

Six hundred years of settlement history of the Methana peninsula: an interdisciplinary approach

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Archaeology and ethnographic studies have been infrequently applied to the study of historical processes in post-Roman Greece, at least in comparison with preceding periods. One reason for this difference is that in the more recent periods of Greek history there are more documentary sources which help us to understand a variety of aspects of Byzantine and post-Byzantine history. However, these sources tend to be most useful in providing overviews of the political and economic history of large regions: they rarely give us a detailed picture of the development of small sectors of Greece over many centuries.¹ They also tend to represent the points of view of dominant institutions such as the church and governments.

The introduction into Greece in the last two decades of the intensive regional survey, with its emphasis on the regional micro-scale – for instance a Cycladic island² or a modern *eparkhia*³ – is a major departure from the standard fare of historians of all periods in Greece.⁴ Most regional survey projects concentrate on the investigation of surface remains which indicate the history of settlement and exploitation of the local environment, usually over a time-span of millennia, continuing up to the twentieth century.⁵

The multi-period but small-scale focus of regional survey means that there has been a marked increase of interest in the identification of Frankish and Ottoman ceramics, the study of which is still in its infancy.⁶ Regional survey projects have also increasingly included ethnographic studies as a way of broadening the scope of their non-documentary investigations,⁷ and as a way of providing oral histories in conjunction with local documents for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These are the kinds of approaches that the Methana Archaeological Survey Project has adopted in its investigation of material from the late medieval period onwards, fuller details of which will appear in the final Methana Survey

publication.⁸

Relevant documentary sources throughout the period under discussion are extremely limited. Although Methana occasionally appears under that name in documents dating as early as the fifteenth century, those prior to the period of the Second Venetian Occupation (1686-1715) merely note its existence. Some Venetian documents of this period, by contrast, actually indicate the situation on Methana. Grimani's census⁹ is perhaps the most important example. An unpublished document,¹⁰ ascribed to the provveditor general of the Morea for the years 1703-1705, also mentions the peninsula.

Somewhat later, Methana is mentioned by foreign travellers in Greece, with greater or lesser accuracy, and generally only incidentally: most do not seem to have set foot on the peninsula. The French Scientific Expedition to the Morea (1829-30) is an exception, providing vital census information for the period of the end of the War of Independence.¹¹ Few sources document the post-Independence situation on Methana in the nineteenth century, although censuses¹² and a *Geography* of the area¹³ are useful, if skeletal. Such mentions of Methana as appear in non-Greek sources almost exclusively discuss its ancient sites or its geology. National censuses are also the primary documentary source for Methana in the twentieth century, although the booklet by Akritas provides anecdotal information.¹⁴

The lack of documentary sources for Ottoman-period Methana contrasts sharply with some of the Cycladic islands, for instance, where large quantities of late Ottoman documents provide an excellent resource.¹⁵ This is probably in large part because the inhabitants of this rugged and isolated peninsula had very little to do with the Ottoman-dominated outside world. At least at the close of the Ottoman period, the inhabitants seem to have been left very much to their own devices.¹⁶

In this article we attempt to identify aspects of the interrelationship between the human population of the Methana peninsula and its landscape. In particular, we try to answer the following questions: how and when did the present settlement pattern develop? what were its precursors? and can we identify the reasons for its development in its particular form? The identification of changes in settlement locations since the Frankish period, and broad social and economic trends external to Methana which have affected it, are thus the main focus of this work. By deliberately presenting a study of a backwater area we hope to provide a comparandum for regional studies of parts of Greece which are well provided with

documentary sources and which may have been affected by very different historical, economic and social factors.

Because of the paucity of historical documents, we have attempted to identify broader, longer-term factors which explain the 'facts on the ground', such as they are. This has been achieved by employing a multi-disciplinary approach combining archaeological data, historical records, and ethnographic and oral history sources where appropriate. We also of necessity play to our 'long suit': the material record of human occupation over the centuries.

Methana: a geographical sketch

Methana is a small peninsula attached to the southern Argolic peninsula of the Peloponnese by a narrow isthmus only a few hundred metres wide. Diagrammatically, it can be envisaged as a rounded cone of c. 10 km diameter, and almost 750 m high. Due to the volcanic activity which formed it, however, the landmass is extremely rugged and the terrain very broken. These twin factors of quasi-insular identity and extreme internal ruggedness have had a major effect on Methana's history over the centuries.

Traditionally, agriculture has been practised almost exclusively on cultivation terraces carved out of the rock-strewn hillsides. Land at all elevations is presently cultivated, but Methana can be divided into three separate major altitudinal zones, both agriculturally and in terms of settlement. One is the area below about 250 m, consisting of fertile and relatively gently sloping land running down to the sea. The second zone consists of land above about 500 m: a broken landscape of precipitous peaks and numerous smallish basins with deep, productive and water-retentive soils. Connecting these two zones is a zone of mostly extremely steep slopes, where little if any settlement has occurred at any time.

Over the past 8000 years, settlement locations have varied widely, but for most of that period the great majority of settlements was concentrated below 200 m. This observation includes Methana's primate site in antiquity, presently called Palaiokastros (site 10), on an elevated crag close to the sea (fig. 1). Only after c. 500 B.C. is there much evidence for settlement at elevations between 200 and 750 m. Most of these sites are at high elevations and before the Byzantine period were apparently isolated farmsteads.¹⁷

The present settlement pattern is very different from that of classical antiquity. It consists of ten villages, almost all located in a band at elevations of roughly 100-250 m, and a spa-town on the coast (fig. 2). Most villages are sited where the very

steep slopes of the middle zone meet the less steep land running down to the sea. According to tradition, raids by pirates were a problem in previous centuries, and the location of villages adjacent to particularly steep terrain is believed by inhabitants to have given previous generations a better chance of escape and concealment when raids were imminent. Besides these 'traditional' settlements, primarily dedicated to agricultural activities, the major present-day settlement, and centre of local government, is the town of Methana, known locally as Loutra – 'The Baths' – a name which will be used here to avoid confusion.

The exploitation of the landscape over the last one hundred and fifty years or so has resulted in the construction of a wide range of structures well away from inhabited villages. Since we examine settlement change over the long term right up to the present day, the patterning of all structures presently, or until recently, used in the landscape will be discussed here. In this way the previous developments which led to the present situation can be better understood.

