

# Arsinoe in the Peloponnese: the Ptolemaic base on the Methana peninsula<sup>1</sup>

*D. Gill*

In the late nineteenth century, an Egyptian portrait head was recovered from the sea off the island of Aegina. The piece, clearly a royal portrait with double crown and broken uraeus, was inscribed with hieroglyphs and was quickly recognised as a portrait of Ptolemy VI Philometor.<sup>2</sup> It is not clear if the portrait had been displayed on the island of Aegina or somewhere bordering the Saronic Gulf, or if it had been dumped in modern times as excess ballast from a passing sailing ship.<sup>3</sup> One possibility is that the statue was linked to one of the Ptolemaic bases in the Aegean, perhaps that located at the nearby peninsula of Methana.

## **The Methana Peninsula**

The Methana peninsula adjoins the eastern side of the Argolid, pointing into the Saronic Gulf (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> To the east lies the island of Poros, and to the north-east the island of Aegina. Methana is linked to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, a feature which was fortified from at least the fifth century BCE.<sup>5</sup> The peninsula is largely volcanic, and the main dome rises to 760 m. Mineral springs are found around the peninsula, on the north side at the modern settlement of Pausanias, named in honour of the second century AD Roman travel writer who described the peninsula, and on the east side at Loutra, the modern spa-town of Methana, much frequented by present-day Athenians. The historic settlement of Methana lay on the west side of the peninsula at the site of Palaiokastro near the modern village of Megalochori.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my former colleagues from the Methana survey, especially Christopher Mee, Hugh Bowden, Hamish Forbes and Lin Foxhall, who have added much to my understanding of the peninsula in the Hellenistic period. Sheila L. Ager has offered helpful comments on aspects of the boundary disputes between Arsinoe and its neighbours.

<sup>2</sup> Athens, National Archaeological Museum ANE 108. Six 1887; Tzachou-Alexandri 1995, 165, no. 108; Richter 1984, 235, fig. 213; Hölbl 2001, 185, fig. 7.1. The head had been displayed in the Egyptian sculpture gallery of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens though this collection is no longer on public view.

<sup>3</sup> Six 1887, 220.

<sup>4</sup> Mee and Forbes 1997. See also: Forbes, et al. 1996; Mee and Cavanagh 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Thucydides 4.45. For the fortified sites on the isthmus: Mee, et al. 1997, 162–7, MS200–3. See also: Gill, et al. 1997, 65.

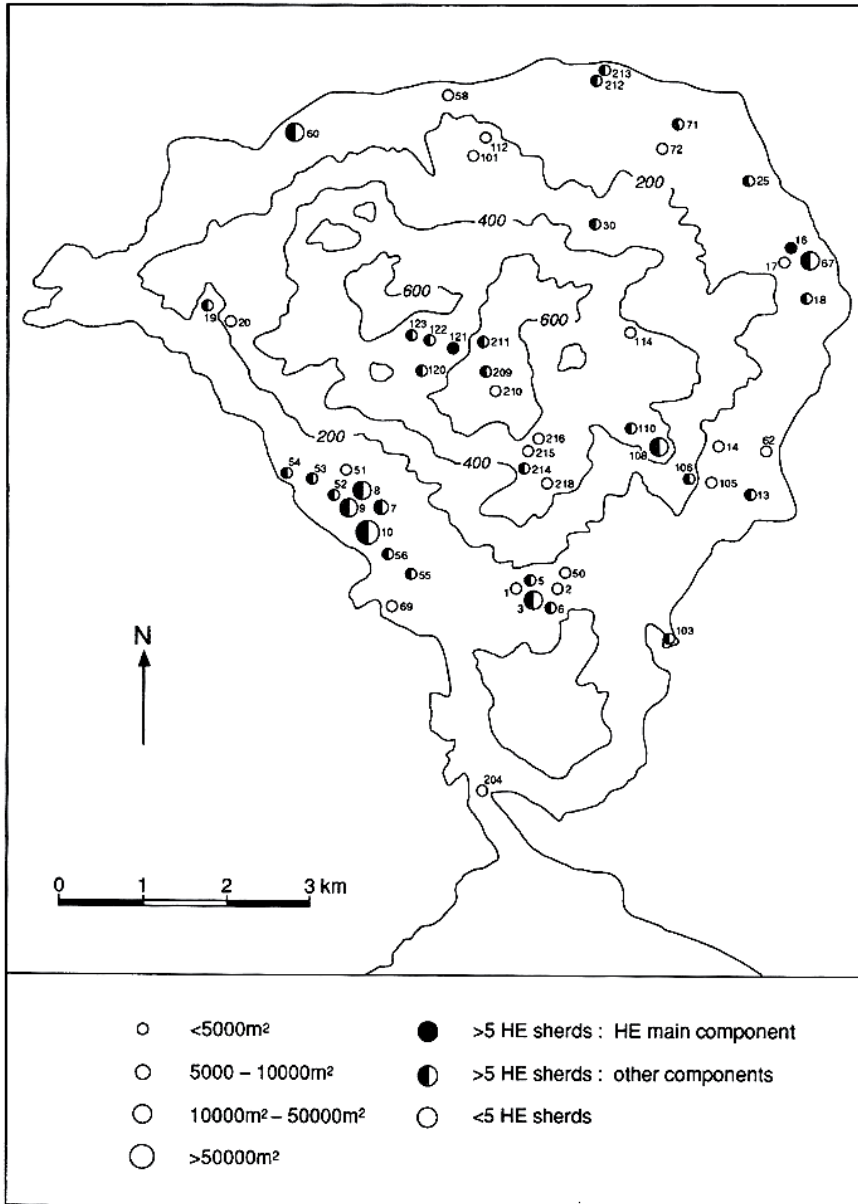


Figure 1: Map of the Methana peninsula in the Hellenistic period (after Mee and Forbes). The fortified Ptolemaic harbour lies on the eastern side of the peninsula (MS103). The main urban settlement lies on the west side (MS10).

The peninsula is significant for its geological fame. It lies at the west end of an arc of volcanoes that stretch across the southern Aegean, and include the island of Thera (Santorini). The last major eruption on Methana was in the early third century BCE. There are two descriptions: the first in the Roman geographer Strabo (1.3.18):

*a mountain seven stadia in height was cast up in consequence of a fiery eruption, and the mountain was unapproachable by day on account of the heat and the smell of sulphur, while at night it shone to a great distance and was so hot that the sea boiled for five stadia and was turbid even for twenty stadia, and was heaped up with massive broken-off rocks no smaller than towers (trans. H.L. Jones, LCL).*

A more colourful description comes in the Roman poet Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 15.296–306).

