

Harbours of Byzantium

The Archaeology of Coastal Infrastructures

Edited by

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Cover: Southwestern harbour of Byzantine Kassandreia in Chalkidiki, Greece (A. Ginalis)

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Editor's Preface

Christianity, Roman tradition and ideology, as well as Greek cultural heritage, have been labelled as the pillars of the Byzantine Empire. In fact, the real crux and enabler of power in an empire that combined the Occident with the Orient was its control over the seas. As such, seafaring constituted the formula of success for dominance of the Mediterranean, playing a key role in communication, military activities, and, especially, economic exchange. But how does one get from land to water? The linking gates are coastal installations, i.e. ports, harbours, and other infrastructures. These function as economic hubs, cultural and social meeting points, as well as gateways for communication and connection.

Even though the study of harbour sites and port networks of the Byzantine Empire constitutes a relatively new research field, it has nevertheless received significant attention over the last few years, as we can see from the instigation of various projects and the staging of conferences. However, attention is rarely paid to analyses of physical harbour remains and their impact on the general development of Late Antique and Medieval architecture, economy, or trade networks.

As such, in 2018, an international conference on the *Harbours of Byzantium* was organised at the Institute for Advanced Study of the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg in Delmenhorst, Germany. This event was intended to focus particularly on the archaeology of Byzantine coastal sites, including both harbour infrastructures *per se*, as well as associated facilities and affected landscapes. Leading scholars in the field from twelve different countries presented new material and data with which to understand the development of harbour architecture and coastal activities from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The papers set out to cover sites from all provinces of the Byzantine Empire, stretching from Italy in the West to the Levantine coast in the East, and the Black Sea in the North to Egypt in the South. This allowed a general overview for comparative analyses and discussions on various aspects of Byzantine harbour networks and maritime connectivity.

Accordingly, the current volume provides a series of scientific papers deriving from presentations given at the conference. Beyond general approaches to the study of Byzantine harbour archaeology, the contributions offer a representative picture of harbour activities across the historical and geographical boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. Although it is impossible to reflect a comprehensive picture of the entire sweep of coastal landscapes, this work hopefully provides a basis for future comparative research in Byzantine harbour studies – on a local, regional, and supra-regional level.

The conference programme is included in the Appendices. The differences between the conference programme and the final version of this volume are explained by the fact that some scholars who submitted abstracts were ultimately unable to attend, and some who did attend and gave their papers did not submit them for publication. Fortunately, other colleagues agreed to contribute to this volume and I am most grateful to them for so doing.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all participants in the Delmenhorst Conference for presenting papers that provided unique insights, not just into ongoing excavations and investigations related to harbour installations, but also into hitherto understudied aspects of coastal infrastructures. It has been a considerable challenge to assemble this volume, and I am therefore particularly indebted to all authors who contributed and enriched this publication. Bearing in mind the time-consuming work of editing and unifying the papers, etc., as well as the difficulties brought on by the COVID pandemic, I have done my best to ensure as prompt a publication as possible.

Thanks must go here to Dr Susanne Fuchs and her team from the Institute for Advanced Study of the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg for their support in organising the conference in Delmenhorst. I am also sincerely grateful to David Davison and Mike Schurer from Archaeopress for agreeing to publish this volume and for guiding this work through to publication, their technical help, and the quick production of the printed version.

Alkiviadis Ginalis

6. Remarks on the Urban Transformations of the Harbours of the North Aegean Coastline during the Early Christian Era as well as on their Links with the Road Network

Flora Karagianni

As has often been pointed out, the structure and organisation of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) from Late Antiquity to the Late Byzantine era included a network of roads (land and maritime) that connected cities, smaller settlements, and harbours. This model of organisation of the hinterland and the coastline is repeated in many places, with differentiations that have to do with the landscape and the strategic (or not) position of the cities.

Since the harbours served the constant needs for transportation of people as well as various commercial activities, the relationship between them and the land routes was always very strong. As a result of this reality, what one can see when looking at the maps is the development of ports in cities that function as main stations in the network of communication. This contribution focuses on the area of eastern Macedonia and Thrace, which offers us a very interesting case of harbours that developed along the northern coastline of the Aegean and kept a close connection with the main land route.

In the 2nd century BC the Romans constructed a long, and well-known, road called the *Via Egnatia*,¹ which started from Apollonia and Durrachion in modern Albania, crossed Macedonia as far as the Nestos River, continued into Thrace, and ended at Byzantium (Külzer 2011) (Fig. 6.1). This route was an extension of the *Via Appia*, which connected Rome with modern Brindisi. Through the connection of the two main roads, access was offered to the eastern parts of the empire – to the Aegean and the Black Sea ('Euxeinos Pontos') regions. Although it was Constantine the Great who highlighted the importance of this great road, it is clear that many Roman emperors paid attention to securing control over the *Via Egnatia* throughout the Roman and Early Byzantine eras. After Constantine's decision to move the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium, the *Via Egnatia* played an additional and very significant role, i.e. connecting the two capitals – the former and the new Rome (Avramea 1996; Oikonomides 1996).