Three small abandoned hamlets and numerous isolated (and mostly ruinous) field-houses (*kalyvia*) also exist on Methana (fig. 2). In the nineteenth century, when cattle – much slower and less sure-footed on steep mountain paths than mules and donkeys – were the main plough animals, households would thus live away from their villages for a few days close to the scene of their activities. Also associated with the days of cattle-traction are numerous abandoned plaster-lined grape-treading floors (*patitiria*), near vineyards in the rugged interior. By taking only the juice of the grapes to the village in goatskins, Methanites restricted the bulk that needed transportation on their limited numbers of pack animals.

Numerous churches, still in use, stand as isolated structures in the countryside at all elevations. Although most date to long before the present settlement-pattern emerged (see below, p. 82), some were built within the last hundred years or so. In most cases it is no longer clear why these recent churches were constructed. At almost all of these isolated churches there is a single annual liturgy, on the day of the patron saint. Usually, inhabitants from the nearest villages attend these celebrations, but the annual celebrations at a few have become foci of pan-Methana celebrations. One has become the focus for expatriate Methanites, mostly living in Athens and Piraeus.

Before the development of a road system on the peninsula in the late 1960s, occasions like these were the only regular opportunity for friends and kin separated by migration, or marriage in other villages, to renew old ties. These religious structures, although at a distance from settlements, thus formed the foci

of important social as well as religious activities at a level above that of the individual settlement. It is these points in the landscape, far removed from any 'central place' or 'primate site' (in the terminology of archaeology and geography), which traditionally linked the inhabitants of the different settlements on the peninsula and contributed to a pan-peninsular identity.

Archaeological evidence: Methana in the medieval period

Evidence of settlement on Methana in the later medieval period is as follows:

1. A substantial settlement site or refuge site located on a high (c. 710 m), steep-sided mountain peak (site 119). Although there is evidence of considerable thirteenth and fourteenth century activity, it is unclear whether this was a simple refuge site, the main population centre, or primarily a seat of government.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this peak site could not physically have accommodated more than 30-40 families.
2. Close to the coast, at the site of the ancient city (site 10) there are structural remains and pottery dating to the medieval period (*sensu lato*). Despite being spread over an area comparable to that of the Roman period site, they do not indicate the urban character of the remains of the earlier period. Since the spread of Turkish period pottery is much smaller than that of the medieval period, it is likely that by the end of medieval times this settlement was much reduced in size, possibly having become little more than a hamlet.
3. Site 10 in the medieval period may well have been connected to small harbour facilities at Vathy (sites 52, 53, 54), further north along the coast. A decline in sherd numbers from the medieval period (*sensu lato*) to the Turkish period mirrors the situation at site 10 to which these facilities were apparently connected.
4. A settlement (site 217), probably of village size, existed some 400 m directly above site 10 by the end of the medieval period. The bulk of the pottery has been dated to the Turkish period, but some is medieval. The foundation of a church here has been dated to the thirteenth century: it was then expanded into a substantial structure (in Methana terms) shortly afterwards. We tentatively interpret this development as a response to a substantial increase in the settlement's population by the later thirteenth century, possibly due to the removal of population from site 10, and, conceivably, site 119.
5. Site 101, not far from the modern village of Palaia Loutra, seems to have been a small village between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries.
6. Site 14 may have been a farm or small hamlet with 2-3 structures on a small

plateau with very steep slopes leading down to a small bay called Pro. But it is also possible that the site is associated with the (poorly dated, but probably medieval-Turkish) evidence of exploitation of sulphur deposits close to the shore at Pro (site 62) below the site. (For the discovery of a major Mycenaean shrine close to this site see the headnote at the end of this paper.)

7. Medieval fortifications exist on the isthmus, although not all are readily datable. They include a wall (site 203), which runs across the entire width of the isthmus. The existence of the wall in particular suggests that Methana was an important enough area at some point in the later medieval period to merit expenditure on its defence by some external political authority.

8. Other sites with artefacts of medieval date seem to have been of little significance in settlement terms. The largest were probably no more than clusters of a few houses. Several are best interpreted as seasonally occupied sites, associated with agricultural activities.

The pattern c. A.D. 1400 might therefore be reconstructed as consisting of the two village-sized sites (119 and 217) at particularly high elevations (c. 710 m and c. 400 m respectively), bearing in mind that the highest point on the peninsula is under 750 m. A third, smaller, site (101), was located at a somewhat lower elevation (c. 300 m), but here the terrain, which falls precipitously from the edge of the site down to the sea shore, provides an effective natural defence.

The three late medieval village sites discussed here would have had ready access to good-quality arable land in the numerous small basins and other areas of gently sloping land at high elevations. In the recent past these have been highly suited to growing cereals, vines and figs,¹⁹ although olives would necessarily have been cultivated at lower elevations. The site of Panayitsa (217) also overlooks – from a safe distance – extensive areas of sloping land close to the shore. It is quite possible that villagers descended from their mountain fastness to exploit this as well.

All other sites datable to the final century or so of the medieval period seem to have been of a subsidiary nature: merely hamlets, farmsteads or seasonally occupied structures. With such a small number of sites identified for this period, it is tempting to assume that many sites have been missed. However, neither the methodology of surface survey, with its dependence on sampling, nor the possibility that substantial sites may be covered by modern villages, nor our poor state of knowledge of the ceramics of the period seem adequate explanations: much the same gap in rural settlement evidence for the Frankish and Turkish

periods has been noted in the Cyclades.²⁰

The size of the population on the peninsula (and elsewhere in Greece) within the last century should not mislead us into assuming a relatively large medieval population, whose settlement site(s) is/are as yet unknown. This must especially be a consideration in the period following the arrival of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century.²¹ A detailed census of 1700 (see below, pp. 79-80) indicates a total population of only 76 families on Methana: there is no reason to believe that it represents the nadir of population on the peninsula. Our very rough estimates of the late medieval population suggest perhaps 30 families at sites 217 and 119, and perhaps 10 at site 101, with a further 15 families from other small sites. The total of 85 families is above the figure for the Venetian period.