*Near Troezen ... there is a hill, high and treeless, which once was a perfectly level plain, but now a hill. For (horrible to relate) the wild forces of the winds, shut up in dark regions underground, seeking an outlet for their flowing and striving vainly to obtain a freer space, since there was no chink in all their prison through which their breath could go, puffed out and stretched the ground, just as one inflates a bladder with his breath, or the skin of a horned goat. That swelling in the ground remained, has still the appearance of a high hill, and has hardened as the years went by.*

The date for the eruption is provided by Pausanias who suggested that it took place when ‘Antigonos was king in Macedonia’, in other words Antigonos Gonatas (284–239 BCE).<sup>6</sup>

Little detail was known about the archaeology of the peninsula until the 1980s. Nineteenth-century travellers had visited Methana and recorded inscriptions, among them Edward Dodwell (1767–1832) in the first decade.<sup>7</sup> Before the outbreak of the First World War M. Deffner of the German Archaeological Institute in Athens had investigated some of the extant architectural remains, which was followed by the sherding of the main acropolis area.<sup>8</sup> The distinguished American excavator Eugene Vanderpool, then a student of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, had written a report in 1930 based on a field visit; it remains unpublished.<sup>9</sup> An anthropological study of the peninsula by Hamish Forbes encouraged a full collaborative field project co-ordinated by the University of Liverpool and the British School at Athens.<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly the first excavation on the peninsula was conducted in 1979 on a Late Roman structure on the west side; and in more recent years the discovery of a major Mycenaean (LH III A-B) cult site with numerous terracotta offerings has been found in the eastern side of the peninsula.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Pausanias 2.34.2. For an eruption during the Ptolemaic occupation of Thera: Forsyth 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Dodwell 1819.

<sup>8</sup> Deffner 1909.

<sup>9</sup> The manuscript is in the library of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. For Vanderpool at this time: Lord 1947, 394. For British interest in Methana immediately after the First World War: Gill in press.

<sup>10</sup> Mee and Forbes 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Shelmerdine 2001, 366–7, figs. 12–3, 380; Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004. Finds from the excavation are displayed in the Piraeus Museum. Other material from the Methana peninsula,

### The Chremonidean War and the Ptolemaic bases in the southern Aegean

One of the reasons for the establishment of the base at Methana was presumably to provide a secure harbour for the Ptolemaic fleet.<sup>12</sup> The most likely context for its occupation was during the Chremonidean War.<sup>13</sup> Greece at this time was dominated by the two kingdoms that had emerged from the Macedonian conquests of the fourth century BCE, namely the Antigonids in Macedonia, and the Ptolemies of Egypt. Ptolemy II Philadelphus seems to have developed close links with Athens during the 270s.<sup>14</sup> This led to a three-way treaty between the Ptolemies, Athens (under the influence of Chremonides) and Sparta, in an attempt to counterbalance Antigonos Gonatas.<sup>15</sup> The alliance was expressed in an Athenian decree that is probably best dated to 268/7 (if that is the date for Peithodemos' archonship) at the start of the war.<sup>16</sup> The three main parties were joined by other poleis and leagues: Elis, the Achaean League, Tegea, Mantinea, Orchomenos, Phigaleia, Kaphyai, and 'the Cretans'.

Macedonia had occupied the Piraeus, the strategic harbour of Athens, in 294,<sup>17</sup> and this facility was denied the Ptolemaic fleet which arrived in the Aegean under the command of the *strategos* Patroklos (probably in 267).<sup>18</sup> The Ptolemaic fleet had therefore to establish strategic bases around Attika.<sup>19</sup> One of them was on a small island off the southern coast of Attica, 'Patroklos' Island' (Patróklu), or as the Augustan geographer Strabo (9.1.21) called it the 'palisade (χάραξ) of Patroklos'.<sup>20</sup> It was noted in the second century AD by Pausanias who commented on the

*quite small deserted island called after Patroklos, who built a camp on it and constructed a wall. He was admiral of the Egyptian galleys that Ptolemy sent to help the Athenians at the time Antigonos at the head of an invading army was devastating the land and pressing in with his fleet at sea.*<sup>21</sup>

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including some of the inscriptions, is stored in the Poros Museum.

<sup>12</sup> Bagnall 1976, 135–6. For aspects of the Ptolemaic fleet: Lloyd 2000, 397–8.

<sup>13</sup> Tarn 1934; Heinen 1972, 131, 199–201; Walbank 1984, 236–43; Jameson, et al. 1994, 88; Shipley 2000, 125–7; Hölbl 2001, 40–3; Shipley 2005, 321. For the context of Ptolemaic bases at this time: Shear 1978, 17–18. See also Huss 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Habicht 1992; Habicht 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Hölbl 2001, 40–1. See also Pausanias 3.6.4–6.

<sup>16</sup> Athens, Epigraphic Museum. *SIG* 3 434/6; *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 687 + 686; Austin 1981, 94–7, no. 49; Burstein 1985, no. 56. See also Walbank 1984, 236; Gabbert 1987; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 35–6; Shipley 2000, 125–6; Tracy 2003a; Tracy 2003b. For observations on the chronology of the war: Tracy 1990, 545.

<sup>17</sup> Camp II 2001, 166–7. For further information on this period: Palagia and Tracy 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Tarn 1934, 27–8.

<sup>19</sup> Walbank is perhaps unnecessarily cautious in suggesting 'the help accorded by Ptolemy was unimpressive': Walbank 1984, 238.

<sup>20</sup> Hölbl 2001, 41. See also Camp II 2001, 167–8.

<sup>21</sup> Paus. 1.1.1.

Such a base would dominate access to Athens from the approaches round Cape Sounion; Sounion itself was under the control of the Macedonians.<sup>22</sup>

A second major base has been identified at Koroni near Porto Raphti on the east coast of Attica which was excavated by the American School in the early 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Numismatic evidence suggests that there was significant activity in the reign of Ptolemy II,<sup>24</sup> and the pottery indicates that occupation was short-lived.<sup>25</sup> Moreover the parallels for the Rhodian amphoras come not from the rest of Attica but from Alexandria.<sup>26</sup> At least three other Ptolemaic bases in Attica are known. On the north-east of Attica a further base was secured at Rhamnous where a fort had been constructed in the fifth century BCE.<sup>27</sup> An inscription from Rhamnous mentions Epichares, a hipparch (appointed in the archonship of Lysithides, 272/1), who made provision for the troops of Patroklos 'who came to aid' (*ἐπι τὴν βοήθειαν*).<sup>28</sup> This probably should be dated to 264/3 or a little later. A base at Rhamnous would have controlled shipping between Euboea and mainland Attica. Numismatic evidence also points to Ptolemaic activity in the region of the Mikro Kavouri peninsula near the sanctuary of Apollo Zoster at Vouliameni,<sup>29</sup> and at Helioupolis just to the south of Athens on the south-western slopes of Hymettos.<sup>30</sup> Both sites appear to be contemporary with Koroni as all have yielded coins of Ptolemy II.

