735. Transl. by Jordan, *Pantokrator* 740. 753.

besides »the ones that are lit in the services and are again extinguished«³³ showing that there was continuous lighting in the monasteries³⁴. The monastic founder, according to his/her social status³⁵, regulated what was necessary for the illumination of the monastery, providing for various kinds of lighting devices³⁶. The impressive illumination of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is described by Paul the Silentiary in a poem written after the reopening of the church in 563: »Thus is everything clothed in beauty; (...) no words are sufficient to describe the illumination in the evening: you might say that some nocturnal sun filled the majestic church with light«³⁷. The real illumination emanating from other ecclesiastic/monastic institutions was not as impressive, depending also on their importance and economic basis³⁸. A passage from an anonymous text written on Saint Nikolas shows that lighting was necessary for a monastery, as food was for human beings³⁹, especially when the monastery was located at a troublesome location with difficult access (τὴν ἀπορίαν καὶ δυσχέρειαν τοῦ τόπου)⁴⁰.

Monasteries were deliberately established in spatial environments combining tranquillity and isolation⁴¹, two of the most basic monastic rules associated with the spirituality of a monastery. The monastic founder was in search of a location »suitable for spiritual benefit«⁴², as reiterated in the sources. However, the topography of a monastery involved further equally important aspects⁴³. According to a hagiographical text, the monastic founder gave attention to »the environment, the position and the way of life«⁴⁴ of the location where the monastery was about to be established. Thus, topography⁴⁵ was a key aspect determining the future function of the monasteries. Some of the monasteries built in Asia Minor were founded in places of military significance and organized in such a way that they exercised some spatial control on the surrounding area⁴⁶. The choice of the location for a monastery foundation involved a practical judgement on how a monastery could realistically function and interact within its spatial environment. Within this framework, the establishment of a monastic foundation at a location with

steep coasts, often with a little safe harbour nearby, inevitably determined its interaction with its maritime environment. The topography of some coastal Bithynian monasteries is indicative.

Being familiar with the monastic centre of Olympus in Bithynia⁴⁷, Michael Psellus praised the mountain⁴⁸ and provided an accurate picture of this region, where »ridges meet the sea, creating steep shores and from their heights, the gaze sees far and watches all movement on land as on sea«⁴⁹. Speaking about monasteries built there, especially after the Iconoclast movement⁵⁰, the polymath writer described them through a visual image, comparing them to lighthouses either large or small (πυρσοὶ μεγάλοι τε καὶ μικροὶ) that dominated their vicinity⁵¹. The evidence from some coastal monasteries of the Bithynian Olympus, such as Megas Agros, Pelekete, Medikion, strongly suggests that Psellus' expression not only describes the spiritual enlightenment of the monasteries but also encompasses other practical aspects.

Theophanes, the famous chronographer and former military officer from a wealthy military family, founded the monastery of Megas Agros⁵². The monastery was situated at the foot of Sigriane Mountain on the southern coast of Marmara, at a sensitive location at the entrance of the Sea of Marmara, dangerous for navigation because of its steep coast⁵³. Apart from the strategically important position of the monastery, most interesting is the fact that this monastic establishment is described in connection with the building of fortifications in the neighbouring city of Cyzicus⁵⁴, which Theophanes had undertaken at his own expense. During this military mission, Theophanes travelled to the rugged cliffs of Sigriane, when the sea was calm (γαληνοδρομίᾳ τὴν πορείαν ἐποιεῖτο), where he chose to build his monastery, on a wooded cliff that also had its own little harbour⁵⁵. The monastery »imitated the sky and shined like the sun and the stars carrying means of illumination to the whole earth«⁵⁶. Hagiographical sources tampering with reality to give the air of sanctity to Theophanes avoid any other connection with military and other secular affairs. However, this literary image in combination

33 Typikon of the Pantokrator Monastery, ll. 738-739. Transl. by Jordan, Pantokrator 753.

34 Except kellia: Life of Athanasios of Athos B, 44,38,179: οὐκ εἶχομεν γὰρ φῶτα ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ.

35 Bouras, Lighting devices 479-481.

36 Bouras/Parani, Lighting 1.

37 Paul the Silentiary, Ekphrasis, ll. 806-809. Transl. by Mango, The Art 89.

38 Xanthopoulos, Les lampes 68-69.

39 Μοναχός [...] ἀπῆρτε τὰ πρὸς τροφήν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ πρὸς φωταψίαν τοῦ εὐκτήριου ναοῦ: Thaumata de pastore furo 359.

