

# HARBOURS AND HINTERLANDS: RECONSTRUCTING MARITIME CULTURAL LANDSCAPES IN MYCENAEAN MESSENIA\*

Messenia has one of the longest coastlines in mainland Greece (Pl. I), yet knowledge about the maritime and maritime-related activities of the Mycenaean Messenians is extremely limited. This paper will explore ways in which the existing body of archaeological evidence can be scrutinised to reveal traces of maritime culture and offer hints about the human relationship with the sea. To do this, the concept of maritime cultural landscapes will be used to connect disparate pieces of evidence to an overall understanding of how the sea influenced the daily lifeways of ancient Messenians. Maritime cultural landscapes have been foundational for the study of the human-sea relationship beyond the physical remains of ships and harbours, and are firmly rooted in the tradition of landscape archaeology, phenomenology, and cognitive landscapes. Firstly, potential harbour locations in Messenia will be discussed and their relationship to nearby Mycenaean sites will hint at the nature of maritime interaction. Archaeological remains will then provide evidence for both the tangible and intangible connection to the sea. This should enable a deeper and more focused discussion about maritime affairs in Messenia, while also acting as a template for future investigations into the maritime cultural landscapes of other regions of the LBA Aegean.

## Maritime Cultural Landscapes

Maritime cultural landscapes as a concept were developed and introduced into the English-speaking world in 1992 by Christer Westerdahl.<sup>1</sup> In his initial conception, he described maritime cultural

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Abbreviations used:

*EMPORIA* = R. LAFFINEUR and E. GRECO (eds), *EMPORIA. Aegeans in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean. Proceedings of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference, Athens, Italian School of Archaeology, 14-48 April 2004* (2005).

*NICHORIA I* = G.R. RAPP Jr. and S.E. ASCHENBRENNER (eds), *Excavations at Nichoria in Southwest Greece. Volume I, Site, Environs, and Techniques* (1978).

*NICHORIA II* = W.A. McDONALD and N.C. WILKIE (eds), *Excavations at Nichoria in Southwestern Greece: Volume II: The Bronze Age Occupation* (1992).

*OHMA* = B. FORD, D.L. HAMILTON, and A. CATSAMBIS (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Maritime Archaeology* (2011).

*THALASSA* = R. LAFFINEUR and L. BASCH (eds), *THALASSA. L'Égée préhistorique et la mer. Actes de la troisième rencontre égéenne internationale de l'Université de Liège, Station de Recherches sous-marines et océanographiques (StaReSo), Calvi, Corse, 23-25 avril 1990* (1991).

*UMME* = W.A. McDONALD and G.R. RAPP JR (eds), *The Minnesota Messenia Expedition: Reconstructing a Bronze Age Regional Environment* (1972).

*WALL PAINTING* = H. BRECOULAKI, J.L. DAVIS, and S.R. STOCKER (eds), *Mycenaean Wall Painting in Context. New Discoveries, Old Finds Reconsidered* (2015).

<sup>1</sup> C. WESTERDAHL, "The Maritime Cultural Landscape," *IJNA* 21 (1992) 5-14.

landscapes as: “human utilization (economy) of maritime space by boat: settlement, fishing, hunting, shipping and its attendant sub-cultures, such as pilotage, lighthouse and sea-mark maintenance.”<sup>2</sup> Maritime cultural landscapes seek to understand both the physical and cognitive use of maritime space, including the sea and coastal zones. They are intended to highlight the uniqueness of life when in contact with the sea, and the mental mapping and imprinting of coastal and maritime aspects of the landscape. Equally important are the immaterial aspects of the maritime world: the traditions, superstitions, and taboos. There have been some criticisms of maritime cultural landscapes as Westerdahl initially conceived of them.<sup>3</sup> In particular, it is difficult to draw a solid dividing line between what is and is not in some way connected to the sea. By demarcating a separate *maritime* cultural landscape a division is created in scholarship between maritime and non-maritime spheres which would not have existed in the past in such black and white terms. Westerdahl, however, has also emphasised that maritime cultural landscapes are not intended to be a foil against *agrarian* cultural landscapes, since communities and individuals would have regularly participated in both.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the stark division between land and sea has led some scholars to seek out frameworks that incorporate maritime-adjacent activities; concepts such as *maritimity* have also been used to describe the blurred lines between the maritime and terrestrial realms.<sup>5</sup> Rather than the dualism of land and sea, maritimity represents a gradient or the degree of the sea’s impact on individuals and communities.

Westerdahl proposed five avenues of evidence that could elucidate past maritime culture: (1) shipwrecks, (2) land remains, (3) tradition of usage (local tradition), (4) the study of natural topography, natural havens, and (5) place names.<sup>6</sup> No LBA shipwrecks have been found along Messenia’s coasts and place names in Greece are frequently changing and migrating (the place names preserved in the Linear B tablets from Pylos do not appear to have any obvious maritime associations). This leaves only land remains (archaeological evidence), local traditions (maritime culture in Messenia today and historically), and the study of the natural topography as the remaining markers of maritime culture in Messenia. It is best to address these in reverse order, first establishing the locations of potential harbours as well as natural features of the Messenian coastline, the location of modern anchorages, and then investigate some of the archaeological remains from Pylos and other sites which might act as proxies for Mycenaean maritimity and the LBA maritime cultural landscape.