As a result, and as shown by the archaeological data, along the whole axis of the *Via Egnatia* in Macedonia and Thrace a series of very important cities developed over the centuries (from the 4th to at least the 7th), e.g. Lychnidos, Edessa, Pella, Thessaloniki, Amphipolis, Kavala, Topiros, Peritheorion, Maroneia, Makri, Ainos, etc. (Karagianni 2010: 55; Farrington 2008: 78; Avramea 1994; Bakirtzis 1994; Adams 1986) (Fig. 6.2).

The stations of the *Via Egnatia* were of various types. Every 7 to 14 miles were the so-called *mutationes* (supply stations); additionally there were c. 500 marble cylindrical columns, known as *miliaria*, providing information on distances (Otatzes 1998; 1997; Gounaropoulou and Hatzopoulos 1995; Collart 1976; Romiopoulou 1974); then, every 30 to 40 miles, there were the *mansiones*, providing accommodation and rest for travellers. These facilities had a bearing on the organisation and residential development of the whole area, ultimately reflected in the spacing of urban development. As the Aegean bordered the southern parts of eastern Macedonia and Thrace, in several regions (of course depending on the topography) some of the major cities of the road network were coastal in nature, functioning both as urban centres/stations and harbours.

The most important of these was, undoubtedly, **Thessaloniki** (Fig. 6.3). Directly on the *Via Egnatia*, Thessaloniki became a thriving city-port during the Early Christian era. After Constantine the Great constructed extensive harbour installations at the beginning of the 4th century AD,² it developed intensive commercial activities, with an expanded network of cities in areas near and far.³ According to written accounts, it seems that Constantine I established the city's military harbour within the western part of the walls (where its Hellenistic predecessor port was located), and this facility soon developed into a centre of maritime trade for Thessaloniki and the Macedonian interior (Livadioti 2013; Odorico 2003; Bakirtzis 1975).

¹ The bibliography on the *Via Egnatia* is lengthy. Indicatively, one can see: Tsatsopoulou-Kaloudi 2005; Daderas 2003; Fasolo 2003; Avramea 2002; Hatzopoulos 1997; Walbank 2002; 1985; Hammond and Hatzopoulos 1982.

² See the contribution by M. Livadioti in this volume.

³ Sources reveal that in the 11th and 12th centuries AD, Thessaloniki produced, among other things, silk and pottery that was widely disseminated in many places in northern Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria (Laiou 2012: 137).



Figure 6.1: The Via Egnatia in Roman times.

From this harbour products (i.e. grain, pulses, tools, textiles, perfumes, pottery, etc.) were transported from and to the entire Byzantine Empire and beyond, at least until the Late Byzantine period. Recent excavations have revealed that the urban plan of the early Christian city included several buildings dealing particularly with

trade activities, i.e. a customs house, warehouses, inns, baths, dockyards, as well as workshops for repairing and selling various marine accessories (oars, ropes, sails, etc.) (Marke 2013). Most of these buildings were located in the area between the harbour and the Golden Gate, which was the starting point of the *Decumanus*



Figure 6.2: The route of the Via Egnatia.



Figure 6.3: Thessaloniki (from an old postcard).

maximus that crossed the city (Konstantinidou and Miza 2020; Vasileiadou and Tzevreni 2020) (Fig. 6.4). Excavations have brought to light in this area three buildings with porticoes that belonged to one huge, north-south orientated warehouse complex, allowing access both from the Golden Gate and from the piers of the port (Chatziioannides and Tsamissis 2013: 190-194). The overall plan of this complex is estimated at 180 m x 95 m, covering almost two quarters of the city grid. According to the chronological data, the main period of use of the complex was between the 4th and 6th centuries AD (Fig. 6.5).

Large quantities of amphora sherds document the commercial character of the complex, which was undoubtedly also used to store goods destined for export. Based on the pottery finds, the western structure seems to have been connected with storing oil and wine, i.e. a so-called *Horrea olearia*, whereas the other two were granaries.

A very interesting archaeological find, which links the harbour facilities with the road network, is the existence of a building next to the Golden Gate, beyond

the walls, containing *pithoi*. These finds indicate a probable interdependence between the *Horrea* and the *Pitheon*, as well as the distinctive role given to each of them by the state. Accordingly, the products were temporarily stored at the *Horrea* close to the port for control and taxation, and subsequently moved to the *Pitheon*, beyond the walls, where they were stored until their transportation inland (Chatziioannides and Tsamissis 2013: 192-193).