The ethnic identity of the late medieval inhabitants of Methana is unknown. Today the bulk of the inhabitants of the southern Argolic peninsula (including Methana) and its off-shore islands of Hydra, Spetses and Poros, are Albanian speakers (*Arvanites*) or their descendants. With the exception of the name of the peninsula itself, all Methana toponyms that have been investigated are Albanian, although some village names have been Hellenized, and some Albanian toponyms given Greek equivalents. When, and by what process Albanian speakers so totally replaced the previous inhabitants that they gave the landscape exclusively Albanian toponyms is unclear. They are recorded as settling near Corinth in the early fifteenth century²² and their presence is documented in the southern Argolid at the same time.²³ We assume, therefore, that they settled on Methana at this period or slightly later.

Methana in the Turkish period

Archaeologically recognizable sites of the Turkish period on Methana are even less common than in the previous period.

1. The settlement around the Panayitsa church (site 217) seems to have become Methana's main site: the bulk of the diagnostic pottery on the site dates to the Turkish period. However, this being the case, the population of the peninsula must have been very small: it is hard to envisage site 217 being home to more than perhaps 40 families.
2. Sites 101 and 119 seem to have been abandoned and site 10 seems to have contained a mere hamlet. Whether sulphur extraction continued at Pro (site 62) is unclear, but the site above it (14) was not occupied.
3. The small numbers of sherds of this period from sites 52, 53 and 54 around

Vathy suggest little permanent settlement: sherd evidence from this period may merely indicate that the harbour was the point of contact with the outside world used by site 217, perched high up above it.

4. The closely-linked sites 113 and 75 close to Kounoupitsa we interpret as a relatively substantial seasonally occupied settlement. On the evidence of olive-processing equipment we believe that this comparatively low-level site was associated with the exploitation of olives, which must be cultivated at much lower elevations than those around site 217. Winter is the season for picking and cultivating olives – a period when pirates were perhaps least likely to attack.

5. Apart from these sites, the few others that exist seem to consist of isolated structures or clusters of a few houses. Several may not have been permanently occupied. The only definitively dated evidence of occupation on the isthmus for this period derives from Fabvier's defences constructed during the Greek War of Independence (see below, p. 82).

The early Turkish-period settlement pattern, dominated by a single village perched high in the interior of the peninsula, is typical of the Greek island settlement pattern of the time. Site 217 effectively became the *khora* of Methana, paralleling the single main settlement of that name, often in a well-defended position, to be found in many Aegean islands in this period.²⁴

A settlement of about 40 families at Panayitsa, representing a modest increase over the site's medieval population size (as reflected by the increased density of Turkish period pottery), would not be improbable. On the assumption that scattered small settlements elsewhere plus a few isolated houses would have contained a further 10 families, we obtain a putative population figure of 50 families – perhaps about 250 people – for the earlier part of the Turkish period, when the main settlement seems to have been at the Panayitsa church. This figure is smaller than that of the Venetian census of 1700, but not so much so as to make it entirely unbelievable, especially if the figure for 1700 included a number of recent immigrants (see below, p. 80).

Historical documents relating to the short-lived Second Venetian Occupation of the Peloponnese (1685-1715) shed some light on Methana at this period. The Venetians made several censuses during their occupation, but in those so far published Methana seems to be directly mentioned only in Francesco Grimani's highly detailed census of 1700. With 76 families, Methana had the fourth largest population of the 20 communities listed in the *Giurisdizione* of Porto Porro (the island of Poros), exceeding even Poros in size. Given the apparent thoroughness

of the census in this part of the Peloponnese, it is fair to assume that the listing of 'Mettena' indicates a single permanently-occupied settlement on the peninsula, since the locations of all the *Giurisdizione*'s other settlements can be identified.²⁵

A community of 76 families at site 217 is not supportable on archaeological grounds. We therefore believe that Methana's only settlement had been transferred to the site of the modern village of Meghalo Khori some 350 m below site 217 at some time before 1700. This view is strengthened by the testimony of the traveller Dodwell, who indicates that this site was already settled by the end of the eighteenth century, although named Methana at that time.²⁶

The breakdown of the Methana population in the census is as follows:²⁷

<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>	
1-16	74	1-16	82
16-30	79	16-30	67
30-40	17	30-40	6
40-50	17	40-50	17
50-60	12	Old	15
Old	6		

Total families: 76

Total population: 392

These data can be transformed into a population pyramid: although far less finely graduated than those preferred by demographers,²⁸ the results do not seem to resemble the profile of a typical stable pre-industrial population. In particular, the very great differences between the numbers in the 16-30 year and 30-40 year groups, even if weighted to account for differing time-spans, suggest some abnormality. On the basis of evidence from contemporary documents relating to the Hermionid, we do not believe that this phenomenon is the result of hostilities associated with the Venetian capture of the Peloponnese.²⁹ The large numbers in the lowest age groups are perhaps best explained as a substantial number of immigrants, presumably mostly young, brought into Methana by the Venetians, as occurred in the neighbouring Hermionid.³⁰ If this inference is correct, then the population of Methana in 1700 was significantly larger than it had been just prior to the Venetian occupation. The presence of a mere 15 immigrant families would give us a figure of about 50 families prior to the Venetian occupation – the same

number as hypothesized from the archaeological evidence for the settlement of the whole peninsula in the period when the main settlement was at site 217.

In 1715 the Peloponnese reverted to Turkish control: there is no further documentary information on Methana until the description of Edward Dodwell, the only foreign traveller who we can be sure visited Methana prior to 1821. He indicates that in the first years of the nineteenth century the only significant settlement was at the site of the present village of Meghalo Khori.³¹

Dodwell's comments on Methana indicate the extreme isolation of the inhabitants from the outside world. The overall impression is that the area was pretty much left to its own devices at this time. Methana's rugged landscape and semi-island form were doubtless partly responsible for the lack of direct Turkish contact. But the economic and political power of the neighbouring islands of Poros, Hydra and Spetses must also have played a part.³² Being so close to these islands, Methana's inhabitants were presumably relatively safe under the 'umbrella' provided by these powerful fleets, even though they did not apparently participate directly in their activities.

Dodwell and Leake both describe cultivation as concentrated around the main settlement, with much land being uncultivated, although it is possible that both writers could have been unaware of areas of cultivated land in the high interior parts of the peninsula. Overall, however, Methana in 1800 probably differed little from the situation in 1700, or even perhaps 1600: it seems to have been underpopulated, mostly uncultivated, and largely insulated from the outside world.