One of the considerations that arises from maritime cultural landscapes is the inclusion of harbours and coastal communities as integral components of maritime culture. Harbours and the settlements that develop around them are the natural bridges between humans on the sea and humans on the land. They are also natural gathering places and areas of frenetic energy. Harbour settlements are centres of maritime life and have historically been places of significant economic and cultural importance. Harbours are social spaces, and it is important to understand the social significance of ports and harbours and examine how living in these nodes of connectivity affected the people who inhabited them. This line of thinking led L. Vance Watrous to describe harbours on Crete as “agents of social change”, claiming that throughout ancient history harbour towns were “seedbeds for ideas that subvert the orthodoxy of the centralized

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<sup>2</sup> WESTERDAHL (*supra* n. 1) 5.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. J.R HUNTER, “Marine culture: notes from the land,” *IJNA* 23: 4 (1994) 261-264; D.B. TUDDENHAM, “Maritime cultural landscapes, maritimity and quasi objects,” *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 5:1 (2010) 5-16; P.B. CAMPBELL, “The Sea as a Hyperobject: Moving beyond Maritime Cultural Landscapes,” *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology & Heritage Studies* 8:3-4 (2020) 207-225.

<sup>4</sup> C. WESTERDAHL, “The Maritime Cultural Landscape,” in *OHMA*, 733-762.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. TUDDENHAM (*supra* n. 3); A.B. KNAPP, A. RUSSELL, and P. van DOMMELEN, “Cyprus, Sardinia and Sicily: a maritime perspective on interaction, connectivity and imagination in Mediterranean prehistory,” *CAJ* 32:1 (2022) 79-97.

<sup>6</sup> WESTERDAHL (*supra* n. 1) 7-9.

state.”<sup>7</sup> People living in port towns often had more access to overseas networks, wealth from the sea, and goods from abroad, but they were also subject to raids, blockades, and disease, and this social approach to the archaeology of ports and harbours contextualises the physical remains and artefacts from each site. A social approach to harbour archaeology refocuses the discussion on the people operating and living within the harbour-space and the varied activities specific to waterfront contexts which stimulates the formation of unique identities. Ports and harbours can also be considered “contested landscapes” since they create interaction between social groups that might not normally exist within the same orbit.<sup>8</sup> However, these descriptions all focus on large, cosmopolitan ports and harbours, but there are also harbours that are sleepy and infrequently visited by anyone other than locals. These places would have entirely different attitudes and perceptions; outsiders may have been unwelcome in these small ports, potentially creating anxieties about piracy, stolen fishing spots, or bringing disease.

Harbours in the LBA Aegean were most often natural spaces rather than the large, monumental constructions of the 1st millennium BC and the Roman world.<sup>9</sup> However, built harbours and harbour infrastructure have been identified at several LBA sites on Crete, and evidence for Minoan harbours range from jetties and moles to shipsheds and slipways.<sup>10</sup> Since the discovery of the long, monumental galleries at Kommos and their identification as Minoan shipsheds,<sup>11</sup> other potential examples have been identified at coastal sites across Crete, such as at Poros-Katsambas, Gournia, and Malia.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, built harbour facilities on the mainland are not as well attested, and it has often been suggested that Mycenaean ships were most commonly pulled up on sandy beaches.<sup>13</sup> Sites typically classified as harbours on the mainland, such as Pavlopetri in Laconia<sup>14</sup> or Kalamianos in the Corinthia<sup>15</sup> have not revealed any evidence for harbour infrastructure or structures similar to those on Crete.

### Harbours in Messenia

In order to consider the human relationship with the sea in Mycenaean Messenia, an understanding of the places where the transition between land and sea occurred is needed. Harbours and safe anchorages are not the only places where ancient Messenians could have physically encountered the

<sup>7</sup> L.V. WATROUS, “Harbours as Agents of Social Change in Ancient Crete,” in P.P. BETANCOURT, M.C. NELSON, and H. WILLIAMS (eds), *Krinoi kai Limenes. Studies in Honor of Joseph and Maria Shaw* (2007) 101.

<sup>8</sup> A. ROGERS, “Social Archaeological Approaches in Port and Harbour Studies,” *Journal of Maritime Archaeology* 8 (2013) 181-196.

<sup>9</sup> J.P. OLESON and R.L. HOHLFELDER, “Ancient Harbors in the Mediterranean” in *OHMA*, 811-812.

<sup>10</sup> A. RABAN, “Minoan and Canaanite Harbours,” in *THALASSA* 129-146; S. CHRYSOULAKI, “The Imaginary Navy of Minoan Crete: Rocky Coasts and Probable Harbours,” in *EMPORIA*, 77-90; J.W. SHAW, “The Earliest Harbour Installations on Aegean Foreshores,” *IJNA*, 48:1 (2019) 85-102.

<sup>11</sup> J.W. SHAW, “Bronze Age Aegean Harboursides,” in D.A. HARDY *et al.* (eds), *Thera and the Aegean World III. Volume One: Archaeology. Proceedings of the Third International Congress (Santorini, Greece, 3-9 September 1989)* (1990) 420-437.