The Ptolemaic force seems to have established island bases in the southern Aegean at this time. Thera seems to have been occupied by Patroklos, and its first commander (*epistates*) seems to have been an individual by name of Apollodotos in 267/6.<sup>31</sup> The city of Koressos (Koresia) in the north-western corner

<sup>22</sup> The artillery bastion ( $\Delta$ ), made in part from reused funerary monuments, at Sounion on the mainland opposite the island may, perhaps, date to this time; Goette 2003, though the suggestion that the 3rd century BCE work belongs to the period after 229 is not compelling. See also Camp II 2001, 168–9, fig. 163, 305–10. A decree of 298/7 shows that Sounion was then under the control of Athens: Goette 2003, 159, fig. 12, a–b. For the control of Sounion by Antigonos Gonatas after 255: Tracy 2003a, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Vanderpool, et al. 1962; Grace 1963; Edwards 1963; Vanderpool, et al. 1964. See also Camp II 2001, 281–3. For the implications of Koroni for the study of Hellenistic pottery: Rotroff 1997, 31–2.

<sup>24</sup> Vanderpool, et al. 1962, 57. 24 out of 32 coins were Ptolemaic, of which 19 were assigned to Ptolemy II Philadelphus. It is suggested that the coins are no later than 265/4 BCE.

<sup>25</sup> Vanderpool, et al. 1962, 56.

<sup>26</sup> McCredie 1966, 12.

<sup>27</sup> For the site: Petrakos 1991, esp. 50; Camp II 2001, 301–5. For Rhamnous in the mid-3rd century: Habicht 2003, 52–3.

<sup>28</sup> *SEG* xxiv (1969) 154; Heinen 1972, 152–4; Austin 1981, 97–8, no. 50. Vanderpool, et al. 1962, 60; Shipley 2000, 126. The inscription is dated by the archon Peithidemos (line 5) to the start of the Chremonidean war. For this period: Meritt 1981. See also Walbank 1984, 238.

<sup>29</sup> Varoucha-Christodouloupoulou 1953/54. Nine coins of Ptolemy II are noted. See also Vanderpool, et al. 1962, 60; McCredie 1966, 30. For the location: Travlos 1988, 466–79, esp. fig. 588. Early Hellenistic pottery was also reported from the site.

<sup>30</sup> Varoucha-Christodouloupoulou 1953/54. See also McCredie 1966, 46–8. Finds also included arrowheads and sling bullets. 45 coins of Ptolemy II are noted.

<sup>31</sup> Bagnall 1976, 124. See *IG* xii, 3, 320. See also Ager in preparation.

of the island of Keos also served as a Ptolemaic base. The attraction seems to have been the harbour of Ayios Nikolaos.<sup>32</sup> Again the context for occupation seems to have been during the Chremonidean war.<sup>33</sup> ‘The Cretans’ are mentioned in the Chremonides Decree from the start of the Chremonidean War.<sup>34</sup> Patroklos is known to have landed at Itanos in the east of the island on his way to the Aegean during the Chremonidean War and as a result had been granted citizenship.<sup>35</sup> Patroklos’ party were also honoured at Olus on the Gulf of Mirabello, Crete.<sup>36</sup>

The Chremonidean War ended with defeat for the Ptolemaic alliance: Areus, one of the Spartan kings, was killed at Corinth,<sup>37</sup> and Athens fell into the hands of the Macedonians (262/1).<sup>38</sup> Chremonides fled to Egypt and he is later found as an officer in the Ptolemaic fleet.

### The Ptolemaic base of Methana (Arsinoe)

The numismatic evidence for the other Ptolemaic bases in the southern Aegean suggests that the likely context for the occupation of the Methana peninsula was during the Chremonidean War.<sup>39</sup> At this time Methana was a *polis* independent of her neighbour Troizen.<sup>40</sup> The peninsula may have still been recovering from the eruption in the earlier part of the century (or if Pausanias’ testimony is to be trusted perhaps no more than a decade or so before the occupation); the settlement at Magoula on the north side of the peninsula, and closest to the volcano, was possibly abandoned by the time of the eruption, and Oga on the east side was probably abandoned shortly afterwards.<sup>41</sup> If this date is correct, it would seem that both Methana and Koressos (Koresia) on the nearby island of Keos were renamed Arsinoe at this time in honour of Ptolemy’s sister and wife, Arsinoe II.<sup>42</sup> It is perhaps significant that the Chremonides Decree indicated Ptolemy’s involvement with Athens and Sparta was ‘in accordance

<sup>32</sup> Bagnall 1976, 141–5; Caskey 1982; Cherry and Davis 1991.

<sup>33</sup> Bagnall 1976, 142; Cherry and Davis 1991, 16. See also Walbank 1984, 238.

<sup>34</sup> Burstein 1985, no. 56.

<sup>35</sup> I *Cret* III.4.2–3; see also Austin 1981, 447, no. 267. See Hölbl 2001, 42. For the acquisition during the Chremonidean War: I *Cret* III, 77. See also Walbank 1984, 238.

<sup>36</sup> I *Cret* I.22.4. For further details of the city with comments on its strategic harbour: Myers, et al. 1992, 216–21.

<sup>37</sup> Pompeius Trogus *Prolog.* 26; Plutarch, *Agis* 3. Stroud 1971, 143–4; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 37; see also McCredie 1966, 108.

<sup>38</sup> A Macedonian garrison was placed on the Mouseion Hill: see Burstein 1985, no. 58; Tracy 1990, 545. This took place in the archonship of Antipater.

<sup>39</sup> Bagnall 1976, 135 (suggesting a date after 270 when Arsinoe II died); Jameson, et al. 1994, 89; Cohen 1995, 125 (‘soon after the death of Queen Arsinoe II in 268 B.C.’); Hölbl 2001, 41.

<sup>40</sup> The view is supported by the issuing of coins by the polis of Methana: Gill 1997. For earlier epigraphic evidence (which need no longer be associated with Methana): Bauslaugh 1990.

<sup>41</sup> Gill, et al. 1997, 73. For details of the sites: Mee, et al. 1997, 143–4 (MS60, Magoula), 146–8 (MS67, Oga).