Methana from the declaration of Greek independence to World War I

Our sources of information for the development of the settlement pattern in the first half of the nineteenth century are largely tangential, but produce a believable picture. Apart from the comments of Dodwell and other travellers' reports, we depend on data gathered by the French Scientific Expedition to the Morea.³³ For the latter part of the nineteenth century, our documentary sources are little better, being dependent primarily on censuses and the *Geography* of Miliarakis.³⁴ The picture of this period is considerably more complete, however, because of the availability of oral histories and reminiscences.

During the hostilities of the Greek War of Independence from 1821 until 1830, the Argolic peninsula was one of the safest parts of all of Greece, resulting partly from the proximity of the off-shore islands of Spetses, Hydra and Poros, whose

fleets protected the area. Methana was further protected not only by its topography but also by the presence of the French philhellene Fabvier, who fortified the isthmus and used the peninsula as a refuge and military training area during part of the period. Traces of batteries and other structures of this short-lived settlement are still visible on the isthmus.³⁵

The safety afforded by Methana probably explains the developments which took place during and immediately after the War of Independence. By 1830 the population had almost tripled from that of 1700.³⁶ While the population of the original settlement was virtually unchanged from that of 1700, there were now at least six new villages, all but one with more than 20 families. This radical change in the settlement pattern almost certainly occurred during the War of Independence. Further small villages may have been founded in the next decade or so (see below), so that the present settlement pattern was largely completed in less than twenty-five years.³⁷

In a largely 'empty' landscape, the positions chosen for settlement are themselves of interest. It could be argued that the locations of the new villages on Methana at points roughly mid-way between the shore-line and the basins of the elevated interior allowed inhabitants access to a wide range of soil-types and micro-environments. But Methanites claim that sites well away from the shore were chosen because of fears of pirate raids. These statements conflict with the comments of scholars who question the seriousness of the effects of fear of piracy on settlement patterns in previous centuries.³⁸ The reality of the fear of raids is still visible in the Methana landscape, however, in the form of ruined *ambaria*, small storage structures, located well away from villages, where the bulk of households' food supplies was kept safe (fig. 3). Only food for immediate consumption was kept in houses.

These observations do not, however, explain why specific sites were chosen for settlement, while others, apparently equally suitable, were ignored. A salient feature of all but one or perhaps two of the presently-inhabited 'traditional' villages is that they incorporate, or are adjacent to, churches which are far older than the earlier nineteenth century. It would seem, therefore, that the newcomers were reacting to a pre-existing religious landscape by considering the existence of a place of worship to have been roughly comparable in importance to considerations of safety and an agrarian livelihood.

In the two decades following the end of hostilities, the high crude rate of population increase – approximately 2.4% per annum – suggests that immigration

continued during this period, the newcomers probably being responsible for founding those present-day villages not listed by the French Scientific Expedition. The contrast with the very low levels of population increase in the adjacent areas of the mainland at this time strongly suggests that considerations of security were still uppermost in newcomers' minds.³⁹

The population of Methana continued to rise throughout the nineteenth century, having increased by almost 2.5 times in less than eighty years. The crude rate of increase dropped progressively during the second half of the nineteenth century to rates which are most easily explained in terms of natural fertility rather than significant in-migration.⁴⁰ In contrast with the situation on Methana, crude rates of population increase on the adjacent mainland soared in the second half of the nineteenth century, reaching 8.4% per annum for a short period. The best interpretation of this phenomenon is that in-migration into the wider region continued into the mid-to-late nineteenth century, but that its focus switched to the mainland portions. The availability of cultivable land probably best explains the changing population dynamics in the region generally, with security presumably being a lower priority by this time. Apart from the evidence of the census figures themselves, the geographical sketch of Miliarakis⁴¹ contrasts the under-exploited nature of the malarial plain of Troezenia with the intensive agricultural methods of the Methanites.

Evidence for the high levels of population pressure felt on Methana in the recent past can be seen in the form of traces of cultivation terraces, often now reverting to scrub or woodland, visible on almost all parts of the peninsula, even on the steepest slopes with very thin soils. However, it is possible to infer from Miliarakis and Frazer⁴² that large areas of the steeper slopes were terraced only at the end of, or even after, the nineteenth century. Oral testimony supports such a view. Thus the present intensively terraced landscape of Methana, although seemingly the product of centuries of toil, may be largely a product of a mere seventy years or so of intensive labour. By the same token, its reversion to a largely uncultivated wasteland may be accomplished in a similar time-span (see below, p. 89).

Although Miliarakis' description of Methana emphasises the primarily agricultural base of the inhabitants, they were nonetheless increasingly being drawn into contact with the wider world. By the 1880s, they had 15 small vessels trading within the Saronic Gulf, some of which were doubtless used for transporting Methana produce, which included pears and lemons, to the rapidly growing

population of the capital.⁴³ Oral sources also indicate that much of the substantial quantities of olive oil produced on Methana at this time⁴⁴ was sold to merchants, especially from Piraeus.

The growth of the port of Piraeus at the governmental centre of Greece also affected the development of some parts of Methana over others. For much of antiquity and up into the Turkish period, Vathy and the beach between it and Palaiokastros (site 10) seem to have provided the main harbour facilities for Methana. However, the growth of a busy coasting trade within the Saronic Gulf, based on Piraeus, led to the development of Kounoupitsa as a notable sailing community. Unlike Vathy and its adjacent beach, in a sheltered position in the Gulf of Epidaurus, Ayios Yioryios, Kounoupitsa's harbour, was unprotected from the fierce north-easterly winds which periodically make sailing in the Saronic Gulf, and elsewhere in the Aegean, hazardous. Its exposed position on the north coast of Methana, however, put it in an almost direct line with Piraeus and encouraged the inhabitants of Kounoupitsa to develop a small coasting fleet. As the main point of contact with the capital, Kounoupitsa also became one of the two administrative centres on the peninsula. Meghalo Khori, although the largest community on Methana, was not an administrative centre in the 1880s because of its peripheral position in the new Saronic Gulf communication system.