With the rebuilding of the port by Constantine the Great, and the extension of its facilities, Thessaloniki became a transit centre, supplying the Balkan hinterland with products coming to the port via the maritime routes of the Aegean (Karagianni 2014). Using the land routes (mainly the *Via Egnatia*), Sirmium, the headquarters of the Praetorian Prefecture of Illyricum, could be in direct contact with the southern areas under its jurisdiction. After the conquest of Sirmium by the Huns in the mid 5th century AD, Thessaloniki developed even more as a military, ecclesiastical, and commercial centre, with an extensive network of state supplies that extended from the Prefectures of the Danube to the southern Mediterranean, and which was to continue throughout

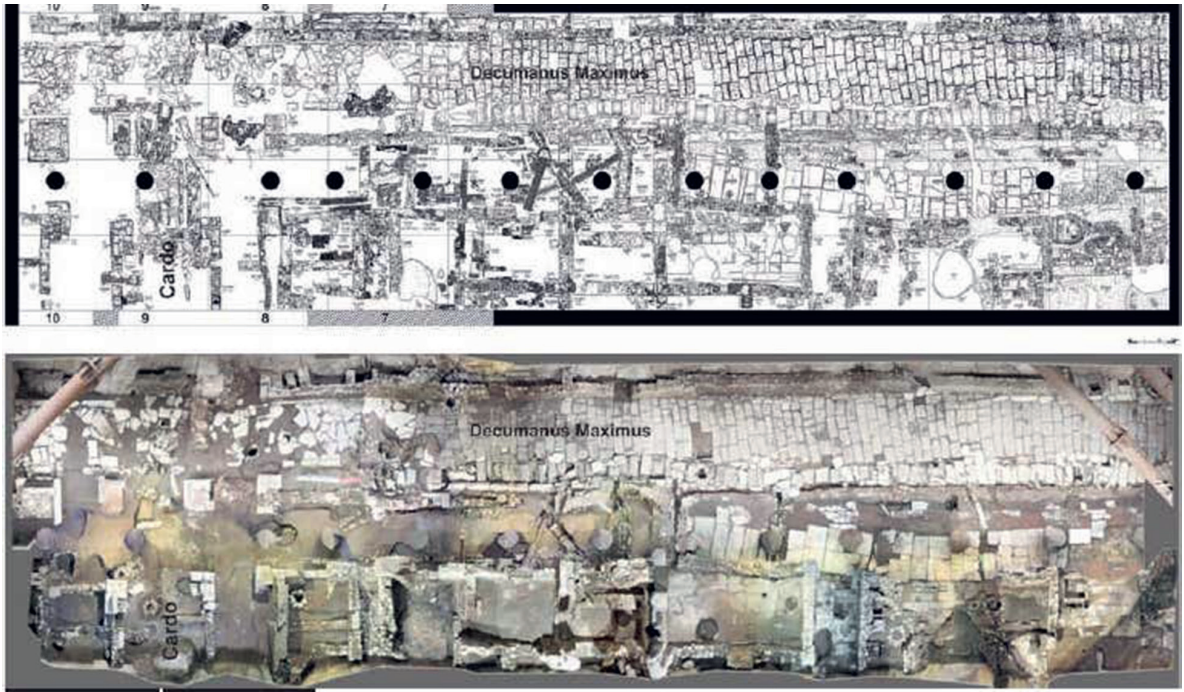


Figure 6.4: The Decumanus Maximus, Thessaloniki (Konstantinidou and Miza 2020: 12, Figs 3-4).