<sup>42</sup> For the date: Bagnall 1976, 142. See also Robert 1960, 157–9; Jones and Habicht 1989, 333.



with his ancestors' and his sister's [sc. Arsinoe's] policy'.<sup>43</sup> Thus renaming the polis of Methana with the name Arsinoe would be in keeping with the spirit of Ptolemy's new alliance. The occupation of the Methana peninsula may also have been a strategic one. The peninsula would have served as a useful link between the Peloponnese and Attica given the position of Antigonos Gonatas' force at Acrocorinth.<sup>44</sup> Part of the Macedonian garrison may have been located on Mount Oneion (just to the south of Corinth's eastern port of Kenchreai) where third century BCE pottery has been found in association with a series of fortifications and a tower.<sup>45</sup> There appear to have been repeated Spartan attempts to open up the route across the Isthmus of Corinth, finally ending with the death of Areus.<sup>46</sup> The garrison at Arsinoe would also have been able to keep an eye on Troizen from which a Macedonian garrison had been expelled in the 270s.<sup>47</sup> Robertson has suggested, on the basis of an inscription of Diomedes of Halikarnassos ('Distinguished scion of the splendid stock of Anthas') from the Amphiareion of Oropos, that Troizen went over to Ptolemy II, perhaps even during the Chremonidean War.<sup>48</sup> This may even have been the historical context for the erection of the Themistokles Decree at Troizen, normally dated to the third century BCE.<sup>49</sup> The new sea-power in the Aegean and specifically in the Saronic is perhaps alluded to by the Athenian fleet of 480 which likewise brought freedom to the Greeks.<sup>50</sup>

The main urban centre of Methana had been located around the acropolis of Palaiokastro on the west side of the peninsula.<sup>51</sup> Occupation can be traced back to the archaic period and, on the basis of the sherd collections, probably continued uninterrupted until the third century BCE. There has been substantial accumulation of silt in the area around the classical and early Hellenistic city, and there are no obvious remains of a harbour, although a small sheltered natural harbour is located to the north. Submerged remains of the settlement

<sup>43</sup> Burstein 1985, no. 56.

<sup>44</sup> Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 37. See also Tarn 1913, 341–2: 'from the all but island of Methana ... a fleet could watch Corinth and the Piraeus, and flank any Antigonid fleet based on Corinth'.

<sup>45</sup> Stroud 1971. Stroud (p. 144) makes the point that the fortifications would also help to secure Kenchreai from an attack by the Ptolemaic fleet under Patroklos though he felt that evidence for the Ptolemaic base at Methana was circumstantial.

<sup>46</sup> Walbank 1984, 238.

<sup>47</sup> Tarn 1913, 163; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 32; Robertson 1982, 13–14; Jameson, et al. 1994, 88–9. It has been proposed on archaeological evidence alone that Halieis may have served as a Macedonian garrison; the defences on the site appear to have been dismantled perhaps in the 270s: Jameson, et al. 1994, 88–9.

<sup>48</sup> Robertson 1982, 14–21 (text at p. 15). For the sanctuary: Camp II 2001, 322–4. The statue was made by Xenokrates. The dedication by the people of Troizen celebrated the way that Diomedes 'delivered their city from the enemy / And crowned it once more with its ancient laws' (*ὄμ παρὰ δυσμενέων Τροϊζήνιοι ἄστν λαβόντα / καὶ πάλιν ἀρχαίους, εὔ περιθέντα νόμοις*).

<sup>49</sup> [Robertson, 1982 #4359], esp. 12–26. See also Jameson 1960; Jameson 1962; Jameson, et al. 1994, 90; Johansson 2001.

<sup>50</sup> Robertson 1982, 30–1.

<sup>51</sup> Mee, et al. 1997, 122–7, MS10.



Figure 2: The fortified Ptolemaic harbour of the Nissaki on the eastern side of the Methana peninsula (© David Gill).

have also been noted.<sup>52</sup> The walls surrounding the acropolis have several phases of construction and a Ptolemaic phase is possible.

The main Ptolemaic naval base seems to have been on the eastern side of the peninsula to the south of the modern spa-town of Loutra.<sup>53</sup> A small island, known as the Nissaki, is linked to the mainland by a narrow promontory, which in turn encloses a large harbour (Figure 2). The Nissaki itself is surrounded by substantial walls, polygonal or irregular trapezoidal in character. These have been damaged by modern construction though it has been possible to observe late classical and Hellenistic pottery in the fill immediately behind the wall which has helped to date the architecture (Figure 3). In style the walls on the Nissaki seem similar to those found at Hermione in the Southern Argolid which have been tentatively dated to the third century BCE.<sup>54</sup> There is a possibility that they too were constructed by the Ptolemies to provide additional safe havens for their ships. A further explanation may be that these walls were constructed to defend coastal settlements feared attack by pirates,

<sup>52</sup> These are noted in Blackman 2000/01, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Mee, et al. 1997, 152–3, MS103.

<sup>54</sup> Gill, et al. 1997, 73; Mee, et al. 1997, 152. For a discussion of the walls at Hermione: McAlister and Jameson 1969, 170–1; Jameson, et al. 1994, 581–95 (esp. p. 586, 'While caution on the dating of walls from masonry styles alone now prevails . . . , all stretches [at Hermione] could be of Classical or early Hellenistic date.' For a coin of Ptolemy II at Hermione on the north side of Potokia Bay away from the Hellenistic city: Jameson, et al. 1994, 90 n. 32.





Figure 3: The gateway of the fortified Ptolemaic harbour of the Nissaki (© David Gill).

perhaps at Gonatas' prompting, who were recorded as raiding Attica during the Chremonidean war.<sup>55</sup>

Further fortifications on the Methana peninsula, though not necessarily Ptolemaic, defended the narrow isthmus which joined the peninsula to the mainland (and the territory of Troizen).<sup>56</sup> The isthmus area was clearly of strategic importance during the Ptolemaic occupation and is mentioned specifically in a series of border disputes between Arsinoe and her neighbours.

There are a few mentions of the base of Arsinoe from the reign of Ptolemy II to Ptolemy VI. It is perhaps significant that the Achaean League appointed Ptolemy III (246–221 BCE) as commander (*hegemon*) by land and sea.<sup>57</sup> Although it has been suggested that the position was no more than 'honorary',<sup>58</sup> the appointment may reflect the realisation by the Achaean League that such an honour could give them access to the Ptolemaic garrison in the Peloponnese. A possible context may be the peace between Ptolemy and Antigonos

<sup>55</sup> E.g. the honorific inscription of Epichares from Rhamnous: *SEG* 24 (1969), no. 154, lines 21–2; Austin 1981, 97–8, no. 50: ἐκόλασε δὲ καὶ τοὺ[ς] κ αθηρομένους εἰς τ[ῆ]ν χώραν τοῦ πειραταῖ; 'he [sc. Epichares] also punished those who had introduced the pirates into the land' (tr. Austin). See the suggestion that the pirates were part of Antigonos' strategy: Walbank 1984, 238; Hölbl 2001, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Mee and Forbes 1997, 162–8, esp. fig. 11.28. The elliptical fort (MS202) is a possible Ptolemaic candidate.

