

The Partitioned Space of Byzantine Peloponnese

From History to Political and Mythical Exploitation

Ilias Anagnostakis and Maria Leontsini

The space of the Peloponnese has always had its own particularity: it is, in fact, almost an island, a *paene insula*, in other words, a peninsula that has since mythical times taken its name as a whole from its north-western part, and this designation remained consistent up to the Middle Ages. This area of land, almost completely surrounded by water except for an isthmus connecting it with the mainland, was named Peloponnesos, ‘the island of Pelops’, after the ancient king of Pisa, a town in the north-western part of the peninsula. It became the dominant name, although, as appropriate, it was also called the *land of the Argives*.¹—From Hellenistic and Roman times onwards, the north-west part was also known as Achaia and came under the administration of the Roman province of Achaia, which included further territories in the Hellenic Peninsula.² During the Byzantine period, it bore both names, the Peloponnese and Achaia, and from the 13th century onwards the appellation Morea prevailed, a name originating most probably from Elis, an area in the western Peloponnese.³ This introductory remark on the peninsula's naming in relation to its spatial partitioning is an essential supplement to what we shall discuss below concerning the formulation of the concept about the two separate Peloponnesian parts, during the middle Byzantine era, which recognised the eastern part as pure (*καθαρεύων*) and the western one as Slavic-occupied, commixed (*σύμμικτον*) and thus

¹ Strabo, 8.1, 2, 6–7; 8.5, 5, 134–137; 8.6, 5, 154–155; Stephanos Byzantios, letter P 95, 52–53; *De thematibus*, 6.7–13, 90; *Chrestomathie*, 8.117, 294; Eustathios, 338.8; 608.35–609.9; 684.5; Pseudo-

² *De Administrando Imperio*, 49.43, 230–231; *De thematibus*, 6.2–3, 90; Bon 1951, 61, 108–110.

³ Bon 1951, 117, 137, 158–159; Diller 1954, VIII. 337A, 38; Laurent 1962; Bon 1969, 306–326; Gregory 1991; Nesbitt – Oikonomides 1994, 88–89 n. 32 (with commentary); della Dora 2013, 459–461; Gerstel 2013, 1–2.

implicitly alleging that, in contrast to the eastern part, this was the “impure” one. As nomenclature signifies, a section of the partitioned space of the peninsula, specifically the north–west, gave over time its name to the whole, with whatever that entailed in each era as a political, economic or cultural dynamic of this part in relation to the entirety of the region.⁴ This study intends to assess how some special attributes were employed to project the Peloponnese as a space divided into two parts, and subsequently reevaluated notions on population movement and space drawn from antique literature.

The resilient designation of the spatial partition of the Peloponnese emanated from environmental, geographical and ethnological features that formed the setting for movements, exchanges and communication. The morphology and the topography of the terrain, with its mountain ranges and promontories stretching far out into the sea, and its bays, create indeed a very distinctly east–west partitioned space in the Peloponnese. Over time this partitioned space shaped ethnological and cultural–historical divisions and determined communicability. Suffice to say that Horden and Purcell speak of physically distinct landscapes, such as the Peloponnese, and discuss the liaisons developed between its micro-regions and centres of major authority that formed distinctive communication dynamics from ancient to modern times.⁵

Communication lines clearly existing during the Early Byzantine period became difficult after the 7th century; at that time, according to certain sources, a different reality of subdividing the Peloponnese into two distinct parts was established through the restructuring of the regional, ecclesiastical, civil and military organization. This segmentation of the Peloponnese was furthermore attributed invariably to the Avar and Slav raids,⁶ and was transmitted with some novel denotations concerning the spatial

⁴ Pausanias, 5.8, 2, 420–421; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 67.

⁵ Horden – Purcell 2000, 130; see also Avramea 1997, 107–108; Stewart 2013, 81–82.

⁶ Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 76–77, with sources.

fragmentation of the Peloponnese. The individuality of the Peloponnesian space and the formation of particular regions and units had already been highlighted by historians and geographers in antiquity. Herodotus described seven geographically separate peoples, indigenous and settlers, Strabo spoke of the western and eastern parts, measuring the length and breadth of the peninsula, while Pausanias divided it into coherent, self-contained sections. In other words, the divided character of the landscape was not unknown in antiquity.⁷ (Map 1).