40 Thaumata de pastore furo 359.

41 Talbot, Founder's choices 51.

42 τόπον [...] ἐπιτήθειον εἶναι πρὸς ψυχικὴν ὠφέλειαν: Anonymous, Life of Theophanes I 8. – See Kaplan, Lieu saint 183-198.

43 For the social and political incentives for founding a monastery, see Kiousopoulou, Geógraphia 95-106.

44 Τὸν τόπον ὃν ὁ λόγος ἐπεζήτη, φύσιν, θέσιν καὶ διατριβήν: Life of Makarios of Pelekete 144.30-31.

45 For the complex role undertaken by the monasteries in strategic locations, see Bakirtzis, Locating 113-132.

46 Especially those situated close to Constantinople: Kiousopoulou, Parousia 163-171.

47 Mango/Ševčenko, Some Churches 261-262. – Auzépy, Les monastères 441. – Belke, Bithynien und Hellespont 860-865.

48 Michael Psellos, Olympos 134-137.

49 Auzépy et al., Médikion 183.

50 Kountoura Galaki, Byzantine Clergy 173. 213. – Auzépy, Les monastères 438.

51 This description is found in the funeral speech for the patriarch of Constantinople Ioannes Xiphilinos: τὰ μὲν ἐν περιωπῇ ἰδρυμένα, τὰ δὲ ἐν ταῖς πᾶν ὁρῶν ἀγκάλαις ἐξωκοδομημένα λαμπρῶς, οἷά τινες πυρσοὶ μεγάλοι τε καὶ μικροὶ καταπεφτευμένοι τοῖς ὄρεσι: Michael Psellos, Epitaphios 16 line 49, p. 139. – Cf. Papaioannou, Michael Psellos 10.

52 Yannopoulos, Théophane 73-74.

53 τὰ κρημνώδη τοῦ τῆς Σιγριανῆς ὄρους παράλια: Anonymous, Life of Theophanes I 7. – See Mango/Ševčenko, Some Churches 260-264. – Belke, Bithynien und Hellespont 764-766.

54 Methodios, Life of Theophanes 11. – Anonymous, Life of Theophanes III 28.

55 Mango/Ševčenko, Some Churches 261.

56 Anonymous, Life of Theophanes I 10: οὐρανομίμητον μοναστήριον. ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἥλιος σὺν ἀστροῖς δαδουχεῖ τὴν σύμπασαν καταλαΐζων γῆν τῷ φωτὶ τῆς ἐλλάμψεως.



Fig. 2 The Bithynian coast at Trigleia (today Zeytinbaği). – (Photo Bynalcin, trilye bursa türkiye, CC by 3.0).

with the monastery's site, which is »situated in a picturesque spot in the foothills of the Sigriane mountains«⁵⁷, according to C. Mango and I. Ševčenko, provide a basis for considering that the monastery functioned as a lighthouse for the sailors and that it played a complex role in its difficult maritime environment.

The site of the monastery of Pelekete may be considered from the same perspective. The hagiographer of Makarios, abbot of Pelekete, gives a full account of the natural features of this monastic area, which perfectly match either to a lighthouse in concept or to a lighthouse in use: »A rock rises to a height on both sides and is reached by a single ascent which is not easy. Standing on higher ground than all the adjoining valleys, it enjoys a purer air; and it is smooth all around and well-turned as if(?) hewn with an axe«⁵⁸. As specified by the recent research, the monastery of Pelekete was located on the coast of Trigleia, from where someone »could watch the movement of boats coming out of the

Gulf of Kios and follow what was happening in front on the shore« (fig. 2)⁵⁹.

Another monastery in the same area which according to its description »could control the surrounding marine traffic«⁶⁰ was the first monastery that Nicephorus⁶¹, a scion of a wealthy Constantinopolitan family and later abbot of Medikion⁶² had erected on his estates (»in one of his parental proasteia«). It was situated some distance west of Pelekete, west of Katabolos, a coastal area immediately west of Kios⁶³ and of great commercial importance⁶⁴. According to an *in situ* archaeological investigation, the site of this first monastery of Nicephorus is definitely placed near the coast⁶⁵ »on the coast west of Trigleia« from where someone »could control the maritime traffic«⁶⁶. Examination of its particular location near Katabolos shows that this monastery could also serve as a lighthouse.