<sup>57</sup> Plutarch, *Arat.* 24.4.

<sup>58</sup> Walbank 1984, 251–2; Shipley 2000, 138; Hölbl 2001, 51.

brokered perhaps in 244 that left Ptolemy in control of the southern Aegean.<sup>59</sup> It appears that Troizen and Epidauros joined the League in the wake of the expulsion of the Macedonians from Corinth by Aratos of Sikyon in 243; Hermione joined the League in 229/28.<sup>60</sup>

A border dispute between Arsinoe and her neighbour Epidauros perhaps belongs towards the end of the reign of Ptolemy III. The incident is known from a fragmentary double-sided inscription from the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros.<sup>61</sup> The mention of the Achaian League ([ἐπι]στυ[ατα]γοῦ τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖσι) along with the names of specific named cities of the League suggests a date after 228 BCE. The judges for the case were to be drawn from eleven cities, presumably all members of the Achaian League. The names of Pellana, Aigion and Thelpoussa survive; their membership of the Achaian League also hints that this was a League intervention.<sup>62</sup> Lists of the arbitrators of the dispute were cut on the reverse side of the inscription, probably in three or four columns. Fourteen personal names from the city of Thelpoussa in northern Arcadia, a member of the Achaian league, can be read.<sup>63</sup> If each of the eleven cities were represented with such numbers, the panel hearing the dispute would have been in excess of 150 people. A similar dispute between Epidauros and Corinth is dated to 242/1 to 238/7 and involved Megarians acting as judges.<sup>64</sup>

The context for the dispute between Arsinoe and Epidauros may lie in the growing hostility between Sparta and the Achaian League which had formed an alliance with Anitogonos III Dason.<sup>65</sup> Such a move caused Ptolemy III to move his financial support behind the Spartan king Kleomenes III.<sup>66</sup> In 225 Kleomenes annexed a number of cities among them Epidauros, Hermione, and Troizen.<sup>67</sup> If Kleomenes' action against the Achaian League had been prompted by Ptolemy III, the base of Arsinoe could have been used for influencing the annexation of her neighbours in the Argolid. Although Antigonos' advance was blocked by Kleomenes at the isthmus of Corinth, Argos revolted,

<sup>59</sup> Tarn 1913, 386–7.

<sup>60</sup> Jameson, et al. 1994, 90.

<sup>61</sup> *IG* iv<sup>2</sup> 1, 72; *SEG* 33 (1983) no. 447; Bingen 1953, 624–5; Peek 1969, 25, no. 27; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 272–3, no. 11; Rizakis 1995, 375–6, no. 695; Ager 1996, 135–6, no. 46. For the personal names: *LGPN* III.A.

<sup>62</sup> For Pellana and Aigion (or possibly Aigeira) as members of the League: Polybius 2.41.8. See Rizakis 1995, 259–62, no. 430.

<sup>63</sup> For observations on the number of arbitrators in such disputes: Robertson 1976, 266, n. 29. For Thelpoussa and its acquisition by Antigonos Dason in 223: Polybius 2.54.

<sup>64</sup> *IG* iv<sup>2</sup> 1, 70. See Ager 1996, 113–117, no. 38.

<sup>65</sup> Walbank 1984, 461–2; Hölbl 2001, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Polybius 2.51. See also Rizakis 1995, 263–4, no. 434; Walbank 1984, 464; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 54. Ptolemy III was honoured at Delphi by Lamius of Aetolia probably at the same time.

<sup>67</sup> Polybius 2.52. See also Rizakis 1995, 263–4, no. 435; Walbank 1984, 465; Jameson, et al. 1994, 91.

followed by Epidaurus.<sup>68</sup> Kleomenes himself was forced to withdraw to Sparta, and Ptolemy withdrew his support.<sup>69</sup> The Ptolemaic base at Arsinoe would then have found itself ranged against its neighbours, now again part of the Achaian League after Sparta's defeat at Sellasia in 222,<sup>70</sup> in the aftermath of these actions.

The Spartan king Nabis intervened in the southern Argolid in 197–195 BCE.<sup>71</sup> Hermione was occupied and a garrison of Cretan mercenaries apparently located there.<sup>72</sup> However under pressure from Rome Laconian influence in the Argolid was removed and the Achaian League re-asserted its authority.

### Urban life and the new polis of Methana

The urban centre at Palaiokastro on the west coast of the peninsula seems to have continued to function through the Ptolemaic occupation. The surface pottery of Hellenistic date recorded by the survey of the settlement seems to suggest that the city was slightly reduced in size from its classical predecessor.<sup>73</sup> It also seems to have been strengthened at this time by the construction of substantial walls using ashlar masonry perhaps during the third century BCE (Figure 4).<sup>74</sup> This major investment would suggest the Ptolemaic period as the most likely. Such fortifications would provide an additional stronghold for the Ptolemaic garrison, as well as protection for the indigenous population. The location would allow the Ptolemaic garrison to monitor the coastline belonging to Epidaurus. There is a single honorific inscription from this period which reflects the euergetism that was such a feature of Greek cities in the Hellenistic period (ἀρετῆς [ἐνεκα]).<sup>75</sup>

One of the best indicators for the vitality of the polis of Methana is through the issuing of coins.<sup>76</sup> The polis issued its own coinage with the abbreviated name, *MEΘ()* or *ME()*, in the late classical to early Hellenistic periods. On the obverse was placed the head of Hephaistos wearing a conical pilos, usually facing right. Such coinage is typical of the mints of the Argolid at this period: Troezen, Hermione, Epidaurus and Halieis.<sup>77</sup> The choice of Hephaistos may

<sup>68</sup> See Walbank 1984, 467. For context: Polybius 2.53.

<sup>69</sup> Walbank 1984, 471.

<sup>70</sup> Jameson, et al. 1994, 91. For the battle: Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 57.

<sup>71</sup> Jameson, et al. 1994, 91–2. For an inscription from Hermione: Jameson 1959, 111, no. 4. For the context: Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 74.

<sup>72</sup> *IG* iv, 729 with Jameson, et al. 1994, 91 and n. 33.

<sup>73</sup> 70,000 m<sup>2</sup> from 80,000 m<sup>2</sup>, see Mee, et al. 1997, 123.

<sup>74</sup> Mee, et al. 1997, 123.

<sup>75</sup> *SEG* 37 (1987) 315; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 273, no. 14.

<sup>76</sup> Gill 1997. For earlier notes on the coinage of Methana: Imhoof-Blumer and Gardner 1885, 98–9. For the iconography: *LIMC* iv, 1, 636 no. 87; iv, 2, pl. 389.

<sup>77</sup> Gill 1997, 278–79. The similarity to coins from Halieis suggests a possible *terminus ante quem* of 290–280 BCE.