Development of a spa below the village of Vromolimni in the early 1870s added to Methana's external connections.⁴⁵ Although at first facilities were extremely rudimentary, within ten years some 20 buildings of different sizes had been built to accommodate bathers. Food was provided by enterprising Methana farmers, but until as late as the 1960s drinking water had to be bought, being transported by boat from Poros. In recognition of the importance of these visitors, Methana during the 1880s had two part-time administrative centres: during the summer (15 April – 14 September) at the village of Vromolimni, above the sulphur springs, and during the winter (15 September – 14 April), when the spa was unused, at Kounoupitsa, the main point of contact for coasting vessels.⁴⁶

Methana rapidly became quite a popular spa: already by 1896 there was a permanent population of 114 in the Loutra settlement, separate from the village of Vromolimni above it, and this had more than doubled by 1907.⁴⁷ As a spa, Methana benefitted by being readily accessible from the capital, via boats from Piraeus. At a time when the Greek road network was at best rudimentary, ready access by sea was a major advantage.

By the 1880s, out-migration had become a significant factor: Miliarakis'

description indicates that nearly 9% of those born on Methana were resident elsewhere. Although a much smaller figure than that of Hydra (over 40%), whose population plummeted throughout the mid-to-late nineteenth century, it is significantly higher than that of the rugged mainland on the opposite side of the Gulf of Epidaurus from Methana.⁴⁸ Had it not been for the development of the spa, out-migration would probably have been considerably greater.

The appearance of out-migration as a significant factor is understandable, given the restricted land-area of Methana and the rapid rise in its population, especially in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century. Oral histories indicate that most of those who left went to Athens or Piraeus, which were expanding very rapidly at this time: by 1912 there were so many Methana expatriates there that they formed their own regional association. Informants on Methana agree that many emigrants were among the poorest on the peninsula. Nevertheless, some were among the wealthiest: they moved to the economic centre because it provided more opportunities for investment than a rural area like Methana. In both these cases, the result was a reduction in the range of wealth classes on the peninsula – a phenomenon still affecting it after World War II.

The presence of the capital close by allowed many parents to provide their children with a livelihood (e.g. a skilled trade) or property (especially as dowry) there in order to reduce the problems of fragmentation of farm holdings. This livelihood or property was considered the child's inheritance: a family's land was then divided only between those children who were left on the peninsula.

It is tempting to decry such actions as the steady bleeding away of much-needed capital from Methana towards the economic centre, stifling any possibility of economic development within the peninsula. Although it is not always clear how it became available, from oral evidence it would seem that when capital was needed for various relatively major projects (in terms of peasant household economies) it could be found. Sales of agricultural produce, especially olive oil, were apparently one source. Ethnographic study on Methana indicates a tradition of keeping agricultural produce in store for several years precisely to provide such capital lump sums.⁴⁹ Another source of cash was short-term out-migration, such as seasonal work at the salt-pans in Attica. But working away from Methana for some years in order to make a substantial capital sum was another. Several Methanites worked on the Panama canal: some of them were still regaling incredulous villagers with their experiences when ethnographic fieldwork was first undertaken in the early 1970s.

Structures still visible on Methana are eloquent evidence that capital was widely available when needed, even if in relatively small individual amounts. The early development of the spa is the most obvious example, accommodation and other local facilities being built mostly by Methanites. In addition, two small hamlets (now abandoned) in the interior of the peninsula were built at this time. In the villages, inscribed dates on many houses and cisterns dating from the 1860s up to the First World War testify to substantial capital outlays. Most of the grape-pressing floors located near vineyards (see above, p. 75) were also probably constructed during this period. Finally, the change-over by the beginning of the twentieth century from cattle to mules (which were much more expensive to purchase) as traction animals likewise indicates increasing monetization and capital investment in the agrarian economy, related to the intensity of land use engendered by land shortages.

Methana from World War I to the present day

Developments in transportation again loom large in our understanding of the Methana population's relationship to its landscape and to the outside world in this period. One of the most fundamental improvements for Methanites during this period seems to have been the introduction of the motorized *kaiiki*. Methanites claim that many refugees who came from Asia Minor at the end of World War I invested the capital assets that they brought with them into these modern coasting vessels. The result was a much more reliable communications network between Methana and the port of Piraeus. Previously, *kaiikia* in the Saronic Gulf area had been wind powered: sometimes a wait of several days was necessary before there was a favourable wind to transport people or goods from or to Piraeus.

The appearance of reliable transport meant that Methanites were now prepared to make substantial capital investments to increase their cultivation of fresh produce. Methana's fertile soil and substantial land area close to the sea where the climate is particularly warm were ideal for growing fresh fruit and vegetables, many of which could fetch premium prices because of their earliness. But there was little incentive to grow such perishable crops as long as there was a serious risk of having to wait several days for a fair wind.

Wells of up to twenty metres deep were dug for irrigating summer vegetables. They and their associated equipment were major capital investments, needing both specialist technicians and substantial supplies of explosive for their digging. The water-lifting devices also demanded considerable cash outlay, as did the

stone-built *kalyvia* which were often built beside these installations. Fig trees were also planted on land close to the sea to allow earlier shipment of fresh figs sent to Athens. These observations underline the statement made above that, when opportunities for investment were available, capital could be found.

The introduction of reliable *kaikia* and steamers doubtless also helped the development of the spa, which boomed in the inter-war years. By the end of the interwar period Loutra was by far the largest community on Methana. The construction during this period of facilities to allow steamers to dock at the settlement (unlike the situation at Kounoupitsa and Vathy) meant that most contact with the outside world was now via Loutra. Thus unlike the situation on Aegean islands like Kea, where the nineteenth-century pattern of settlement dispersal continued,⁵⁰ on Methana many of the villages lost population or barely maintained it, while Loutra's population rapidly grew.

By 1940, Loutra had expanded to the point where much of the settlement was now permanent and it provided a number of specialist services on which the inhabitants of the other villages depended. Thus whereas the nineteenth-century settlement pattern had been one of several roughly equal-sized villages, none of which was plainly dominant, now the pattern was of a dominant settlement at Loutra, upon which the other settlements depended, both for specialist services, and as their major link with the outside world.