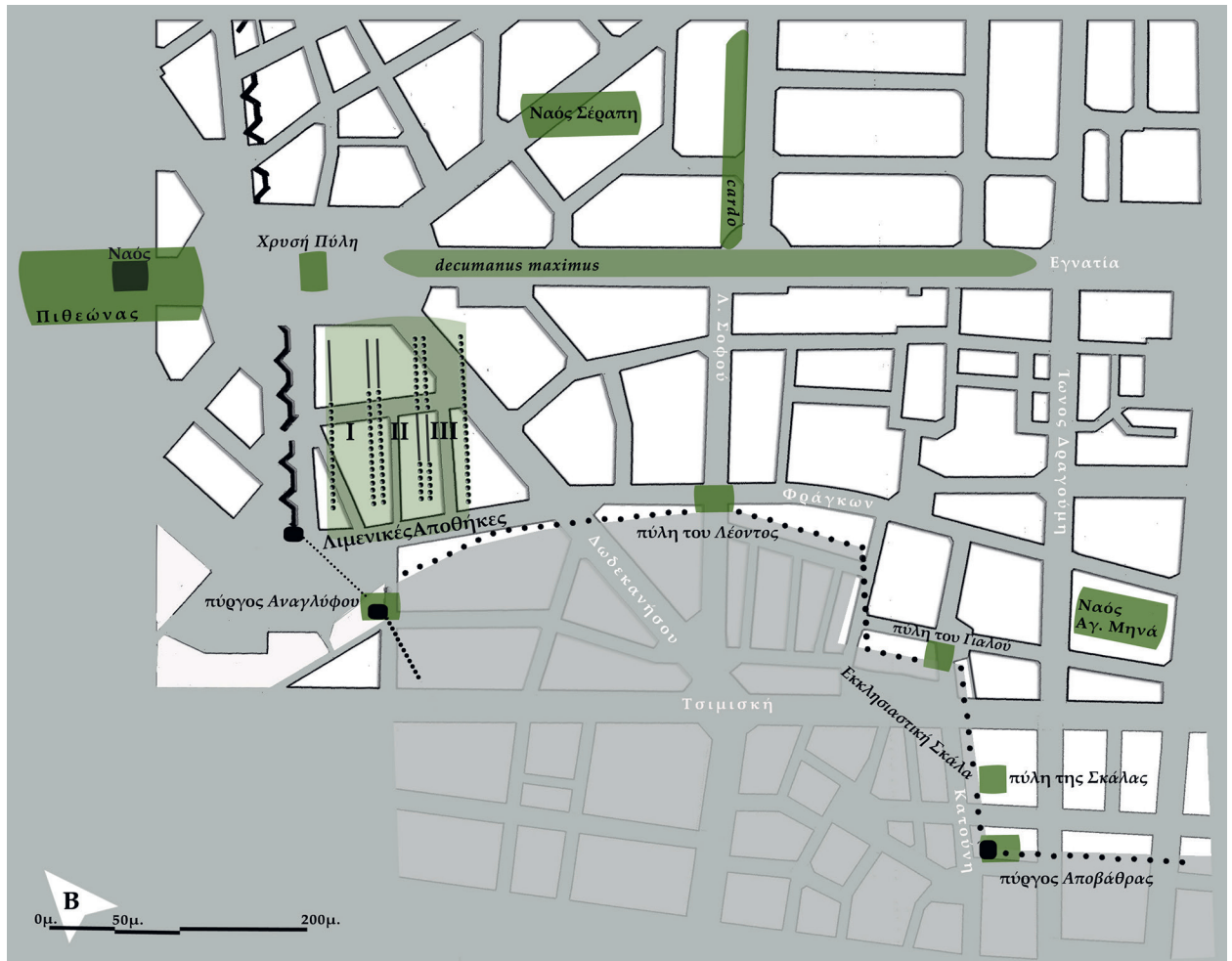


Figure 6.5: Plan of Thessaloniki's harbour area (Chatziioannides and Tsamisis 2013: 203, Fig. 1).

the Justinianic era and after (Chatziioannides and Tsamissis 2013: 192-193 ; Konstantakopoulou 1996 ; Popović 1996: 35-36; Spieser 1984: 7-24; Tafrali 1919). To serve the commercial needs and exchange of products, the officers (*commerciarii*) of the customs authorities stamped all goods before they were transported. The customs house (c. 31 m x 18 m) has been identified and excavated near the harbour in the western part of the city (Marke 2013: 178-179) (Fig. 6.6).

Written sources attest that, even in the period of the Arab raids, maritime commerce never ceased. In the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* ('Miracles of Saint Demetrius'), for example, the city's patron, St Demetrius, appeared in a vision to a ship's master, Stephanos, who was in Chios preparing to sail for Constantinople; the saint persuaded Stephanos to change course for Thessaloniki, transporting his cargo of wheat to relieve the city,