One of the most »typical« maritime regions of the Byzantine realm was Lycia, an area with a well-known nautical

57 Mango/Ševčenko, *Some Churches* 261.

58 εἰς ὕψος μὲν γὰρ ἑκατέρων τῶν μερῶν ἦρται πέτραν μίαν τὴν ἄνοδον, καὶ ταύτην οὐκ ἄμοχθον ἔχουσα, ἀνφικισμένη δὲ πάντων πρὸς αὐτὴν κοίλων, ἀκραιφνέστερον τὸν ἀέρα εἰσδέχεται λεία τε τὰ περὶ τυγχάνουσα καὶ εὐτονος πελεκητήν: *Life of Makarios of Pelekete* 145,5-8 Translation by Mango/Ševčenko, *Some churches* 244; for the location of the monastery of Pelekete, see 240-248. – See also Auzépy, *Les monastères* 437-438.

59 Auzépy et al., *Médikion* 185. – Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont* 903-904.

60 Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont* 185.

61 PmbZ nr 5280.

62 Medikion was the second monastery that Nikephoros had established in the same area, not far from the coast in the hills above it: Auzépy et al., *Médikion* 185. – Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont* 762-763.

63 Mango/Ševčenko, *Some Churches* 274-276. – Auzépy, *Les monastères* 447-448. – Belke, *Bithynien und Hellespont* 651-652.

64 Lefort, *Les communications* 210.

65 *Life of Nikephoros of Medikion* 408,17-18; 413,3-6.

66 See Auzépy et al., *Médikion* 185-187.

tradition since ancient times. As described by Strabo, this famous maritime area combined rough and steep coasts, as well as good ports⁶⁷. Lycia became a core region of the maritime *thema* of Kibyrrhaioton⁶⁸ established by Emperor Leo III (717-741) before 732. The area was the homeland of Saint Nicholas (4th c.), the patron saint of local sailors; the development of his cult coincides with the creation of theme of Kibyrrhaioton⁶⁹. It was also a place of strategic importance as a gathering point of Byzantine ships for war operations in the eastern Mediterranean⁷⁰. Close to Myra, where modern Alacahisar-Karabel is situated⁷¹, the monastery of Sion was built after the definitive loss of the real Sion at Jerusalem in 638, which was connected with the 6th century Saint Nicholas of Sion, coming from Pharroa in Lycia. The hagiographic text of Saint Nicholas of Sion refers to the monastery as »shining throughout the whole land all day and all night«⁷², or mentions that it resembled a »burning lantern illuminating the whole mountain like a sun«⁷³. Such references correspond with the meaning of the name Sion, which in Hebrew means light⁷⁴, as well as with the significance of Jerusalem as a centre of the Christian cult. However, there is one more aspect of the monastery's radiance, which is implied in the wording of the Life of Saint Nicholas of Sion. It is worth mentioning that a large number of *polykandela* and lamps belonging to the monastery has been found at the location identified with the monastery of Sion⁷⁵. The light, which constantly illuminated the monastery, warned seafarers about the danger of coasts and indicated the safe harbour of Andriaki⁷⁶.

Another hazardous area of the Eastern Mediterranean is Cape Maleas at the southern tip of the Peloponnese, also known as Xylophagos, which means »wood-eating«, because of the numerous shipwrecks that have happened there. In his historical work of the late 13th-early 14th century, George Pachymeres mentions such an accident. Referring to the Byzantine representatives who had taken part in the Synod of Lyon (1274), the historian vividly described the sinking of the ship carrying all the precious gifts of the Byzantine emperor for the Latin members of the Synod; due to a storm, it was shipwrecked sailing the passage of Maleas⁷⁷. Saint Thomas