During the Middle Byzantine period the peninsula's division into eastern and western parts was again presented in terms of communicability, ethnic purity and administratively partitioned space. From the 7th century onwards, this reoccurring concept on spatial partitioning acquired a novel political, administrative and ethnological peculiarity. It is indeed strange, if not provocative, for example, that the vertical axis, proposed by Strabo together with other geographers for measuring the length of the Peloponnese, running from Aigion to Cape Maleas and dividing the peninsula into eastern and western parts, coincides perfectly with the dividing line between the western and eastern sections of the Peloponnese, put forward by the Byzantines.⁸ This spatial partition is considered to have been brought about by Slavic settlement, which determined the later applications of portioned space, and coincides with the logic of ecclesiastical and administrative arrangements in the Byzantine era. (Map 2)⁹

The reprocessed formation of this spatial shaping, voiced along with concepts of population dynamics, could be a simple coincidence, although it is not; yet, even if it

⁷ Herodotos, 8.73, 70–71; Strabo 8.2, 1–2, 12–15; Pausanias, 5.1, 1–2, 380–381; Baladié 1980, 2–4 n. 8; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 66–67; for a general assessment of the one-sided valuations of the Peloponnese in the textual sources and their influence in archaeological analysis, see Stewart 2013, 15–17. On the new conceptions on space influenced by theology and politics and introduced in Late Antique historiography, see van Nuffelen 2019, 1–12.

⁸ Strabo 8.2.1, 12–13; Bon 1951, 16, 18, 19–21; Lambropoulou 2000, 95–113; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 67.

⁹ Yannopoulos 1993; Kislinger 2001, 35; Anagnostakis 2012, 104–105, 107–108 with references to documentation; Stewart 2013, 97–98; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 109.

were a coincidence, it is highly revealing. Cape Tainaron and the Taygetos mountain range could have been the dividing line. We have to wonder why the western part of the Peloponnese, in this case Patras, was not united politically to Cape Tainaron but to the Laconian Helos and Cape Maleas, although the last two could form the end or the beginning of another section in the eastern part of the Peloponnese. Aspects of this differentiation have been discussed with regard to geomorphology, ethnic diversity and communicability.¹⁰ We shall simply point out that the north–west part, which, as we said above, gave the name to the peninsula over time, although presented as being vulnerable and exposed, was also occupied and separated and ended up having no political or administrative contact with the rest of the Peloponnese during two historical changeover periods: during the Slavic invasion and the Frankish rule.

The criteria on spatial partition acquired new dimensions during the Byzantine era and mainly concerned the livelihoods of the local populations and the strategies aimed at their subordination to state structures. This reality was concurrent with the decline of the urban centres in the Early Byzantine period and the increasing role of the countryside.¹¹ Changes became obvious from the end of the 6th century, probably, following the Slavic incursions and settlement, when the two Peloponnesian east and west units again came to determine space. Slavic settlement contributed to reshaping the dynamics of urban-rural relations and at the same time created the ground for power claims among the new urban centers, where state structures were established, primarily in Corinth, the metropolis and capital city of the theme of the Peloponnese, and then in Patras and Lakedaimon (Sparta), while creating at the same time antagonism with regard to their bonds with

¹⁰ Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 67, 73–78, see also n. 6 above.

¹¹ Bon 1951, 89; Nesbitt – Oikonomides 1994, 78; Avramea 1997, 111–112. Literature has dealt extensively with the policies of integration of the Slavs, see below and nos. 19 and 33. More on the resuming of the repressive strategies to subdue the Slavic populations in the 10th c. can be found in Zuckerman 2014.

Constantinople. Therefore, the division of the Peloponnese according to Byzantine textual sources was no longer defined by mathematical, geographical and geomorphological standards, but only in terms of communication and control.¹² The spatial distribution of Slavic settlements located elsewhere in the interior of the Peloponnese and not only in the eastern and western parts has been well studied on the basis of numismatic material, especially coin hoards, also pottery, metal objects and burial practices.¹³

So far, the distribution of these findings and the material from Slavic terminology-related site names, designating the tools used for land clearing and cultivation, suggest a wide spread of the Slavic establishment.¹⁴ However, allusions to the formation of the two separate geographical units of the Peloponnese presented in the sources are projected as a result of the Byzantine efforts to take control of the territories where the Slavs had settled. Such state policies point clearly to the changes of power relations in the peninsula which introduced the setting of new spatial boundaries into areas under the jurisdiction of bishoprics, cities and fortified settlements. It is even evident that the sources' narratives were invested with historical and mythical explanations so as illustrate and vindicate the partition of the Peloponnese in relation to the rivalries that emerged after the claims of superiority among different centers of power.¹⁵

The transformation of the Peloponnesian space into a divided territory with an eastern and a western section is set out in the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, a 10th-century text, probably written by Arethas, the bishop of Kaisareia, a native of Patras (ca. 850–

¹² Konstantakopoulou 1989; Koutava–Delivoria 1993, 98; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 105–106.