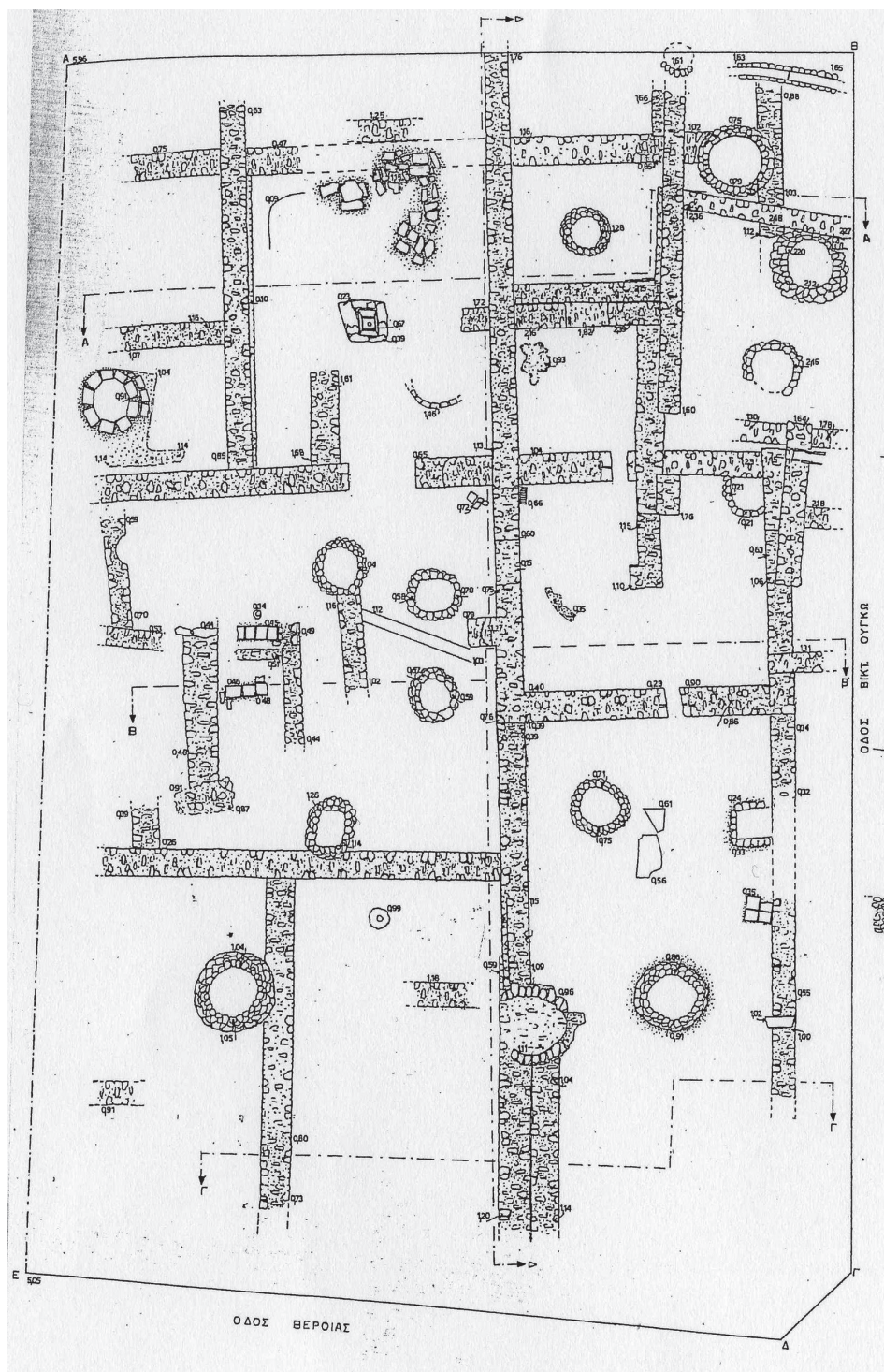


Figure 6.6: A big complex serving the port facilities of Thessaloniki. Plan of the excavations at Fragon 28 Str. (Marke 2013: 186, Fig. 8).



Figure 6.7: Map of Chalkidiki with indications of the position of Skalai (Papagelos 2013: 309, Plan 1).

which was beset by Arab attacks (Bakirtzis 1997: 136-139).

To the southeast of Thessaloniki, along the c. 600 km coastline of the Chalcidice Peninsula, some very important ancient port-cities developed, i.e. Kassandreia, Skioni, Aphytos, Toroni, and Ouranoupolis. However, it is striking that between the 5th and 15th centuries AD references to ‘λιμήν’ are very rare in the written sources – an indication that these locations were not much frequented by travellers within the empire. On the contrary, Chalcidice has references to more than 100 so-called ‘Scalae’ (Fig. 6.7); these may well have provided only wooden piers for the approaching craft, as, in most cases, no special harbour installations were needed. The use of such small infrastructures for the navigation of Byzantine ships along the coastlines of Chalcidice indicates that the main coastal settlements were located far from the land network connecting the Macedonian hinterland.⁴ The coastal settlements of Chalcidice were, accordingly, mainly used for local small fishing and merchant boats, or for the transfer of monks and pilgrims to and from the monasteries of Mount Athos.⁵

⁴ Suggesting that any effort to approach the large Macedonian cities from the sea was difficult enough.

⁵ The possession of boats by the monasteries is frequently mentioned in written accounts (Papagelos 2013).

After Thessaloniki, the next most important harbour in the northern Aegean was, undoubtedly, ancient Neapolis, or Byzantine Christoupolis (modern Kavala) (Fig. 6.8). Placed on the high, rocky peninsula of Panagia, the city was surrounded by strong walls that secured the control of the wider area (Dadaki *et al.* 2013: 214). As the first port-city of significance after crossing the Dardanelles, in Roman and Byzantine times all travellers (whether by land or sea) from Thessaloniki and western Macedonia to Constantinople, and

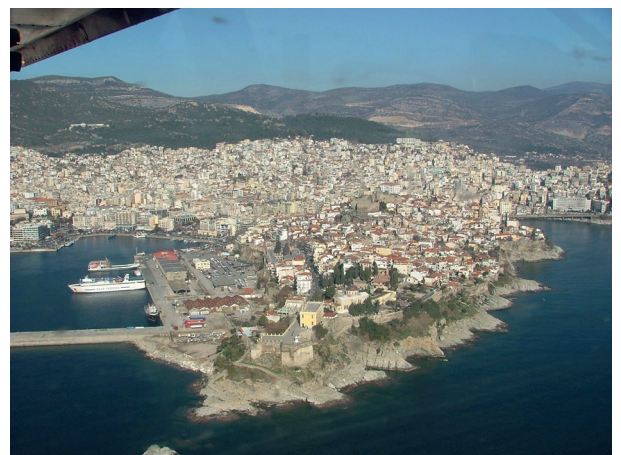


Figure 6.8: Aerial photograph of Kavala.

onwards, would have had to pass through the city; the Imperial Byzantine army did so whenever making for the western provinces.