The development of the spa had knock-on effects in the villages. Farmers, both from the nearby village of Vromolimni, and from others, who had land close to the shore near the springs, or with enough capital to buy a plot of land, built more accommodation. Other farmers, who did not have land close to the spa, would sell fresh produce to the visitors. Demand by summer visitors for fresh vegetables and fruit started to affect agriculture. In particular, many farmers set aside areas of unirrigated but water-retentive land on which they grew large numbers of melons for sale in the spa, transporting them in baskets on mules or donkeys.

The timing of the functioning of the spa in the summer months also fitted in with agricultural activities since this is a period of relative inactivity under traditional rainfall agriculture regimes in the Mediterranean. Cultivation of crops for sale to summer visitors and work in the spa did not therefore clash unduly with other agricultural activities. In this way, cash from the urban-dwellers found its way to many villages on Methana.

Investment in land was not limited to building plots. The nearby plain of Troezenia was malarial and still distinctly underdeveloped agriculturally. Al-

though the exact timing is unclear from oral sources, it would seem that during the interwar years many Methanites bought substantial plots of land on the plain, on which they cultivated cereals or vines. Because of the distance of these plots from Methana (over six hours' walk away), a large number of Methanites had field-houses built on their plots so that they could stay there for the duration of their work. The produce from these plots was shipped back to Methana in small boats hired for the purpose. Occasionally, grape-pressing floors were built by the shore: grapes from the plain could thus be pressed as soon as they were unloaded and only the juice, carried in goat-skins, was transported to the village.

The exploitation of the plain of Troezenia was therefore costly, both in terms of capital outlay, and in recurrent transport costs. It was also costly in health terms, malaria being a major problem until it was eradicated after World War II. Methanites report people working on the harvest in the plain contracting the disease, which, although it does not seem to have caused any deaths, occasionally caused serious problems, such as miscarriages among pregnant women.

Although Methanites who remember the inter-war years describe the hardships of making a living by agriculture, in comparison with life in many parts of Greece, they appear to have been relatively well off. Cash seems always to have been in short supply, but many families had access to capital when the need arose: much anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of families had difficulties finding suitable investment opportunities.

The Axis Occupation of Greece was a time of considerable hardship for much of the peninsula's population. Yet although many people who lived through that time reported being frequently hungry, no one who lived there, in contrast to the situation in the cities, seems to have starved to death. Once again, Methana's close proximity to the capital meant that any available rural produce found a ready market.

From the end of the civil war up until the 1960s the situation on Methana was not unlike that of the inter-war years. But the increasing modernization of medicine, agriculture and transportation links in Greece started to have significant effects on Methana after about 1960. Although fewer people now come for the spa waters, domestic tourism continues to flourish at a moderate level as people wish to escape the heat and pollution of major cities. Improved transportation links, however, mean that many people choose to travel further from Athens. Furthermore, a lack of island status and of sandy beaches means that it is difficult to attract foreign tourists to the resort. Thus although Methana's tourist industry

is buoyant, it is not booming like that of a number of the islands.

Agriculture has not fared so well. Methana's farming has traditionally been based on subsistence considerations,⁵¹ with small scattered plots producing a great variety of crops worked by human and animal labour. But with its terraced landscape and lack of substantial ground-water supplies, Methana cannot compete with the modern agricultural methods used elsewhere in Greece. Furthermore, the development of efficient transport links throughout the country means that proximity to the capital is a far less important consideration than previously.

Under these circumstances, many of those who have stayed on Methana rather than migrating to Athens have moved to Loutra, from where they can cultivate a few plots of land, particularly those with olives, during the winter months. Their primary income is frequently non-agricultural, however. Villages are therefore rapidly losing their populations to Loutra, and large sectors of the landscape consist of abandoned terraces overgrown with scrub or pine trees.

Summary

One major feature which underlies the developments outlined above is Methana's extremely rugged topography, allied to its fertile soils. A second is its quasi-insular position. Together they have made Methana an unusually secure part of the Peloponnese for settlement in past centuries, even in very troubled times. A third factor, at least since the middle of the eighteenth century, is that Methana has found itself close to major economic centres: first the Argo-Saronic offshore islands, and later the capital. These observations, however, only serve to emphasise that none of the changes that we have identified is understandable without reference to other developments in the wider world, be it the Aegean, Greece, or the whole world economic system.

During the late-medieval and Ottoman periods, Methana's ruggedness and semi-island setting gave its population a reasonable degree of security in a period of social, political and economic instability. The locations of settlements during this long period seem to reflect the approximate level of risk of attack. In the later part of the Turkish period, security appears to have been improved by the proximity of the substantial fleets of the islands of Hydra, Spetses and Poros, located in the Argo-Saronic area. These islands themselves rose to prominence largely by being on the sailing route between the major centres of the eastern Mediterranean and those in the western Mediterranean. Methana did not participate directly in these mercantile developments: withdrawal from the outside

world seems to have been a prime concern. Nevertheless, it benefitted from the security derived from being close to these power centres.

Security again seems to have been the primary consideration in the development of new settlements during the War of Independence. Once more the internal physical aspects of the peninsula are only part of the story: Methana's location put it in one of the safest parts of Greece during the whole period of the war. Even in the first decades after the war, the rapid population increase can be best understood in terms of the security provided by the peninsula, combined with its agricultural potential in the form of fertile soils.

Stability returned to Greece in the second half of the nineteenth century, and political and economic activities became increasingly centralized in Athens and Piraeus. Lying in the Saronic Gulf, Methana was again well placed to take advantage of propinquity to major economic centres. This time, however, it was not the umbrella of security that these provided, but access to markets. Thus Methana's history since about 1860 has largely involved the exploitation of market opportunities connected with the capital. Some of these opportunities involved shipping agricultural produce to the urban population; others involved bringing the urban population to Methana. In either case, proximity to the centre has been a major factor. The introduction of large-scale, mechanized agriculture and the development of fast communications between the centre and distant parts of the country have undermined Methana's agricultural and, to some extent, its tourism advantages. Its ruggedness and broken topography, once a major reason for settling there, are now the cause of population loss.