¹³ Fougères 1898, 596–599; Bon 1951, 51 n. 2, 57, 60, 62–63, 165; Konti 1985, 107–108, 116; Weithmann 1996; Anagnostakis 1997, 288–289, passim; Anagnostakis 2009; Avramea 1997, 72–81; Anagnostakis – Poulou 1997, 232–233, 292–303, 309–317; Kislinger 2001, 96–98; Vroom 2003, 141–143; Veikou 2012, 200–205; Metaxas 2018, 689–700, especially 692 n. 32, 693 n. 37.

¹⁴ Malingoudis 1981; Anagnostakis 2009 passim; Curta 2011, 210–211; Anagnostakis 2012, 106–108 and passim; Veikou 2012, 184–188.

¹⁵ These issues are clarified in Anagnostakis 2009; and Anagnostakis 2012.

after 932). The western part of the Peloponnese is mentioned as a specific unit which differs in population and culture from the eastern part. The *Chronicle* describes the eastern part as rugged and inaccessible.¹⁶ This landscape morphology was obviously projected in this text as influencing the formation of the political, military and ecclesiastical division and as having an impact on the populations' subjugation and control. From this perspective, the *Chronicle* outlines the rise of Patras to a metropolis, exercising its jurisdiction over the bishoprics not only of the western part but also over Lakedaimon in the southern part, previously under the metropolitan see of Corinth.¹⁷ Thus, the western part, due to state policies, was reinforced with regard to administration, while, however, it soon became more impure and commixed after Lakedaimon's repopulation with a mixture of people (Kapheroi, Thrakesians, Armenians and others). The *Chronicle* also presents the western part as being exposed to the Slavs and threatened by their uprisings, but, on the other hand, it makes clear that it was well strengthened by the measures taken after the suppression of the revolts by the thematic armies heading from Constantinople and Corinth, the capital of the Peloponnese's *thema*.¹⁸ Similar arguments regarding the spatial partition were expressed by Konstantinos Porphyrogennetos when Byzantine control had been regained over the entire area of the Peloponnese. His account of the military operations carried out for the subjugation of the Slavic tribes, the Melingoi and the Ezeritai, is framed by narratives

¹⁶ *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 10.55–58 (Lemerle), 12, 18 (Dujčev); Avramea 1997, 68–70; Kislinger 2001, 18–25; 101–104, 106; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 74; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 107–110. On the text see also Charanis 1950, 142–144, 161–164; Anagnostakis 2012, 106–107; Neville 2018, 130–131.

¹⁷ *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 10.70–11.76 (Lemerle), 18, 20 (Dujčev); *Notitia* 4.493; *Notitia* 5.42; *Notitia* 7.32.549–555; *Notitia* 8.34; *Notitia* 9.410–415; *Notitia* 10.492–475, Darrouzès 1981, 261, 265, 271, 284, 291, 303, 326–327; *De thematibus*, 6.4.6, 90; Charanis 1950, 154–157, 163–164; Bon 1951, 44, 106, 109–110; Kresten 1977; Yannopoulos 1993; Weithmann 1996, 18; Zivković 1999; Kislinger 2001, 43–44, 102–103; Turlej 2001, 55–57, 60–70, 87–90, 112–114; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 72; Curta 2011, 136–137, 251–252; Moulet 2011, 107–108 and n. 360; Anagnostakis 2012, 103–104.

¹⁸ *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 10.45–58 (Lemerle), 20, 22 (Dujčev); *De Administrando Imperio*, 49.4–18, 39–59, 65–75 228–232, 50.9–15, 63, 232–233, 234–235; Kislinger 2001, 42–44, 50, 54, 104; Turlej 2001, 101–104; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 110.

comparable to the *Chronicle's* reports on the morphology and accessibility of the lands where these populations settled.¹⁹ Porphyrogenetos segregates the Slav incomers of the western part from the people in the south-eastern Peloponnese (naming Mani, Malea peninsula, including probably the region of Monemvasia), claiming that the inhabitants there were descendants of the ancient Greek and Romaioi: “the inhabitants of the castle of Maïna are not of the race of Slavs, but of ancient Romaioi and even to this day they are called Hellenes-Greeks after the ancient Hellenes ... and the place where they live (i.e. all the Hellenes) is situated on the tip of Malea, that is beyond Ezeron towards the coast” (οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς τῶν προρρηθέντων Σκλάβων, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τῶν παλαιότερων Ῥωμαίων, οἱ καὶ μέχρι τοῦ νῦν παρὰ τῶν ἐντοπίων Ἕλληνας προσαγορεύονται... κατὰ τοὺς παλαιοὺς Ἕλληνας... Διάκειται δὲ ὁ τοιοῦτος τόπος εἰς ἄκρην τοῦ Μαλέα, ἧγουν ἐκεῖθεν τοῦ Ἐζερού πρὸς τὴν παραθαλασσίαν).²⁰ He also relates how the *strategos* who had his seat in Corinth, in the eastern extremity of the *thema* of the Peloponnese, was expected to send aid to Patras, in the west, when besieged by the Slavs, that is, to the part that is presented in the *Chronicle* as unclean or impure. In the same way Strabo’s 10th-century *Chrestomathy* refers to Slavs only in the western Peloponnese.²¹ This elucidative commentary confirms the general tendency prevailing in the 10th century sources to present us with the

¹⁹ *De Administrando Imperio*, 50.1–5, 15–32, 40–70 232–235; Bon 1951, 61, 73; Kalligas 1990, 43, 45; Kislinger 2001, 53; Zuckerman 2014.