Since Classical Antiquity, Neapolis had been the focus for people and ideas circulating within the hinterland, via its harbours. It was through the harbour of Neapolis that Christianity reached Macedonian territory in the 1st century AD; St Paul disembarked there, from Samothrace, before following the *Via Egnatia* to Philippi: ‘... εὐθυδρομήσαμεν εἰς Σαμοθράκην, τῇ δ’ ἐπιούσῃ εἰς Νέαν Πόλιν, κακεῖθεν εἰς Φιλίππους...’ (‘... Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a straight course to Samothrace, and the day following to Neapolis and from there to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the foremost of the district, a Roman colony...’) (*Acts of the Apostles*, XVI. 12).

Neapolis, as Byzantine Christoupolis, eventually became the major and most important harbour between Constantinople and Thessaloniki during Late Antiquity – a station for travellers as well as a transit centre for switching itineraries from land to maritime and vice versa. The strong connection of the port-city with the *Via Egnatia*, which is one of the main reasons for the maintenance of its significance during the Byzantine era, is attested by numerous written accounts, i.e. the 9th-century reference by St Gregory of Dekapolis, stopping for a while when sailing from Ainos to Thessaloniki, later continuing his trip by land; and a reference from AD 968/969, when the mission headed by Liutprand of Cremona arrived in Christoupolis and continued onwards by land (Dadaki *et al.* 2013: 214, fn. 21). The central thoroughfare of the *Via Egnatia* passed to the north of Thessaloniki, to which the city streets connected; it descended from the hills of Aghios Silas to Freedom Square, and the so-called ‘Kamares’. Subsequently it ascended to the area known as ‘Sugiolou’, and ended in the present-day gardens of ‘Kara Osman’ (Lychounas and Tsoures 2005: 31).

Archaeological data, such as repairs to the walls and the excavation of an Early Christian basilica, reveal traces of the life of the city, which kept its strategic character throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. For that reason, Andronikos II, at the beginning of the 14th century, built the intermediate wall (διατείχισμα) linking Christoupolis with the hill opposite, thus offering extra security and protection to travellers (Tsoures 1998: 408-410) (Fig. 6.9).

Among the several stations between the land and sea routes in the north Aegean, the island of Thasos (close to the Macedonian and Thracian coasts) played a crucial strategic role for centuries as an intermediate port of call on maritime routes linking Constantinople with Alexandria in Egypt and Thessaloniki, in particular

during the Byzantine era. Thasos had two harbours: one military and one commercial, which, at least until the 7th century AD, was used for the export of the island’s main industrial product – marble (Fig. 6.10). According to archaeological excavations, the city’s large basilicas, as well as the great number of fine houses, attest that the port city of Limenas was very prosperous during the Late Antique period. Although over the following centuries the city was limited to its acropolis area, on the upper part of the hill, written sources prove that it continued to be a major supply base for vessels sailing from Constantinople to the West (Bonnias and Dadaki 2002: 66-78; Dadaki and Giros 2001; 1991; Sodini 1995).

To the east of Christoupolis, the largest and most important harbour was Ainos (Soustal 1991: 170-173). This city received considerable support from Justinian I, who repaired the strong walls that protected it (Fig. 6.11). During the Middle and Late Byzantine eras, Ainos acquired the shape of a typical fortified city with an acropolis, from which two rows of walls descended from the hills down to the harbour.

Although in the northern part of the Aegean the largest harbours providing links between maritime routes and the *Via Egnatia* were Thessaloniki, Neapolis/Christoupolis, and Ainos, within the same axis several smaller port-cities were able to develop. To the east of Mount Athos, the first natural port mentioned in contemporary nautical charts (portolans) was one referred to as Chrysoupolis (Soustal 2011: 57-59; Dunn 1998a; Dunn 1990: 327-329) (Fig. 6.12). As the end point of one of the north-south routes coming from the hinterland of Aimos, via the course of the Strymon River, which flows into the Aegean, it constituted an important hub and intersection of land routes. At this time, only metres from the coast, the *Via Egnatia* crossed the area in an east-west direction. Until c. the late 18th century, the Strymon Delta was the only convenient point of contact between the plains of Serres, and the surrounding uplands, with the Mediterranean; close access to the *Via Egnatia* also offered the area important connections with the rest of Macedonia and Thrace. Thus, the Strymon Delta became a meeting point for long-distance communications and supra-regional exchange and redistribution for the Serres Basin – a region rich in agricultural products, pastoralism, and wetlands (Dunn 1998b: 339).