<sup>12</sup> D. BLACKMAN, “Minoan Shipsheds,” *Skyllis* 11:2 (2011) 4-7; L.V. WATROUS, “The Harbor Complex of the Minoan Town at Gournia,” *AJA* 116.3 (2012) 521-541.

<sup>13</sup> L. CASSON, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (1971) 361-362; cf. G.F. VOTRUBA, “Did Vessels Beach in the Ancient Mediterranean? An assessment of the textual and visual evidence,” in *The Mariner’s Mirror* 103:1 (2017) 26.

<sup>14</sup> J.C. HENDERSON *et al.*, “The Pavlopetri Underwater Archaeology Project: investigating an ancient submerged town,” in J. BENJAMIN *et al.* (eds), *Submerged Prehistory* (2011) 216.

<sup>15</sup> T.F. TARTARON *et al.*, “The Saronic Harbors Archaeological Research Project (SHARP): Investigation at Mycenaean Kalamianos, 2007-2009,” *Hesperia* 80:4 (2011) 559-634.

sea (beaches and rocky coastlines can easily be accessed throughout the region), but harbours are unique as transitional spaces which facilitate access to the sea from the land and to the land from the sea. Identifying the locations of ancient anchorages is extremely challenging, as often these were natural places, and coastal changes over the last three millennia may have altered their appearance or shifted their location. However, if some likely locations of natural harbours in Messenia can be identified, these can act as important indicators of the maritime cultural landscape of the region and highlight the maritimity of specific sites. Thucydides describes the western coast of the Peloponnese as a harbourless place, but he is referring to a harbour large enough to provide safety to a fleet of Classical era triremes and this is certainly true of western Messenia north of the Bay of Navarino.<sup>16</sup> However, there are smaller places of anchorage which dot this western coastline, and there are also the larger natural harbours of Methoni, Phoinikounta, and Koroni to the south as well as the coasts of the Gulf of Messenia. Thus, to locate potential LBA harbours in Messenia, multiple methods must be employed. Without more extensive geoarchaeological investigation these suggested locations can only be educated guesses by examining existing natural topography, modern pilot guides, and historical sources<sup>17</sup> to understand where harbours could have existed in the Bronze Age. The Bay of Navarino is the largest natural harbour in Messenia, but the majority of harbours in the region are much smaller spaces, which could be accommodating for smaller vessels. Small harbours, however, would likely have been usable by most LBA ships. The Uluburun ship, for example, has been estimated to have been only 15-16 metres in length,<sup>18</sup> while the largest known from the Aegean, the Point Iria ship, has been estimated to have been only seven metres long.<sup>19</sup> These long-distance trading vessels were also likely outnumbered by many even smaller boats for short, localised journeys like those envisioned by Tartaron at the level of the coastscape and maritime small world.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Potential Natural Harbours in Mycenaean Messenia*

There have been several attempts to create typologies and categories of ancient Mediterranean harbours,<sup>21</sup> but the most instructive for understanding Messenian natural harbours is likely Lucy Blue's typology<sup>22</sup> which focuses on the natural topology of high and low energy coastlines, both of which can be

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<sup>16</sup> Thucydides 2.25.4

<sup>17</sup> E.g. R. HEIKELL and L. HEIKELL, *Greek Waters Pilot. A yachtsman's guide to the coasts and islands of Greece* (2018); [www.navily.com](http://www.navily.com); The Hellenic Land Registry (<https://maps.gov.gr/gis/map/>) provides an online viewer of aerial photographs from 1945, which is extremely useful for examining the Greek landscape prior to the construction of much of Greece's modern infrastructure.

<sup>18</sup> C. PULAK, "The Uluburun shipwreck: an overview," *IJNA*, 27:3 (1998) 210.

<sup>19</sup> Y. VICHOS, "The Point Iria Wreck: The Nautical Dimension," in W. PHELPS, Y. YOLOS, and Y. VICHOS (eds), *The Point Iria Wreck: Interconnections in the Mediterranean ca. 1200 BC. Proceedings of the International Conference, Island of Spetses, 19 September 1998* (1999) 83.

<sup>20</sup> T.F. TARTARON, *Maritime Networks in the Mycenaean World* (2013) 188-198.

<sup>21</sup> N.C. FLEMMING, "Survival of Submerged sites in quaternary coastlines Survival of Submerged Lithic and Bronze Age Artifact Sites: A Review of Case Histories," in P. MATERS and N.C. FLEMMING (eds), *Quaternary Coastlines and Marine Archaeology. Towards the Prehistory of Land Bridges and Continental Shelves* (1983) 135-174; RABAN (*supra* n. 10); L. BLUE, "Cyprus and Cilicia: The Typology and Paleogeography of Second Millennium Harbours," in S. SWINY, R.L. HOHLFELDER, and H.W. SWINY (eds), *Res Maritimae: Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean from Prehistory to Late Antiquity* (1997) 31-44; CHRYSOULAKI (*supra* n. 10); M. GIAME, C. MORHANGE, and N. MARRINER, "Contextualisation and Typology of Ancient Island Harbours in the Mediterranean: From Natural Hazards to Anthropogenic Imprints," in A. GILBOA and A. YSAUR-LANDAU (eds), *Nomads of the Mediterranean: Trade and Contact in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Studies in Honor of Michal Artzy* (2020) 105-127.