in Maleo was active at this particular point. According to the Synaxarion of Constantinople, the saint was a military officer⁷⁸ who certainly lived before the 10th century, and at some point, received the tonsure and lived on the steep rock of Cape Maleas, a site of great strategic importance for navigation. The Synaxarion of Constantinople refers to Thomas as a »column of fire, visible during the night«, who »ascended a mountain called Maleos, from where he was visible as a star shining on the surrounding area«⁷⁹. This emphasis on lighting in combination with the strategic position that Saint Thomas chose for his seclusion makes us think that possibly, along with his monastic tasks, he had undertaken, as a former military officer⁸⁰, the task of continuously preserving the light in his hermitage. Thus, through the illumination of his monastic site, he could warn sailors about the hazards of the area. Thomas' vita is reminiscent of another monk who lived in an inhabited rough place outside the trading centres of Constantinople, some of them on the Bithynian coast⁸¹, therefore with strategic importance for the commerce (ἔξω τῶν ἐμπορίων τῆς βασιλίδος τῶν πόλεων)⁸². His only concern was also to keep the lamps lit at all times (μη ἔασω τὸν ἀπτόμενον λύχνον [...] σβεσθῆναι)⁸³.

Another crucial location was Kythera, an island lying opposite the south-eastern tip of the Peloponnese. The site of the church of Saint George of the Mountain is located on the top of the eastern side of the island. The site had acquired particular importance since prehistoric times due to its strategic position because it controls all naval passages from North to South and from East to West. On a clear day, not only Antikythera but also the mountains of Crete can be seen in the south, which is of great importance for navigation, while to the east the islands of Milos and Santorini can also be seen⁸⁴. The site of Saint George of the Mountain has been a sacred space for 3500 years dominating the inaccessible south-eastern side of the island and providing an important point for navigation. Archaeological finds, such as a seal dating from the time of Leo V (813-820) and (monastic?) settlements around the church of Saint George, attest to the presence of the Byzantines. It is a typical example of a

67 ὁ παράπλους ἅπας ὁ Λυκιακός, [...] , τραχὺς δὲ καὶ χαλεπός, ἀλλ' εὐλίμενος σφόδρα [...] ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι μὲν ὀρμητηρίους ἐχρήσαντο τοῖς τόποις πρὸς τὰ ληστήρια, αὐτοὶ περατεύοντες ἢ τοῖς πειραταῖς λαφυροπώλια καὶ ναύσταθμα παρέχοντες· ἐν Σίδῃ γοῦν πόλει τῆς Παμφυλίας τὰ ναυπηγία συνίστατο τοῖς Κίλιξιν [...] : Strabo VI, 14.3.2.

68 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Thematisibus 14.39-42 (p. 79). – For the Kibyrrhaioton theme, see Ahrweiler, Mer 46. – Grégoriou-Ioannidou, Kibyrrhaiotai 207-218. – Hellenkemper/Hild, Lykien 116-125. 729. – Recently, Brubaker/Haldon, History 730-732 considered the issue of the origins of Kibyrrhaiotai enigmatic. – For the formation of the thema of Kibyrrhaiotai in relation to the Arab-Byzantine condominium on Cyprus, see Lounghis, Eastern Mediterranean 25-28. – Kountoura Galaki, Crete.

69 Kountoura Galaki, Saints Nicholas 91. 104-105.

70 Theophanes, Chronography 465,14-16. – Hellenkemper/Hild, Lykien 121.

71 Hellenkemper/Hild, Lykien 454.

72 τὸ γὰρ φῶς τῆς ἁγίας Σιών προελαμπεν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ ἐκείνῳ καὶ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ καὶ ἐν νυκτί: Life of Nicholas of Sion 42.

73 καὶ φῶς μέγα ἐλαμψεν ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ [...] ὡσπερ λύχνον καίόμενον [...] καὶ ὄλον τὸ ὄρος λάμπον [...] καὶ φῶς μέγα ἐλαμψεν ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ: Life of Nicholas of Sion 42.

74 Foss, Sion.

75 Boyd, Sion 191-202. – Boyd, Treasure 10-11.

76 Life of Saint Nicholas of Sion 40. – See Kountoura Galaki, Saints Nicholas 102-103.

77 Pachymeres, History II, 507: ἀπέπλεον πρὸς αὐτῷ τῷ Μαλέᾳ, ὃν καὶ Ξυλοφάγον καλεῖν εἰώθασιν.

78 Synaxarion of Constantinople 803.

79 στύλος πυρός ἐν νυκτί ὄραται φαινόμενος καὶ πρὸς τὴν ὄρος ἀνήλθε Μάλεων λεγόμενον. ἐκείθεν τε ὡς ἀστὴρ ἀναφανείς καὶ αὐγάων τὴν περιγίειον: Synaxarion of Constantinople 803. I express my thanks to my colleague Dr Anna Lampropoulou for the information related to this Peloponnesian space.