NOTES

Since the Methana Survey was completed, a Mycenaean site was discovered at Ayios Konstandinos (site 13), on a small plateau with wide views over the Saronic Gulf. Its recognition and preservation were due in no small part to the energetic intervention of the local archaeological guard, who halted bulldozing of the site at the critical moment. As a result of subsequent excavations by Eleni Konsolaki of the Second Ephorate, a major Mycenaean shrine has been uncovered, with rich finds, including many examples of rare types of terracotta figurines. So far the full extent of the Mycenaean site is as yet unknown and only the briefest of preliminary reports of the excavation are available (*Archaeological Reports* No. 40 [1994] 13; *Ta Nea*, 7 May 1994). Indications of the possible existence of a shrine were apparent during regional survey in the form of a Mycenaean figurine, but the full significance of the site was not realized at that stage.

1 J.L. Davis, 'Contributions to a Mediterranean rural archaeology: historical case studies in the

Ottoman Cyclades', *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 4 (1991) 131-216.

2 E.g. Kea: J.F. Cherry, J.L. Davis, and E. Mantzourani (eds), *Landscape Archaeology as Long-Term History. Northern Keos in the Cycladic Islands from Earliest Settlement until Modern Times* (Los Angeles 1991); Melos: C. Renfrew and M. Wagstaff (eds.), *An Island Polity: the Archaeology of Exploitation in Melos* (Cambridge 1982).

3 E.g. Ermionis: T.H. van Andel and C.N. Runnels, *Beyond the Acropolis: a Greek Rural Past* (Stanford, Cal. 1987); M.H. Jameson, C.N. Runnels, T.H. van Andel, *A Greek Countryside. The Southern Argolid from Prehistory to the Present Day* (Stanford, Cal. 1994).

4 Davis, 'Contributions', 133.

5 E.g. J.L. Bintliff and A.M. Snodgrass, 'The Cambridge/Bradford Boeotian expedition: the first four years', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 12 (1985) 123-61; J.A. Lloyd, E.J. Owens and J. Roy, 'The Megalopolis survey in Arcadia' in S. Macreaddy and F.H. Thompson (eds.), *Archaeological Survey in Britain and Abroad* (London 1985) 217-24.

6 Davis, 'Contributions', 134.

7 E.g. S.B. Sutton, 'Population, economy and settlement in post-revolutionary Keos: a cultural anthropological study' in Cherry *et al.*, *Landscape Archaeology*, 383-402.

8 C.B. Mee and H.A. Forbes (eds.), forthcoming.

9 V. Panayiotopoulos, Πληθυσμός και οικισμοί τῆς Πελοποννήσου. 13ος-18ος αἰώνας (Athens 1985) 247, 294.

10 A. Nani, *Affitanze della Morea*, National Library of Greece, manuscript no. 3925.

11 Travellers' reports by E. Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour Through Greece* (London 1819), II 278-84; F.-C.-H.-L. Pouqueville, *Voyage de la Grèce* (Paris 1826-27), IV 143, V 247-56, and 264; W.M. Leake, *Travels in the Morea* (London 1830), II 453-56; and W.M. Leake, *Peloponnesiaca – A Supplement to Travels in the Morea* (London 1846) 278-9 are the most useful. For the French expedition, see J.B.G.M. Bory de Saint-Vincent, *Expedition scientifique de la Morée* II (Paris 1834).

12 M. Khouliarakis, Γεωγραφική, διοικητική και πληθυσμιακή εξέλιξις τῆς Ἑλλάδος 1821-1971 (Athens 1973), I, part 1, 32-45; and part 2, 1-245.

13 A. Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία πολιτική νέα και ἀρχαία τοῦ Νομοῦ Ἀργολίδος και Κορινθίας (Athens 1886).

14 T. Akritas, Μέθανα: ἡ ἱστορικὴ Χερσονήσος. Ὁ γύρος τῆς Χερσονήσου (Athens 1957); for Methana, twentieth-century censuses are well summarized in N. Pharaklas, Τροικηγία, Καλαύρεια, Μέθανα (Athens, n.d.), appendix 1.

15 Davis, 'Contributions'.

16 Dodwell, *Classical and Topographical*, 279-84.

17 C. Mee, D. Gill, H. Forbes, and L. Foxhall, 'Rural settlement change in the Methana peninsula, Greece' in G. Barker and J. Lloyd (eds.) *Roman Landscapes. Archaeological Survey in the Mediterranean Region* (London 1991) 223-32.

18 Cf. J. Bennet and S. Voutsaki, 'A synopsis and analysis of travellers' accounts of Keos (to 1821)' in Cherry, *Landscape Archaeology*, 369-70.

19 Mee, 'Rural settlement', 228.

20 Davis, 'Contributions', 134-6.

21 Panayiotopoulos, Πληθυσμός, 61-8.

22 Panayiotopoulos, Πληθυσμός, 81-3.

23 Jameson, *Greek Countryside*, 124.

24 Bennet and Voutsaki, 'Accounts of Keos'; Sutton, 'Post-revolutionary Keos'.

25 Panayiotopoulos, Πληθυσμός, 144-5, 247, 294.

26 Dodwell, *Classical and Topographical*, 279-84.

27 Source: Panayiotopoulos, Πληθυσμός, 247.

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- 31 Dodwell, *Classical and Topographical*, 279; see also Pouqueville, *Voyage*, IV, 143.
- 32 C. Michaelides, *Hydra: a Greek Island Town, its Growth and Form* (Chicago 1967) 16-19.
- 33 Bory de Saint Vincent, *Expedition*; Khouliarakis, Γεωγραφική, 32-46; Leake *Peloponnesiaca*. Travellers' reports: n.11 above.
- 34 Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία.
- 35 W. St. Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: the Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (London 1972) 291. E. Vanderpool, *The Antiquities of the Peninsula of Methana*, American School of Classical Studies at Athens (1930) 7.
- 36 Khouliarakis, Γεωγραφική, 33.
- 37 Leake, *Peloponnesiaca*, map.
- 38 Bennet and Voutsaki, 'Accounts of Keos', 380-1.
- 39 Khouliarakis, Γεωγραφική, I, parts 1 and 2; cf. Fekri Hassan, *Demographic Archaeology* (New York 1981) 125, 234.
- 40 1848-1870: 1.2% per annum; 1870-1896: 0.5% per annum. Khouliarakis, Γεωγραφική, I, part 2; cf. Hassan, *Demographic Archaeology* 234.
- 41 Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία, 207-10.
- 42 J.G. Frazer, *Pausanias' Description of Greece* (London 1898) 287.
- 43 Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία, 203, 207, 209.
- 44 Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία, 209-10.
- 45 Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία, 207; Akritas, Μέθανα, 20-1.
- 46 Miliarakis, Γεωγραφία, 208; cf Akritas, Μέθανα, 14.
- 47 Khouliarakis, Γεωγραφική, I part 2, 191, 285.
- 48 Miliarakis Γεωγραφία, 179, 205, 210.
- 49 H. Forbes, *Strategies and Soils: Technology, Production and Environment in the Peninsula of Methana, Greece*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania (1982) 377-91.
- 50 Sutton, 'Post-revolutionary Keos', 395-7.
- 51 H. Forbes, "'We have a little of everything': the ecological basis of some agricultural practices on Methana, Trizinia", in Dimen and Friedl, *Regional Variation*, 236-50.