<sup>22</sup> BLUE (*supra* n. 21).

found in Messenia. High energy coastlines are often cliff-lined, and other than slight changes in sea level, could still be viable anchorages today (Pl. II). Low energy coastlines are much more likely to have been altered through geomorphological processes such as siltation (Pl. III).<sup>23</sup> With these classifications in mind, a total of 44 potential Bronze Age anchorages were identified (Table I; Pl. IV). Not all would have been associated with a site and many have no evidence of LBA activity. They only have the potential to have been a place of interaction between land and sea for LBA Messenians.<sup>24</sup>

The majority of Mycenaean sites in Messenia are known only from surveys, so in many cases it is difficult to use any evidence other than the natural topography and the location of potential harbours to infer any sort of relationship with the sea. Many of the identified harbours do seem to have a nearby settlement which could have been their main benefactor. For example, along the western coast of Messenia from Romanou north until the modern harbour of Kyparissia, the coastline is a rocky shelf which makes the sea virtually inaccessible. There are, however, several small natural breaks in the rocks where the rivers draining down from Mt. Aigaleon empty into the sea. These breaks range in size, but often can create small bays or coves which provide some shelter from the worst of the winds and swells. The larger coves, such as Filiatra: Stomio and Langouvardos Cove may have acted as harbours for sites located along the rivers that fed into them. A site at Filiatra: Stomio has been partially excavated, and most of the material was found to be MH,<sup>25</sup> suggesting that the LBA site of Filiatra: Ayios Ioannis, slightly further upriver, may have been the main site with access to the harbour during the LBA.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Gargaliani: Ordines is located only a short distance upstream of Langouvardos Cove. Surface finds suggest that it became an important centre for the coastal plain during the Palatial period. Its location along the Langouvardos River and close to the cove suggests that it may have been well suited to administer the coastal region on behalf of the palace.<sup>27</sup>

Another aspect of the maritime cultural landscape relates to the seamarks and landmarks which would have guided ancient sailors from port to port. Mt. Aigaleon would have stood out for sailors arriving in Messenian waters from any direction (Pl. V). Similarly, the island of Proti was often the first sign of land that ships arriving from the Italian Peninsula or Sicily encountered.<sup>28</sup> The islands off the southern tip of the Messenian Peninsula would have also offered protection to ships travelling either east or west and guided them into the harbours of Methoni and Phoinikounta. The site of Phoinikounta: Ayia Analipsis is located on an anvil shaped headland which juts out into the strait between the mainland and the island of Schiza. It is ideally located to provide safe harbour for ships travelling between the Aegean and the western coast of Greece, as it is the first harbour with a LBA settlement once a ship has rounded Cape Akritas going west and the last port before an eastbound ship crossed the Gulf of Messenia towards the Aegean. The site was surveyed and determined to have material from throughout the Bronze Age and Roman periods<sup>29</sup>. The main harbour in modern times is the eastern bay, but a secondary anchorage exists

<sup>23</sup> BLUE (*supra* n. 21) 32.

<sup>24</sup> It should also be noted that this is not an exhaustive list, much more fieldwork and geoarchaeological studies are required to ground truth these potential harbours. This analysis can provide some insights into the connections between sites and their access points to the sea; however, it is important that this is not taken as evidence that a particular site was using a harbour just because it is closest to it on a map. There are myriad reasons why a harbour may or may not have been utilised by a site other than distance.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. G.E. CHATZI, “Ψάρι Τριφυλίας,” *ArchDelt* 40 (1985) 103-106; IDEM, “Φιλιατρά,” *ArchDelt* 41 (1986) 41-42; IDEM, “Φιλιατρά,” *ArchDelt* 42 (1987) 135.

<sup>26</sup> W.A. McDONALD and R. HOPE SIMPSON, “Further Explorations in Southwestern Peloponnese: 1964-1968,” *AJA* 73:2 (1969) 135.

<sup>27</sup> J. BENNET, “Pylos: The Expansion of a Mycenaean Palatial Center,” in M.L. GALATY and W.A. PARKINSON (eds), *Rethinking Mycenaean Palaces II: Revised and Expanded Second Edition* (2007) 37.

<sup>28</sup> J. MORTON, *The Role of the Physical Environment in Ancient Greek Seafaring* (2001) 192.

<sup>29</sup> W.A. McDONALD and R. HOPE SIMPSON, *Prehistoric Habitation in Southwestern Peloponnese* (1961) 247-8,

on the western side of the headland as well, although it is not as protected; modern yachts often anchor here in good weather, and the sandy beach may also have been used by smaller vessels. Small boats are still pulled onto the beach inside the main harbour today (Pl. VI). The winds are often north-westerly, so the main harbour is perfectly situated to be shielded from the brunt of the wind by the headland itself. The land around Phoinikounta is not flat or particularly good for agriculture, and the hinterlands are mostly mountainous and unsuitable for farming, so the site must have looked to the sea for at least some of its subsistence, perhaps more so than other Mycenaean sites. These types of interactions with the sea and the people who passed through the site suggest a deep understanding of the different properties of the sea: the danger, the ability to provide, and the medium of communication with people both within the Messenian world and beyond it.