Figure 4: Fortifications surrounding the acropolis at Palaiokastro on the west side of the peninsula, perhaps rebuilt during the Ptolemaic occupation (© David Gill)

perhaps reflect knowledge of the peninsula's volcanic geology, though they probably pre-date the eruption of the third century BCE.

During the Ptolemaic occupation Methana issued coins under its new name of Arsinoe. The abbreviated name *APΣI*, Arsi(noe), identifies the city. On the obverse is the bust of Arsinoe, and on the reverse a naked warrior holding a spear with a snake (Figure 5). Several different issues of the coin have been identified. This change of name had posed an issue for nineteenth-century Greek numismatics. The chance discovery of coins minted by this city of Arsi-



Figure 5: Bronze coin issued by the Ptolemaic city of Arsinoe in the Peloponnese.

noe on the Methana peninsula gave an important clue.<sup>78</sup> They suggested that the Greek polis of Methana had been renamed Arsinoe during the Hellenistic period, but then had reverted to its historic name during the Roman period. In the Augustan period the polis of Methana had representa-

<sup>78</sup> The identification was made by Hiller von Gaertringen. See Gill 1997, 279–80. For what is now unnecessary caution about the identification: Tarn 1913, 292 n. 45.

tives in Corinth, the Roman capital of the province of Achaia,<sup>79</sup> and during the second century AD the city was a member of Hadrian's cultural grouping of the Panhellenion at Athens,<sup>80</sup> as well as being on Pausanias's tour of the Peloponnese.<sup>81</sup>

### **Arsinoe and Ptolemy VI Philometor**

Details of the Ptolemaic administration of Arsinoe belong to the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor. One of the key documents was provided by the discovery in the early nineteenth century by the British explorer E. Dodwell of an inscription half-buried on the shore-line next to the main urban settlement at Palaikastro.<sup>82</sup> It reads as follows:

*For the sake of King Ptolemy and Queen Kleopatra ... and of their children, to the Great Gods, Eirenaios of the friends (τῶν φίλων), and those despatched with him from Alexandria to keep guard (παρεφεδρεῦσαι) [...] along with the leaders from among the men and from the squadrons, and the soldiers (στατιῶται) and fighters (μάχιμοι) saved from many and great dangers.*

There are several things to note. First the preamble places the inscription in the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–145 BCE) and Kleopatra.<sup>83</sup> Ptolemy Philometor initially ruled with his mother (who died in 176), then married his sister Kleopatra in 175, and from 170 reigned with her and their brother Ptolemy VIII. The mention of their children dates the inscription a little more precisely as Launey has demonstrated that one of the earliest dated mentions of τὰ τεκνὰ; comes from September 164.<sup>84</sup> This dedication itself was made to 'the Great Gods', either the Greek gods, the Dioskouroi, or the Egyptian deities Isis and Osiris. Perhaps the ambiguity was helpful in a Greek context.

The name of the dedicator is slightly damaged, but the best restoration seems to be that of Eirenaios. He is described as τῶν φίλων, from among 'the friends', a designation used for members of the Ptolemaic court. This is reinforced by the reference that he is part of a group which arrived with him 'from Alexandria'. The presence of both *machimoi* and *stratitotai* in Eirenaios' party suggests that the garrison consisted of both Egyptians and Greeks.<sup>85</sup> The context sug-

<sup>79</sup> *IG* iv, 853; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 273–4, no. 15. The inscription is dated to AD 1/2.

<sup>80</sup> *IG* iv, 858; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 274, no. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Bowden and Gill 1997.

<sup>82</sup> *IG* iv, 854; *SEG* 37 (1987) 321; 51 (2001) 430. Launey 1949; Bagnall 1976, 136; Cohen 1995, 124–5; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 270, no. 8; Rhodes and Lewis 1997, 76.

<sup>83</sup> For a Ptolemaic coin hoard at Corinth from this same period see Thompson 1951. If the hoard belonged to a Corinthian mercenary as Thompson proposed, Arsinoe may provide a simpler solution in the interpretation of the hoard which comes from the Roman destruction of the city.

<sup>84</sup> Launey 1949, 574. Launey notes 'on pourrait concevoir que le document de Méthana fût date de l'année 164'.

<sup>85</sup> See Bagnall 1976, 130.

gests that the inscription records Eirenaios' posting to the base in some sort of administrative capacity.

His role is clarified from an inscription on a cylindrical altar from the island of Thera, another Ptolemaic base, carried the dedication of Eirenaios, son of Nikias, from Alexandria, and of Aristippos, son of Theoxenos, an Alexandrian, the governor (*τεταγμένος*) of Thera (Figure 6).<sup>86</sup> On this Theran inscription Eirenaios is specifically described as: 'the secretary (*γραμματεως*) of the soldiers (*στρατιωτῶν*) and fighting men (*μαχιμῶν*) on Crete, Thera and Arsinoe in the Peloponnese, and the *oikonomos* (*οικονόμος*) of those places'.<sup>87</sup> The present inscription is a secondary one: *βασιλεῖ* in line four has been inserted to the left of the main block of text preceding *Πτολεμα[ίω]* and the relief *boukranion*. Three lines of text are written above the name of Ptolemy and the bottom of the relief wreath. One possible reading is to insert the names of Ptolemy Philometor and Kleopatra in the preceding lines, leaving the reference to Ptolemy as their son, Eupator born around 163/2.<sup>88</sup>

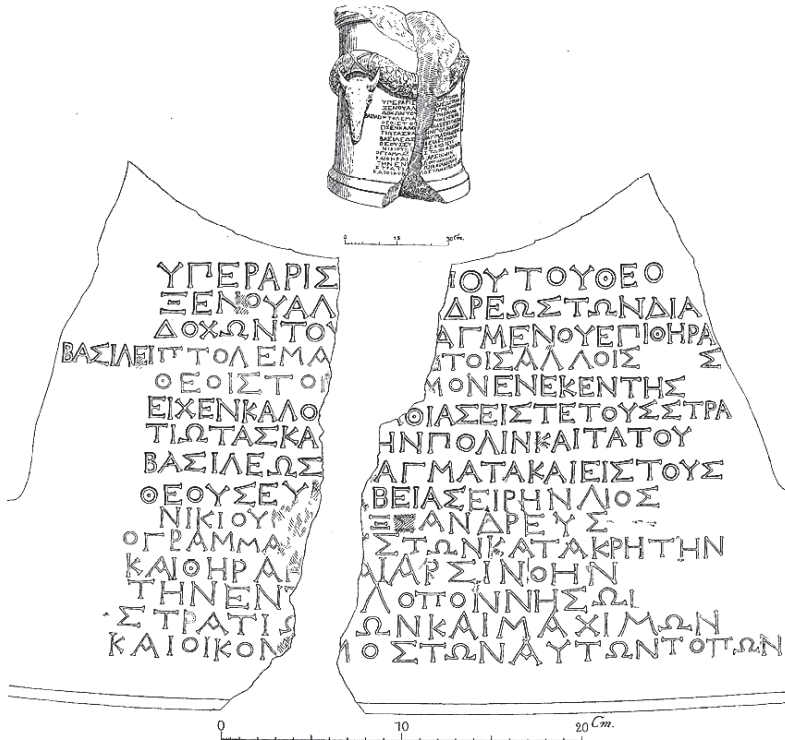


Figure 6: Altar of Eiranaïos, *grammateus* and *oikonomos* of the Ptolemaic possessions on Crete, Thera and Arsinoe, dedicated at Thera (after IG).