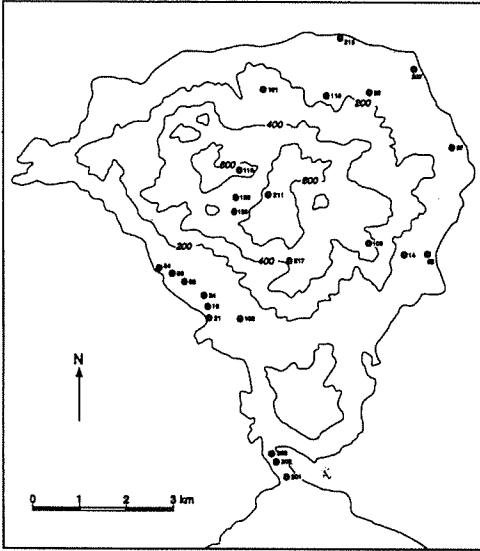


Figure 1: Medieval and Ottoman period sites on Methana.

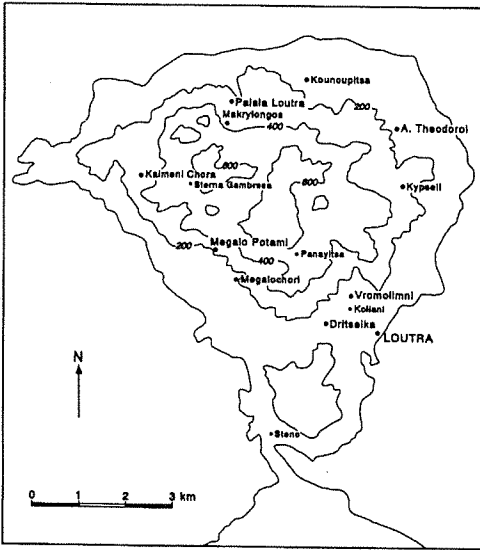


Figure 2: Present-day settlement pattern of Methana.
(Larger dots = inhabited villages, smaller dots = abandoned hamlets.)

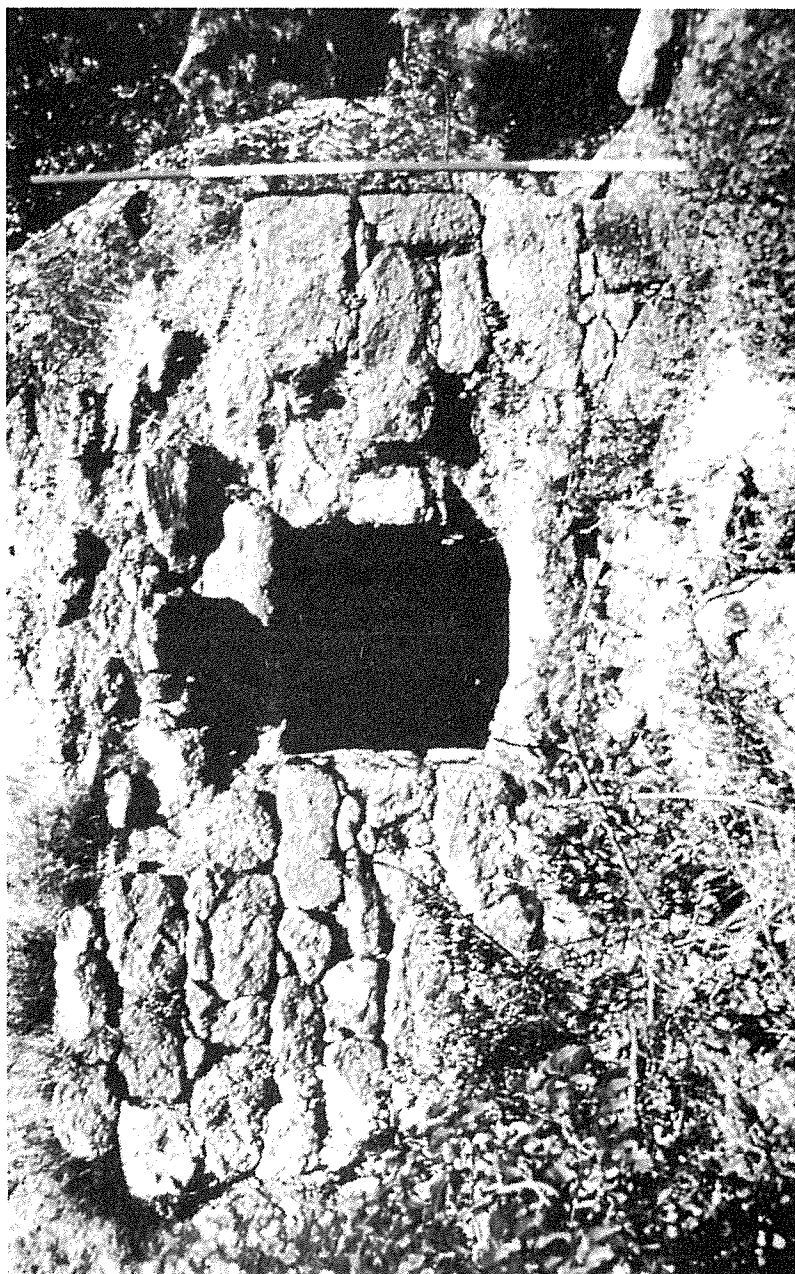


Figure 3: A disused *ambari*.