There is some geoarchaeological evidence for potential LBA harbours from the “Five Rivers”<sup>30</sup> region on the north-western shore of the Gulf of Messenia. In the Mycenaean period, these rivers may have had lagoons near their mouths where boats could have been harboured. The Karya River near modern Petalidi was surveyed as part of the investigations into Nichoria, and it was discovered that the coastline has migrated seaward by several metres.<sup>31</sup> The geoarchaeological investigations of the river also found evidence which seems to indicate that during the Bronze Age a sand barrier caused the mouth of the river to become lagoonal. The investigators argued that this might be the harbour of Nichoria which sits on a ridge overlooking the Karya River and the coastal plain. Prior to the Second World War, the mouth of the Karya was used as an informal port for small caiques to distribute flour and wheat to local merchants, as well as a place for loading barges with lignite from a mine upriver. The rivers of the north-western Gulf of Messenia today have similar, but likely smaller, lagoons. For example, the Velika River has a small lagoon at its mouth (Pl. VII), which would no doubt be larger if the river water was not used for modern agriculture and irrigation.

River deltas also offer opportunities for anchorage and exist in lowland plains at the mouths of rivers, where multiple fluvial channels deposit silt from upstream, often forming marshy wetland environments which facilitate slow moving water. On the Gulf of Messenia’s northern shore, modern drainage projects have erased the once extensive deltaic wetland zones at the mouth of the Pamisos River.<sup>32</sup> Adjacency to these wetlands, however, was a favourable location for settlement in the Bronze Age as wetlands and deltas can be sources of food, foraging, and protection.<sup>33</sup> They can also be used as harbours since they offer protection from winds and currents. This may have been a potential factor in the settlements near Kalamata (*e.g.* Kalamata: Kastro and Kalamata: Tourles) and Velika (Velika: Skordakis) which sit on higher ground overlooking the Pamisos floodplain. The harbours provided by the wetlands may have also served the settlements further up the Pamisos River Valley such as Thouria.

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fig. 12; A. HASIAKOU and G.S. KORRES, “Νέες Προϊστορικές Θέσεις Στην Μεσσηνία. Οι παράλιες θέσεις. Μια πρώτη προσέγγιση,” in *Παρουσία. Επιστημονικό περιοδικό του Συλλόγου Διδακτικού Προσωπικού Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών*, 17/18:2 (2006) 735-6.

<sup>30</sup> S.E. ASCHENBRENNER, “A Contemporary Community,” in *UMME* 61.

<sup>31</sup> J.C. KRAFT, G.R. RAPP Jr., and S.E. ASCHENBRENNER, “Late Holocene Paleogeography of the Coastal Plain of the Gulf of Messenia, Greece, and Its Relationships to Archaeological Settings and Coastal Change,” *Geological Society of America Bulletin* V:86 (1975) 1202.

<sup>32</sup> KRAFT, RAPP, and ASCHENBRENNER (*supra* n. 31) 1204-7; M. ENGEL *et al.*, “Reconstructing middle to late Holocene palaeogeographies of the lower Messenian plain (southwestern Peloponnese, Greece): Coastline migration, vegetation history and sea level change,” *Palaeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 284 (2009) 259.

<sup>33</sup> R. ROTHHAUS, E. REINHARDT, T. TARTARON, and J. NOLLER, “A Geoarchaeological Approach for Understanding Prehistoric Usage of the Coastline of the Eastern Korinthia,” in K.P. FOSTER and R. LAFFINEUR (eds), *METRON. Measuring the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference, New Haven, Yale University, 18-21 April 2002* (2003) 37-48.

*The artificial harbour at Romanou*

How the Palace of Nestor at Pylos accessed the sea and from where is an important question, and likely depends on the time period and its relationships with neighbouring centres such as Iklaina.<sup>34</sup> The site of *ro-o-wa*, mentioned on several Linear B tablets from Pylos, was likely the main port of the palace; it was thought to have been located somewhere along the northern coast of the Bay of Navarino, but possibly further to the north.<sup>35</sup> Since the discovery of a potential anthropogenic harbour near the village of Romanou, it seems more likely that *ro-o-wa* should be associated with the site of Romanou on the modern Tragana-Romanou Road identified by PRAP.<sup>36</sup>

North of Divari Lagoon and the Bay of Navarino is an extensive alluvial floodplain. It has been suggested to have once been the river valley of the Selas River, which now flows into the Ionian Sea. At some point, the river's course was altered, most likely to exploit its floodplain more thoroughly by cutting a channel near the modern village of Romanou.<sup>37</sup> Core drilling by PRAP along the new course of the river discovered a large rectangular basin and canal, which they suggest belongs to a Late Helladic harbour system.<sup>38</sup> Upstream to the northeast of the basin, evidence for a former lake was also discovered. The interpretation of this data was that an artificial harbour had been constructed by the palace. Above the harbour the shallow lake fed by the Selas River flushed the basin with a constant stream of water, preventing siltation. When the palace was abandoned around 1200 BC, the system was no longer maintained, and it fell into disrepair, but the river retained its new course, flowing westwards into the Ionian Sea.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, further investigations have not been conducted because of heavy commercial development near Romanou, so this geoarchaeological study is the only evidence currently available. The harbour remains a controversial interpretation as there is no comparable harbour construction in LBA Greece, though other major hydraulic engineering projects were undertaken during the LBA.<sup>40</sup> If this was a Mycenaean built harbour, it signifies palatial involvement in nautical affairs on a level beyond what is described in the Linear B tablets. Several tholos tombs have also been located in the immediate vicinity of the harbour and the lake above it (Tragana: Viglitsa *Tholos* 1 and 2; Romanou: Golf Course *Tholos*<sup>41</sup>),

<sup>34</sup> It has been suggested that Iklaina remained outside palatial control until well into the Palatial Period (M.B. COSMOPOULOS, "Site Formation in Greece: Iklaina and the Unification of Mycenaean Pylos," *AJA* 123:3 [2019] 349-380).