<sup>86</sup> IG xii, 3, 466; SEG 31 (1981) no. 741; Bagnall 1976, 124–5; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 273, no. 12. The court rank of Aristippos, τῶν διαδόχων, was lower than that of Eirenaios.

<sup>87</sup> See also Tarn 1911, 258.

<sup>88</sup> Launey 1949, 574–5.



Eirenaios' primary role was as secretary or *grammateus*. Such a position is attested elsewhere in the Ptolemaic possessions.<sup>89</sup> This seems to have had a military function.<sup>90</sup> Eirenaios was also *oikonomos* in other words 'the manager of the royal fiscal interests'.<sup>91</sup> He would be responsible for those aspects of the economies on Methana, Thera and on Crete which would generate income for the Ptolemies. This may, of course, be why the cutting of wood and quarrying for stone on Methana are mentioned in a boundary dispute between Arsinoe and her neighbour Troezen, as it related directly to the royal purse.<sup>92</sup> A second inscription from Thera shows an unnamed *oikonomos* being responsible for allocating funds from land to the troops there.<sup>93</sup> It demonstrates that the *oikonomos* was not responsible to the governor of the island, but rather to the *dioiketes* or 'general finance minister' and then to the ruler.<sup>94</sup> It is important to realise that Eirenaios belonged to the 'friends', in other words was part of the royal circle. Contrast him to the actual governor (*πεταγμένος*) of Thera, Aristippos mentioned in the same inscription, who is noted as coming 'τῶν διαδόχων', a rank lower than Eirenaios. Eirenaios also appears in an honorific decree from Delos, perhaps to be dated around 170.<sup>95</sup> Aristippos appears to be one of the later governors of Thera.<sup>96</sup>

It is worth commenting on Ptolemaic possessions in the Aegean at this time. The base at Thera had been visited by Ptolemy VI Philometor in August 163.<sup>97</sup> Crete sounds impressive though it probably meant no more than the Ptolemaic base at Itanos.<sup>98</sup> Thus Methana was part of a complex of Ptolemaic holdings including the southern Aegean and eastern Crete.

Also probably belonging to the reign of Ptolemy VI is a record of a border dispute between Arsinoe and its neighbour Troezen.<sup>99</sup> Like the (probably earlier) dispute with Epidaurus, the double-sided stele was erected in the Asklepion at Epidaurus.<sup>100</sup> A copy of the same text is also known from Troezen.<sup>101</sup> Originally it had been thought that the two sides of the decree reflected two separate disputes both involving Troezen. However Peek suggested that

<sup>89</sup> Bagnall 1976, 16 (Palestine).

<sup>90</sup> See Bagnall 1976, 136.

<sup>91</sup> Bagnall 1976, 123.

<sup>92</sup> Foxhall, et al. 1997, 270–1, no. 9.

<sup>93</sup> Bagnall 1976, 130–1. See also Austin 1981, 446–7, no. 266.

<sup>94</sup> Bagnall 1976, 131.

<sup>95</sup> Launey 1949, 578–80.

<sup>96</sup> *SEG* 31 (1981) 741.

<sup>97</sup> Hölbl 2001, 191.

<sup>98</sup> Bagnall 1976, 131.

<sup>99</sup> See Robertson 1982, 14.

<sup>100</sup> *IG* iv<sup>2</sup>, 1, nos. 76–7. Peek 1969, 27, no. 31; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 270–3, nos. 9–10; Ager 1996, 381–5, no. 138. See also Bagnall 1976, 135–6; Jameson, et al. 1994, 95. For a near contemporary border dispute between Hermione and Epidaurus: *IG* iv, 927; *IG* iv<sup>2</sup>, 1, 75; Jameson, et al. 1994, 496–606 ('first half of cent. II B.C.'). Ager 1996, 170–3, no. 63 (c. 200).

<sup>101</sup> *IG* iv, 752. See also *SEG* 30 (1980) 385.



Figure 7: The fortified isthmus linking the Methana peninsula to the mainland. The mountains of the Argolid can be seen in the background (© David Gill).

the reverse side of the Epidauros stele was not a separate treaty but was a continuation of the record of the dispute between Arsinoe and Troizen.<sup>102</sup>

Unlike the earlier dispute with Epidauros, where the Achaean League intervened, this dispute was considered by the ambassadors (*πρεσβευται*) and judges (*κριται*) of king Ptolemy VI Philometor had to intervene.<sup>103</sup> The dispute concerned the exact boundary in the region of land around the isthmus that joined Methana to the territory of Troizen (Figure 7). The treaty, binding for all time (l. 4: *εις ἅπαντα τὸν χρόνον*), would be ratified in the sanctuaries of the city: in Arsinoe in the sanctuary of Athena. The treaty concerned involved arrangements for cutting wood and the quarrying of stone (l. 9: *τᾶς δὲ τομᾶς τᾶς λιθίνας καὶ τᾶς ξυλίνας*). However Arsinoe's role as a naval base is clear as there are mentions of the launching places (*ἀναγωγᾶς*), the landing places (*καταγωγᾶς*), and the carrying across (*παραγωγᾶς*) of ships (ll. 10–11). These facilities may have been located in the area round the isthmus joining the peninsula to the mainland, though there is no obvious drag-way for ships at this location. The fort (*χάρακα*) on the peninsula or Stenita also appears to be mentioned (l. 14). Significantly this is the same Greek word as the term used for Patroklos' fort on the island off the coast of Attica.<sup>104</sup> The dispute had already lead to *ῥύσια* and it was proposed by the Ptolemaic judges that compensation for such seizures be generated by income from 'common land' (*τᾶς κοινᾶς χώρας*) including the tunny trap (*ἐκ τῶν θυννείων*) (ll. 38–40, 43–4). The trap is still visible on the western side of the peninsula.<sup>105</sup> Fines on breaches of the agreement were outlined: 10,000 drachmas for a city, 1,000 drachmas for an individual (ll. 15–16, 37–8, 41). The agreement also developed links between the communi-

<sup>102</sup> Peek 1969, 27, no. 31. For the text: *IG iv*<sup>2</sup> 1.76; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 271–2, no. 10.