80 Synaxarion of Constantinople 803.

81 Gerolymatou, Emporion 106-107.

82 Ἐξω τῶν ἐμπορίων τῆς βασιλίδος τῶν πόλεων ἐν οἴκῳ τόπῳ εὐκτῆριος ἦν οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ Νικολάου, ἐν ᾧ καὶ τις μοναχὸς παρέμενε, ὃς καὶ ἐν τῇ πόλει καὶ ἐν τοῖς χωρίοις ἀπῆτει τὰ πρὸς τροφήν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ πρὸς φωταψίαν τοῦ εὐκτῆριου ναοῦ: Thaumata de pastore furo 359.

83 Thaumata de pastore furo 359.

84 Sakellarakis, Kythera 78.



Fig. 3 The island of Pseira in the gulf of Mirabellou in Crete. – (Photo A. Skudder, Psira Island, Crete, Greece, CC BY-2.0).

place that is not only place of worship, but also perfect for monitoring and controlling the surrounding area and as a landmark for sailors, allowing easy access to the anchorage in the gulf of Aulaimon⁸⁵.

The island of Amorgos is located at the south-eastern part of the Cyclades and characterized by the abrupt shores of its southeastern side, considered risky for navigation⁸⁶. The monastery of Panagia Chozobiotissa was built on this spot, nested in menacing rocks and visible only from the sea. According to tradition, the first monastic nucleus was founded in the 8th century and is linked with the monastic communities of Choziba (modern Wadi Qilt) close to Jericho in the Holy Land⁸⁷. Thanks to sigillographic evidence, we know that Amorgos, together with other Cycladic islands, Melos, Andros, Thera, Anafi, and Ios, were vital for the nautical activity of the 8th century⁸⁸. The only available written evidence for Amorgos is provided on an inscribed exapterygon mentioning that the monastery was renovated during the reign of Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118)⁸⁹. I think that based on its special location in the Aegean, the monastery of Choziba be-

trays its function as a lighthouse for seamen, as a point that indicated the dangers of the shores in the surrounding area.

So far, this paper has focused on textual evidence; however, one must also take into consideration some examples from the archaeological material. The case of the islet of Pseira is very indicative of this subject. The island Pseira, also characterized by its steep coastline, is located within the gulf of Mirabellou in Crete. A monastic complex was recently excavated there and dated to the 8th century (fig. 3)⁹⁰. The location of the monastic foundation at the deepest point of the peninsula could serve, in addition to its spiritual needs, also its practical purposes by pointing out the islet to the sailors and facilitating access to the protected gulf of Mirabellou.

It is unclear whether there was imperial care for the role that coastal monasteries played within their marine environment. A vague testimony mentioning the correlation between ecclesiastic/monastic foundations established on coastal areas with strategic importance and the concept of naval operations is provided by Procopius of Caesarea. In his panegyric work on Justinian's building activity, he described

85 Sakellarakis, Kythera 98. 122. 147. – Cf. Malamut, *Les îles I*, 189-190.

86 Malamut, *Les îles I* 60.

87 Marangou, *Chozōbiotissa* 17-19. 24.

88 Antoniadis-Bibicou, *Recherches 8* (photograph). – Zacos/Veglery, *Seals nr 242*. – It is significant to notice that the dwelling core of Chora, the subsequent capital

of the island, has been dated to the 8th to 9th centuries: Marangou, *Chozōbiotissa* 13-14.

89 Marangou, *Chozōbiotissa* 26-27.

90 Poulou-Papadimitriou, *Les plaques 687-704*.



Fig. 4 The Arsanas of the Monastery of Megiste Laure on Mt. Athos. – (Photo S. Šljukić, Манастир Велика Лавра – Арсана, СС ВУ-3.0)..

the creation of the new harbour of Hieria in Constantinople. Having stressed that it was a dangerous spot for the sailors, Procopius catalogued the works necessary for port security done by the emperor, which were completed by establishing there ecclesiastical (monastic?) foundations (ἱερὰ τεμένη). The same procedure was followed in the harbour of Eutropius: »he (Justinian) skilfully contrived a sheltered harbour which had not existed before. Finding a shore, which lay open to the winds from two directions and to the beating of the waves, he converted it into a refuge for voyagers in the following way (...). In that place, also he erected holy shrines (...). And he also constructed another harbour on the opposite mainland, in the place which bears the name of Eutropius, not far distant from this Heraeum, executed in the same manner as the harbour which I have just mentioned«⁹¹. We do not know whether the existence of this ecclesiastical (monastic?) foundation in a port served only matters of worship or whether it was part of a practical service by providing lighting for those on sea.