<sup>35</sup> J. CHADWICK, "The Mycenaean Documents," in *UMME* 109-110.

<sup>36</sup> Site I4 in J.L. DAVIS and J. BENNET, "Site Gazetteer," in J.L. DAVIS and J. BENNET (eds), *The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project: A Retrospective* (2017) 37-38.

<sup>37</sup> J.C. KRAFT, G.R. RAPP Jr., and S.E. ASCHENBRENNER, "Late Holocene Palaeogeomorphic Reconstructions in the Area of the Bay of Navarino: Sandy Pylos," *JAS* 7 (1980) 194-195.

<sup>38</sup> E. ZANGGER, M.E. TIMPSON, S.B. YAZYENKO, F. KUHNKE, and J. KNAUSS, "The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project. Part II: Landscape Evolution and Site Preservation," *Hesperia* 66:4 (1997) 619-623.

<sup>39</sup> ZANGGER *et al.* (*supra* n. 38) 619-21. It is also possible that the river's course change was a natural phenomenon, and it has been argued that the river currently travels along a fault zone that divides the north and south of the western coast of the Messenian Peninsula (C. ATHANASSAS, I. FOUNTOULIS, I. MARIOLAKOS, Y. BASSIAKOS, Z. KAROTSIERIS, M. TRIANTAPHYLLOU, and K. THEODORAKOPOULOU, "Comments on the neotectonics of the coastal zone of western Messenia based on luminescence dating and geoarchaeological evidence," *Zeitschrift für Geomorphologie*, 57:3 [2013] 59-60).

<sup>40</sup> R. HOPE SIMPSON and D.K. HAGEL, *Mycenaean fortifications, highways, dams and canals. Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology*, CXXXIII (2006) 176-224.

<sup>41</sup> J. RAMBACH, "Die Ausgrabungen in der P.O.T.A. Romanou/Navarino-Dunes Hotelkomplex bei

which may also signify the area as an important place in the LBA, even before the harbour's construction. If the harbour at Romanou operated in a similar way to later Phoenician harbours, it is also possible that it would have been a military installation. While trade ships could continue to beach on the sandy shores of the Pylian coast or anchor in the northern part of the Bay of Navarino, warships, such as the hypothetical "Mycenaean Oared Galley"<sup>42</sup> might have been stored away from the weather and from coastal raiding. A depiction of such a vessel from the Postpalatial period was discovered on an alabastron in Tragana: Viglitsa Tholos 1, which directly overlooks the artificial harbour.<sup>43</sup> This might hint at the continued use or memory of use of the harbour area for ships beyond the destruction of the palace.

### Material Evidence for Maritime Culture

Objects and artefacts can act as proxies for evidence of the human relationship with the sea and for maritime cultural landscapes. For example, the presence of seashells or fish bones at a site can be considered evidence for a direct connection to the sea: these objects were removed from the sea (or seashore) and brought to a site. Both fish bones and shells might be indicative of marine food consumption, but this does not seem to be borne out by the present evidence from Messenia. No site has produced any great quantity of fish bones to suggest that fish were a staple food source, and this has been supported by isotopic analyses of burials from Pylos, which indicated that marine food consumption was minimal.<sup>44</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that fish was not consumed on an occasional basis. It could also have been consumed only on special occasions or only by certain groups or classes which are less visible in the archaeological record.

Likewise, shells have not been found in quantities in Messenia that would suggest that they were consumed on a regular basis. Many of the shells recovered from Nichoria were collected after the shellfish had already died, either implying that the shells were collected underwater where it would not be possible to differentiate living from dead shellfish or that the shells were collected for a different purpose other than consumption.<sup>45</sup> Other sites with shells include Malthi in the Soulima Valley, around 15km inland; quite romantically the excavator, Valmin, described the people of Malthi gathering shells "for the purpose of ornament or simply out of curiosity... on their visits to the seashore"<sup>46</sup> highlighting the varied ways in which people interact with the sea and the maritime landscape beyond economic endeavours or marine subsistence.

Other objects are more indirectly able to reveal details about the relationship to the sea and the maritime cultural landscape. Iconography, such as depictions of ships or marine life, offers clues about the

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Romanos in der Pylia/Messenien," in Π.Α. ΚΑΛΟΓΕΡΑΚΟΥ, Μ. ΧΑΣΙΑΚΟΥ, Ι. ΚΟΣΜΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, Χ. ΛΩΛΟΣ, Ε. ΜΑΡΑΜΠΕΑ, Ε. ΠΕΠΠΑ-ΠΑΠΑΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ, and Ε. ΠΛΑΤΩΝ (eds), *Κυδάλμιος. Τιμητικός Τόμος για τον Καθηγητή Γεωργίο Στυλ. Κορρέ. Τόμος Πρώτος* (2020) 259-271.