Archaeological data has shown that although in the Early Byzantine era the main city of the area was Amphipolis, only a short distance away a small settlement with a shallow natural harbour was founded at the site of ancient Hion, which soon developed into the Byzantine castle of Chrysoupolis. Pottery study suggests that the founders of the castle understood that control over the Delta’s maritime traffic was far more important

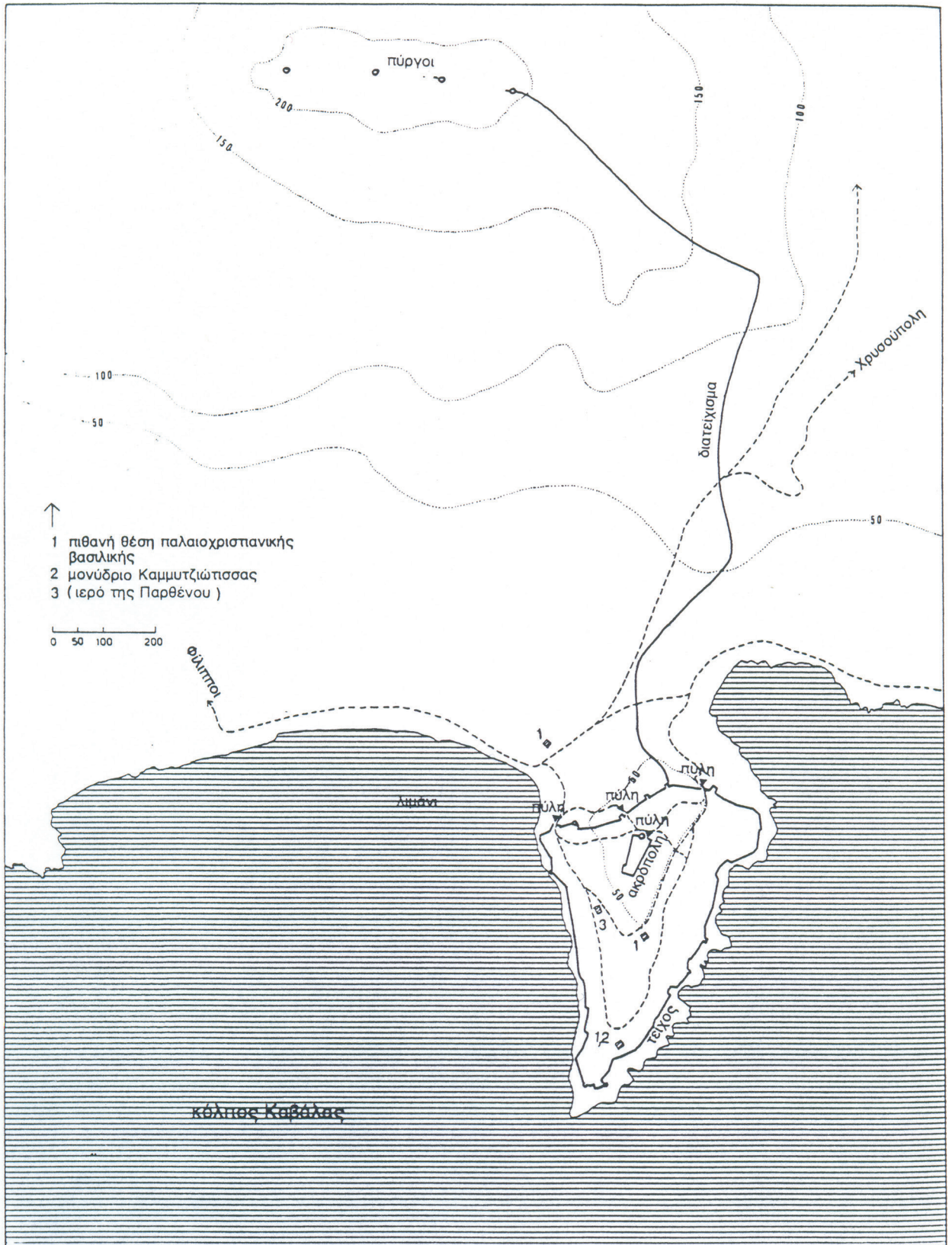


Figure 6.9: Topographical sketch of the area of Kavala.



Figure 6.10: Thasos. Topographical sketch of Limenas (Bonnias and Dadaki 2002: 23).

than the security of the Early Byzantine acropolis of Amphipolis. Consequently, after the 7th century AD, activity in Amphipolis continued at a low level, whereas there is every reason to believe that the new 'harbour' of Chrysoupolis gradually became a transshipment centre for maritime traffic in the Middle Byzantine period (Dunn 1998b: 340-342). Written sources indicate that during this period the patriarch of Constantinople

had estates in the lower Strymon Valley, to which ships also belonged. Later, Chrysoupolis was on the lists of ports where Venetian merchants were exempted from paying trade taxes.

The Thracian coast supported other harbours that were to continue after Classical Antiquity, although many of their layouts were altered. One such was Avdera, east of



Figure 6.11: View of the acropolis of Enez (Ainos) (F. Karagianni).



Figure 6.13: General view of Avdera/Polystylon (F. Karagianni).



Figure 6.12: General view of the castle of Chrysoupolis (F. Karagianni).

Neapolis/Christoupolis,⁶ which in Byzantine times was renamed **Polystylon**, associated just with the ancient acropolis there (Fig. 6.13); the port of the ancient city is still partly preserved. Although the city was not directly connected to the *Via Egnatia*, it functioned as an important station where two roads from the hinterland ended: one from Xantheia, and the other from Peritheorion (Anastasioupolis).