<sup>103</sup> Foxhall, et al. 1997, 270–1, no. 9, lines 5–6. The *κριται* are restored.

<sup>104</sup> McCredie 1966, 98. McCredie makes the point that this is likely to have been a fixed structure rather than a temporary wooden palisade.

<sup>105</sup> Tuna is now farmed commercially around the isthmus.

ties of Arsinoe and Troizen by allowing inter-marriage (*ἐπιγαμίας*) and allowing property to be held across their communities (*ἐγκτάσεις*) (ll. 50–1). The decision was then endorsed by appeal to Athens through embassies from the two cities (l. 52) and it was expected that Athens should send a three man delegation to make a final judgement (ll. 52–4). The choice of Athens may be explained by the historic links between Athens and Troizen dating back to at least the evacuation of Athens during the Persian invasion of mainland Greece, and for Arsinoe perhaps because of the Chremonidean War. The agreement concluded with the decision that copies should be cut on stelai that would be displayed in the sanctuaries of Poseidon on Kalauria, that is to say the island of Poros, in the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros, and on the Athenian acropolis.

### Cult

The Eirenaios inscription with its mention of ‘the Great gods’, whether they be the Dioskouroi or the Egyptian deities, raises issues about other cults on Methana. Pausanias (2.34.1) mentioned a cult of Isis in the Roman city. Its presence is attested by an inscription, apparently of the Roman period, which gives details of a dedication to Isis and Serapis by three individuals, all members of one family: Kallimachos son of Aristodamos, his wife Xenophanta daughter of Timasikrates, and Aristodamos their son.<sup>106</sup> The possibility that this is a cult which was established in the Ptolemaic period is reinforced by the fact that Diokles, a member of the Ptolemaic garrison on Thera, dedicated to Sarapis, Isis and Anoubis at that base.<sup>107</sup> Other cults recorded in the city include one for Herakles, attested by both an inscription and Pausanias,<sup>108</sup> and a sanctuary of Athena mentioned in the preamble to the border dispute between Arsinoe and Troezen.<sup>109</sup>

### Agriculture on the peninsula

The field-survey was able to identify a large number of rural sites on the peninsula. This flourishing of activity is striking because it coincides with a period in which other field-surveys in Greece have tended to show a marked decline in rural sites.<sup>110</sup> One striking thing about the pottery is that some 20 to 24 sites are characterised by pottery of a type identified by Homer Thompson in the early Hellenistic wells around the agora of the city of Athens.<sup>111</sup> Late Hellenistic pottery is much rarer on Methana, being found on between 5 and 10 sites. One of the striking things is that this early pottery is exactly the same period as that found at Koroni in Attica, in other words in exactly the

<sup>106</sup> *IG* iv, 855; *SEG* 37 (1987) 321. Foxhall, et al. 1997, 274–5, no. 18.

<sup>107</sup> *IG* XII 3. 443. See Bagnall 1976, 129.

<sup>108</sup> *IG* iv, 856; Foxhall, et al. 1997, 275, no. 19; Pausanias 2.34.1.

<sup>109</sup> Foxhall, et al. 1997, 270, no. 9.

<sup>110</sup> For a useful comparison (including Methana): Shipley 2005, 328–30, fig. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Thompson 1934. For a revised view of the pottery from these groups: Rotroff 1997.

same period as the Ptolemaic occupation during the Chremonidean War. It is thus tempting to see a renaissance in agricultural activity on the peninsula coinciding with the arrival of the Ptolemaic fleet, which would have needed to have been supplied with grain, wine and oil. A number of Hellenistic sites seem to emerge in the second century BCE, at least three of them at higher altitudes suggesting exploitation of more marginal areas of the peninsula.<sup>112</sup> Among them was a possible farmhouse at Khelona, at a height of some 638 m, which continued into the Early Roman period.<sup>113</sup> This picture from Methana is in contrast with the field-survey results from the island of Keos which also served as a Ptolemaic base.<sup>114</sup> The nearby area of the Southern Argolid also saw a reduced number of sites in this Hellenistic period which does suggest that Methana was unusual.<sup>115</sup>

One of the other features of the late classical and Hellenistic landscape of Methana is the presence of ashlar towers.<sup>116</sup> The construction of these structures suggests a significant investment of time and money. However it is not clear if they are designed as strongholds in case of sudden attack (from pirates). They are rarely found with surrounding ceramic evidence, a feature of similar towers on Keos, which suggests that they were not part of a larger farmstead or settlement. In other words they were isolated structures.

## Conclusion

The Methana peninsula and the city of Arsinoe served as a Ptolemaic base from the Chremonidean War until the middle of the second century BCE. It was clearly grouped with the Ptolemaic garrisons at Itanos on Crete and Thera, under a single *grammateus* and *oikonomos*. The presence of Eirenaios during the 160s under Ptolemy VI Philometor shows the continuing activity of the garrison. This period would also serve as a possible point for the dedication of the Aegina portrait of Ptolemy VI if it did indeed arrive in the Saronic Gulf region in antiquity. Troops were finally withdrawn from the Methana peninsula by Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II in 145 soon after his accession on the death of Ptolemy VI Philometor in July 145.<sup>117</sup> By this time the Argolid was coming under Roman domination. The city of Corinth had been sacked by Roman troops in 146 BCE and its site would remain fallow for a century until it was re-established as a colony.<sup>118</sup> At some point after 146 an appeal to Rome was made over a boundary dispute between Hermione and (almost certainly)

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<sup>112</sup> Gill, et al. 1997, 72.

<sup>113</sup> Mee, et al. 1997, 170–1, MS211. The site also contained items from an olive press: Foxhall 1997, 267.

<sup>114</sup> Cherry and Davis 1991, 22.

<sup>115</sup> Jameson, et al. 1994.

<sup>116</sup> Gill, et al. 1997, 66.

<sup>117</sup> Tarn 1911, 258 (who suggests 146); Hölbl 2001, 43, 194.

<sup>118</sup> Gill 1993. For the context: Alcock 1993.

Troizen.<sup>119</sup> By then Arsinoe had reverted to its historic name of Methana, and during the Augustan period was proud to have close links with the new seat of Roman power.<sup>120</sup> The Ptolemaic garrison at Arsinoe was replaced by a minor polis within the Roman province of Achaia.

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<sup>119</sup> *IG* iv, 791; Ager 1996, 413, no. 151.

<sup>120</sup> Arsinoe on Keos also seems to have reverted to its original name in the second century BCE: Bagnall 1976, 142.

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