<sup>42</sup> S. WACHSMANN, *Seagoing Ships and Seamanship in the Bronze Age Levant* (1998) 155-6; M. WEDDE, "The Mycenaean Galley in Context: From Fact to Idée fixe," in *EMPORIA*, 29-38; TARTARON (*supra* n. 20) 59-71.

<sup>43</sup> *E.g.* WACHSMANN (*supra* n. 42) 135, Fig. 7.17; B. EDER, "The World of Telemachus: Western Greece 1200-700 BC," in S. DEGER-JALKOTZY and I.S. LEMOS (eds), *Ancient Greece: From the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer. Edinburgh Leventis Studies* 3 (2006) 550-551.

<sup>44</sup> Problems have also been noted in the use of Stable Isotope Analysis for identifying marine diets in the Aegean and marine consumption may be more frequent in the ancient Aegean than previously thought (E. VIKΑ and T. THEODOROPOULOU, "Re-investigating fish consumption in Greek antiquity: results from δ<sup>13</sup>C and δ<sup>15</sup>N analysis from fish bone collagen," *JAS* 39:5 [2012] 1618-1627).

<sup>45</sup> D.S. REESE, "Recent and Fossil Invertebrates (with a Note on the Nature of the MH I Fauna)," in *NICHORIA II*.

<sup>46</sup> M.N. VALMIN, *The Swedish Messenia Expedition* (1938) 359.

perception of the sea. Depictions of ships are present at a number of sites in Messenia but are most prominent in the wall-paintings of Pylos<sup>47</sup> and Iklaina.<sup>48</sup> These have commonly been interpreted as signifiers of naval power and prowess at sea, but these images might also have inspired awe, terror, pride, or any other range of emotions depending on the viewer. An enslaved person captured in battle or during a sea raid who now serves in a Messenian elite building might have been induced to sadness, frustration, and terror at images commemorating the naval might of their captors, while a Pylian sailor might have looked upon the same images and been filled with pride and glory.

Imported objects are innately connected to the maritime world through the association of their journey across the sea. Many of the materials used in jewellery production, ornamentation or as grave goods do not occur naturally in Greece and were most likely transported by ship or by boat to the Greek mainland. It is likely that much of this material arrived in Prepalatial Messenia through contact with Minoan Crete and the Aegean islands, but some objects, such as amber, made their way to Messenia via different routes which hint at more diverse maritime contacts and networks. In the Palatial period, objects such as ivory necessarily required a maritime journey from Africa to be worked in palatial workshops. The movement of people as well as things should also not be overlooked; for example, there are divergent pottery-making traditions at Pylos which hint at the presence of foreign interaction and the exchange of ideas.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, it has been proposed that stone masons trained in the techniques of Minoan Crete were present during the construction of the earlier 15th-14th cent. phases of the palace's construction as well as the *tholos* tombs at Peristeria.<sup>50</sup> The presence of foreigners and foreign objects throughout Messenia and throughout the LBA would have emphasised the connection to the maritime world.

Indirect evidence can be compiled together to understand the cognitive connection to the maritime landscape over successive generations at sites such as Tholos 2 at Myrsinochori: Routsis, for example. The tomb was in use throughout the Mycenaean period and contained imported objects ranging from pottery to exotic jewellery to ivory, and various items also depicted marine imagery such as dolphins and squids.<sup>51</sup> One of the earliest burials contained an LH I dagger with a gold inlaid scene of an underwater seascape with seaweed and nautili, another contained an LH IIA Palace Style Jar with an octopus motif, while the latest burials in LH IIIB, were interred alongside a plaster offering table with a depiction of an octopus in the centre of the bowl. Nautili and octopuses also feature prominently in the iconography of the Palace of Nestor. They decorate the walls throughout the palace while an octopus famously occupies the floor tile directly in front of the throne.<sup>52</sup> These objects and images provide evidence for engagement with the maritime world, but for the people who made them and used them, they could also be evocative of some deeper connection that links the objects and the observers to the sea.

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<sup>47</sup> H. BRECOULAKI, S.R. STOCKER, J.L. DAVIS, and E. EGAN, "An unprecedented naval scene from Pylos: first considerations," in *WALL PAINTING* 256-287.

<sup>48</sup> M.B. COSMOPOULOS, "A Group of New Mycenaean Frescoes from Iklaina, Pylos," in *WALL PAINTING* 249-259.

<sup>49</sup> B. LIS, "A Foreign Potter in the Pylian Kingdom? A Reanalysis of the Ceramic Assemblage of Room 60 in the Palace of Nestor at Pylos," *Hesperia* 85:3 (2016) 491-536.

<sup>50</sup> A. BEVAN and E. BLOXAM, "Stonemasons and Craft Mobility in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean," in E. KIRIATZI and C. KNAPPETT, *Human Mobility and Technological Transfer in the Prehistoric Mediterranean* (2016) 89-92.