Centuries later, Emperor Constantine V (741-775) developed a particular relationship between monasteries and imperial administration, when monasteries forcibly ceased to be autonomous centres of worship and deprived of the ability to act independently⁹². Within the framework of the implementation of iconoclastic policy, sources of the time mention the »sacrilegious« decision of the iconoclast emperor Con-

stantine V to convert the monasteries into military camps⁹³, thus changing their purely religious and spiritual character.

Could the iconoclastic emperor's decision conceal a systematic attempt to use specific monasteries of the Aegean and other coastal areas of the Byzantine seascape as lighthouses? Would the iconoclast emperor have initiated such reforms? Would he have undertaken an »official transformation« of the coastal monasteries? One could interpret such actions within the framework of the administrative re-organization of the Byzantine maritime space at the time⁹⁴. Such a reform would have undoubtedly have served the needs of the Empire for safe navigation at a time characterized by the intense activity of the Byzantine fleets. Emperor Constantine V, the first to convey the message for radical changes he wished to bring to the Empire, founded the church of the Virgin of the Pharos in Constantinople, which took its name from its proximity to the famous lighthouse of Constantinople and the Chrysotriklinos⁹⁵. An action by which Constantine V attempted to promote his piety to his opponents, and at the same time perhaps to introduce the function of coastal shrines for the rescue of sailors, not from a spiritual point of view, but in practice through their operation as lighthouses. Of particular interest here is the following observation by P. Magdalino: »the churches and monasteries which the iconoclast emperor Constantine V is said to have converted to secular use were all on the south coast, and most were in the vicinity of the Harbour of Julian«⁹⁶.

91 Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 1.11.18-22: ἐνταῦθα δὲ καὶ λιμένων σκέπας ἀποτετόρνευται οὐ πρότερον ὄν. ἀκτὴν γὰρ εὐρῶν ἑκατέρωθι τοῖς τε ἀνέμοις καὶ ταραχῇ τοῦ ῥοθίου ἀποκειμένην, σωτήριον εἶναι τοῖς πλέουσι κατεστήσατο ὧδε [...] ἐπὶ τὸν λιμένα τοῖς πλοίοις εἰσόδου. ἐνταῦθα δὲ καὶ ἱερὰ τεμένη πεποιήται [...] For the English translation, see Procopius, *Buildings*. Ed. H. B. Dewing / G. Downey. VII (Cambridge MA 1961) 93-94. – See Janin, *Constantinople* 239.

92 Kountoura Galaki, *Kleros* 177-180. – Hatlie, *The Monks* 358-365.

93 Theophanes, *Chronography* 443. – Nikephoros Antirrhethikos III 493 D. – See Brubaker/Haldon, *History* 237-247.

94 Kountoura Galaki, *Crete*.

95 Theophanes, *Chronography* 414. – Janin, *Constantinople* 232. – Magdalino, *L'église* 15-30. – Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon* 388.

96 Magdalino, *The Maritime* 213.

Several years later Nicephorus II Phokas (963-969), a soldier-emperor⁹⁷, like his predecessor Constantine V invested the steep south-eastern tip of Athos with spiritual light⁹⁸, by actively contributing to the foundation of the monastery of Megiste Laura (see **fig. 4**). Megiste Laura's Typikon is an extremely valuable document from the viewpoint of the topography and its function in the maritime space. Indeed, a careful examination of the text reveals the aims of the Laura's founder: the monastery stood »like a goal, drawing and attracting people as the light of a beacon fire or a magnet«.