Another major point on the coastline, controlling both local navigation and land routes, was the city of **Anastasioupolis**, renamed **Peritheorion** in Byzantine times.⁷ Built by Anastasios I, it survived until the 17th century in its favourable coastal location position. Anastasioupolis was able to sustain itself with food and other supplies, and was thus one of the last cities to fall to the Ottomans. Its central gate, with two towers, opening onto the lagoon was erected by Andronikos

⁶ For Avdera/Polystylon, see Dadaki *et al.* 1998; Bakirtzis 1994: 158-162, fn. 5.

⁷ For Anastasioupolis/Peritheorion, see Dadaki *et al.* 2013: 216; Tsoures 1998: 442 (fn. 25); Zikos 1984: 73; Asdracha 1976: 98-104.

III Palaiologos. A wall beginning from the city's fortifications reached as far as Lake Vistonida, securing access to the sea.

The city of **Maroneia** developed further to the east along the Thracian coast. This was a very large city, limited to its coastal area next to the ancient port (Fig. 6.14), which, throughout the Early to Late Byzantine periods, served as the main station before the peninsula of Kallipolis and the Propontis. Although it was located some distance from the *Via Egnatia*, Maroneia was in constant communication with the main Thracian cities, as well as with Constantinople and the other main centres of the empire. From the 9th century AD onwards, the harbour of Maroneia quite often appears in the sources as an intermediate station for those travelling from Constantinople to Thessaloniki, especially when circumstances made it difficult or impossible to take the *Via Egnatia* or other land routes. At the same time, from the 9th/10th centuries up to the Palaiologan era, this harbour facilitated trade and exports to other centres, with Maroneia producing large quantities of glazed pottery and metal crosses. Additionally, numerous coins and lead seals of officials and bishops, as well as amphorae, glazed pottery, and precious works of art from Constantinople, further indicate continuous contact with the capital, as well as other centres of the empire (Dadaki *et al.* 2013: 214, 216-217; Doukata-Demertze 2011; Doukata-Demertze 2008; Bakirtzis 1994: 167, fn. 5).

The constant transfer of people is also testified by the archaeological evidence. At **Synaxis** (the coastal area of the city) a peculiar building with many rooms has been excavated near the shore and recognised as an inn for those pilgrims embarking for the opposite coast and those disembarking from the island of Samothraki to the south (Bakirtzis and Chatzimichalis 1991). Although Samothraki appeared a natural station for those following the maritime routes from Asia Minor



Figure 6.14: General view of the harbour of Maroneia (F. Karagianni).

and the Black Sea to the lands of northern Greece (Fig. 6.15), due to its wild, rocky coastline it was probably never included within the busy maritime networks of the Byzantine Empire. Despite this, the discovery there of Early Christian basilicas, as well as other buildings, testifies its dynamic presence during this era (Matsas and Bakirtzis 1998; Papageorgiou 1982).

Concluding our research on Macedonian and Thracian port-cities, it should be noted that the harbours mentioned above were established in ancient times and served for centuries as important stations for maritime connectivity and links between land and sea routes. From some of these harbours local products were exported, i.e. wine and vinegar from Maroneia, timber from Thasos, and agricultural produce from Chrysoupolis. Although we have no doubts over the functioning of these harbours, one soon realises that they often did no more than to act as local stations, with the exception, of course, of certain major centres, e.g. Thessaloniki and Christopolis. The combination of references in written sources and the archaeological data leads to the conclusion that the east-west maritime axis of the Macedonian and Thracian coastlines was not the most preferable for those sailing from Constantinople to the Aegean and the wider Mediterranean; it seems that other harbours in the north Aegean, the islands of Imbros and Lemnos for example, functioned as the main ports of call instead.

As for the region's main land thoroughfare – the Via Egnatia – the textual sources indicate that its use depended greatly on the prosperity and importance of the cities that it linked, as well as on the level of safety that it could provide travellers, especially during periods of invasions. Bearing this in mind aspect, one understands why the western sectors declined sooner than the eastern ones,⁸ whereas the need for constant

⁸ Interruptions along the western sections are recorded as early as the 4th century AD, when much was seized by the Visigoths, as well



Figure 6.15: General view of the nautical routes between Imbros Island (first level) and Samothrace (second level) (F. Karagianni).

connection between Thessaloniki and Constantinople never stopped, at least until the beginning of the 14th century AD (Laiou 1995). However, already by the 8th and 9th centuries travellers preferred the sea route, as it was considered safer, as testified to by both Theodore Stouditis (AD 797) and Gregory Dekapolitis (c. AD 830) (Avramea 2002: 71).

Constantinople's commercial maritime routes were mainly oriented towards the south Aegean, where they either followed the Asia Minor coast, or the archipelago of the northern Sporades and Euboea (Ginalis 2011). In any event, the port-cities of the northern Aegean (probably to a lesser degree) served as entrance ways into the hinterlands, as well as transit hubs – where travellers, soldiers, tradesmen, artists, pilgrims, saints, even emperors, had to embark and/or disembark when travelling in or out of the empire's borders.

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