<sup>51</sup> S.I. MARINATOS, *Ανασκαφαί Μεσσηνίας 1952-1966* (2014) 108-117.

<sup>52</sup> E.C. EGAN and H. BRECOULAKI, "Marine Iconography at the Palace of Nestor and the Emblematic Use of the Argonaut," in *WALL PAINTING* 289-309.

## Intangible Maritime Culture

Many of the activities of ancient mariners and coastal dwellers do not leave behind evidence in the archaeological record, though sometimes their existence can be implied through careful consideration. The Linear B documents, for example, reveal hints about certain aspects of palatial maritime culture, including things that would never have been possible to discern from the archaeological record alone. Mentions of maritime matters are sparse, but the tablets offer some of the only concrete evidence for the intangible aspects of the Pylian maritime cultural landscape.<sup>53</sup>

The texts mention *na-u-do-mo*, “ship-builders,” but whether this means they were shipwrights in charge of the construction of individual ships, or a group of specialised carpenters sent to a specific shipwright, or something else is unclear.<sup>54</sup> Certain tablets also could potentially be referring to materials for ship construction; PY Vn 46, for example, lists quantities of wood including long timbers for bulwarks, wales, benches for rowers, maststeps, or planking.<sup>55</sup> Though the references are minimal, the presence of shipbuilding at Pylos implies a much more expansive maritime landscape than what is directly mentioned. Shipbuilding is a large and costly endeavour and requires many skilled hands and a network of adjacent industries to support it; specialised knowledge and tools would also be required.<sup>56</sup> Timber needs to be located, harvested and brought to the shipyard (by animal or barge); linen needs to be harvested from flax, spun, and woven into sails; ships need to be cleaned, maintained, and repaired; goods must be loaded and unloaded, stored and processed. The list is extensive and not exhaustive, and there are also would have been rituals and ceremonies performed.<sup>57</sup> Reference is also made in the tablets to rowers levied from Pylian coastal communities for service presumably on military vessels. PY An 610, for example, records at least six hundred rowers, which could man roughly between twelve and thirty ships.<sup>58</sup> The implication from these texts is that coastal communities in Messenia possessed particular specialisations related to rowing and seafaring.

## Conclusions

Identifying aspects of the maritime cultural landscape in Mycenaean Greece requires a degree of imagination. Maritime culture can be ephemeral and immaterial, and it is often only through proxies or inference that traces of Mycenaean maritimity might be understood. Harbours and anchorages provide a link between the terrestrial and the maritime worlds. Some harbours are local places that see the same boats making short coastal journeys, while others are large and cosmopolitan. No matter the size or function of a harbour, its presence in the landscape of Messenia offers a connection to the sea. These harbours play a crucial role in elucidating the maritime culture landscapes of Messenia when evidence

<sup>53</sup> T.G. PALAIMA, “Maritime Matters in the Linear B Tablets,” in *THALASSA* 273-310.

<sup>54</sup> PALAIMA (*supra* n. 53) 287-288; V.P. PETRAKIS, “Politics of the sea in the Late Bronze Age II-III Aegean: iconographic preferences and textual perspectives,” in G. VAVOURANAKIS (ed.), *The seascape in Aegean Prehistory* (2011) 209.

<sup>55</sup> F. HOCKER and T.G. PALAIMA, “Late Bronze Age Aegean Ships and the Pylos Tablets Vn 46 and Vn 879,” *Minos* 25 (1995) 310-315.

<sup>56</sup> E. MARAGOUDAKI and P.K. KAVVOURAS, “Mycenaean shipwright tool kit: its reconstruction and evaluation,” *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* 4 (2012) 199-208.

<sup>57</sup> For example, the tree shrine often represented in Minoan art, but also found on one of the rings of the Griffin Warrior, might represent a seaside ritual meant to ensure protection at sea or offer thanks for a successful journey. C.J. TULLY, *The Cultic Life of Trees in the Prehistoric Aegean, Levant, Egypt and Cyprus* (2018) 112-122.

<sup>58</sup> PALAIMA (*supra* n. 53) 285.

from coastal excavations is lacking. Maritime culture can also be understood through the presence of material culture directly or indirectly associated with the sea. The paucity of fish and shells suggests that consumption was not the primary motivator for engagement with the sea, while exotica and foreign goods provide a constant link to the larger Mediterranean world across the seas. Along with the material evidence of maritime engagement comes the realisation of the vast, often-invisible adjacent industries that would have supported maritime activity. Mycenaean archaeology can benefit from adopting theoretical approaches from maritime archaeology to better understand the relationship between humans and the sea. Paradigms such as maritime cultural landscapes and maritimity are effective at revealing the practices and lifeways of people on the coast and their impacts throughout the landscape.

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. I Map of LBA Messenia  
Pl. II High Energy Coastlines Harbour Typology, after BLUE (*supra* n. 21).  
Pl. III Low Energy Coastline Harbour Typology, after BLUE (*supra* n. 21).  
Pl. IV Map of Potential LBA Anchorages and Harbours in Messenia.  
Pl. V View from a ship travelling towards Messenia after rounding the Mani Peninsula (photo by author).  
Pl. VI Boats pulled up on shore at Phoinikounta (photo by author).  
Pl. VII Velika River Mouth (photo by author).