Among the reasons given by the author of the Typikon for the foundation of the monastery – which in any case are subject to various readings and complex approaches⁹⁹ –, one is immediately appealing because the author of the Typikon mentions that the south-eastern steep end of Athos needed special care for the sailors: »Many reasons, though, led my lowly self to this decision. The seashore along the mountain was precipitous and without any harbours on both sides, to the north, that is, and to the south, for more than eighty miles. The mountain resembles a peninsula, which extends toward the sea in the shape of a cross. The islands in the sea, Lemnos, Imbros, Thasos, and the rest are a great distance away. Because of this, when winter comes, a ship is unable to sail from the mountain to the mainland to procure necessary provisions or to sail back from there to the mountain. It cannot find any sort of anchorage because the seashore on both sides provides no shelter«¹⁰⁰. I think that it is no coincidence that the Laura monastery on Athos, built on a steep

coast, where a small, protected harbour is formed, includes twice in its Typikon the clause that »the supply of necessary goods is not hindered to those seeking refuge and to spend the winter in the protected harbour of the monastery«¹⁰¹. Therefore, we can say that the Laura Monastery, in addition to its spiritual pursuits, was also founded for the benefit of the seafarers and it served as a type of warning sign or landmark. The foundation of the monastery fulfilled the emperor's intention to help seafarers and to create a safe place on a dangerous coast, as numerous travellers from all over the world visited the monastery. The passage in question from the two versions of the Life of Athanasius is initiative¹⁰² of the considerable prestige that the Laura Monastery had acquired immediately after its foundation.

Many more examples can be cited, but the textual evidence discussed so far shows that the sites where monasteries were built were not only intended to provide tranquillity and solitude, i.e. the elements associated with the spirituality of a monastery, but also to influence the space through their other functions. Monasteries built in strategic locations and in steep coastal regions seem not only to have served to control the environment, but also to have served as very real lighthouses for rescuing seafarers, indicating the dangerous nature of the coasts. Further progress in the study of the maritime history of Byzantium depends on the cooperation between experts from various fields of history. For seafarers, lighthouses are the happy end of a voyage, but for us they are also an incentive for new research projects.

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97 For the confluence of religious and political ideals in the time of Nikephorus Phokas, see Laiou, The General 399-412.

98 In the prologue references to the spiritual light of the monastery are emphasized: »Those who exert themselves in journeying along the single-minded way of the solitary life and who do not deviate in striving to attain its holy goal, who by purity of mind and soul and body have conditioned themselves for the brilliant enlightenment which comes from the Holy Spirit, end up by suffusing not only themselves with light, or, to put it more correctly, a godlike appearance, but also everyone in the world with whom they converse. They enlighten other people of any rank or calling whatever. They

challenge them and incite them on to a like goal, drawing and attracting them as the light of a beacon fire or a magnet«: Typikon Lavras 102. Engl. Transl. by Dennis, Ath. Typikon 250.

99 Papachryssanthou, Athōnikos 207-221. – Morris, The origins 37-46.

100 Typikon Lavras 105. Transl. by Dennis, Ath. Typikon 253.

101 »You will not hinder the provisioning with necessities of those spending the winter in the hospice by the harbour for as many days or months as they may need«. Typikon Lavras 114. Transl. by Dennis, Ath. Typikon 260.

102 Life of Athanasios I, 43,13-18:176; II, 158,3-10: 74-75. – For the prestige of Mount Athos, see Oikonomides, Patronage 100. 111.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

A light in the darkness: monastery lighthouses in the Aegean Sea and surrounding coastal regions

While the amount of evidence for lighthouses in the Byzantine Empire is small, this article explores the possibility that monasteries served as beacons at important crossroads of sea routes and on dangerous coasts. In some cases, their location was apparently also deliberately chosen with a view to such a function for shipping. Practical aspects were combined with the symbolic meaning of monasteries as places of enlightenment and orientation.

Ein Licht in der Dunkelheit: Klöster und Leuchttürme in der Ägäis und den umliegenden Küstenregionen

Während die Anzahl der Belege für Leuchttürme im Byzantinischen Reich sehr überschaubar ist, erkundet dieser Beitrag die Möglichkeit, dass Klosteranlagen an wichtigen Kreuzungspunkten von Seerouten und an gefährlichen Küsten als Leuchtfeuer dienten. Teilweise erfolgte ihre Standortwahl auch offenbar bewusst im Hinblick auf eine solche Funktion für die Schifffahrt. Dabei verbanden sich praktische Gesichtspunkte mit der symbolischen Bedeutung von Klöstern als Stätten der Erleuchtung und Orientierung.