²⁰ *De Administrando Imperio*, 50.1–5, 13–14, 71–76, 232–233, 236–237; *De thematibus*, 6.36–40, 91; Bon 1951, 33 n. 2–3, 72–73 n. 2, 116–118; Kalligas 1990, 43, 45–54; Anagnostakis 1992; Avramea 1997, 89, 89; Avramea 1998; Kislinger 2001, 41–42; Curta 2011, 187; Anagnostakis 2012, 107–109; Anagnostakis – Poulou 1997, 300–302; Anagnostakis 2012, 107; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 125, 129. For this original reading of the passage in the *De Administrando Imperio*, 50.71–82 see Anagnostakis 1992; Anagnostakis 1993, 27–30 and note 6.

²¹ *Chrestomathie*, 7.47, 288, 8.108, 293; Bon 1951, 39 n. 2, 43–44, 63 n. 1; Diller 1954, X.449C, 38–39, 48–50; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 74; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 11.

partitioned reality of the Peloponnesian space by exploiting mythological geographical themes from ancient writers, especially Strabo and Pausanias.²²

What is particularly interesting in this case is that a historical reality, such as the Slavic settlement and the spatial partition of the Byzantine Peloponnese, was subjected to political and mythical exploitation, adapting and appropriating old patterns of spatial partitioning to official written testimonia on the Peloponnese coming from the state and church authorities. Ancient mythology and medieval legends were used in the fabrication of propaganda and etiological narrative to serve political and ecclesiastical interests and were purported to explain the Peloponnesian particularity. This partitioned space also served to create identities, and to generate or justify administrative innovations. The author of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* reveals an antiquarian cast of mind, and we know that he used Pausanias in extenso: autochthony in a Greek context was precisely the concern of Pausanias.²³ The narratives in relation to the Peloponnese of both Pausanias and the *Chronicle* inaugurated periods that historians have called the Dark Ages, one with the coming of the Dorians, and the other with the coming of the Avars and Slavs.²⁴ In Pausanias' general account of the peoples of the Peloponnese, at the beginning of Book V, we find a narrative that presents all the basic structural elements of the tale of migrations and division of the Peloponnese, which were reiterated in the *Chronicle*. State measures taken and rearrangements applied in political and ecclesiastical administration and the supervision of populations in certain areas were invested in the *Chronicle* with contrasting notions that valued space with antithetical properties like continuity versus rupture, and assessed ethnicity likewise (*καθαρεύων*,

²² Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 111–114.

²³ Pausanias, 5.1, 1, 380–381; on further documentation and comments see Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 111–114.

²⁴ *Life of Nikon*, 31.4–5, 108, 283; Kalligas 1990, 48–49; Curta 2011, 187; Anagnostakis 2012, 118.

pure versus impure: i.e. ‘pure’ Patras versus ‘impure’ Lakedaimon; ἐγγενής, autochthonous, ‘indigenous’ versus σύμμικτος - mixed).²⁵

The *Chronicle* does not refer directly to the ‘impurity’ of the western or central Peloponnese, but simply presents the eastern part as rugged and inaccessible and as being controlled by the Byzantines. It is this part which is pure *kathareuon* (καθαρεύον); consequently, the other part is impure, apart from Patras with the newly established metropolitan see.²⁶ We are faced with the most blatant formulation, perhaps unique, of a partitioned space in terms of difficulty of access and control but also of population diversity and purity. The meaning of the ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’ of a space attributed to the partitioned Byzantine Peloponnese had implications associated with population mobility. It is evident that the ‘purity’, of *the kathareuon* space, a Byzantine hapax, was juxtaposed to ‘commixture’, of the *symmikton* (σύμμικτον) part; the term *kathareuon* was attributed to the pure part, while *symmikton* or with Slavs was used in the *Chronicle* to describe populations settled in the western and consequently “impure” part.²⁷ These terms, used to provide the image of contrasting distinct spatialities, were associated to mobility, transfers or deportations, exiles and population movements, as well as to rivalries among cities (Corinth, Patras and Lakedaimon), which in several ways were initiated by political motives.²⁸

Kathareuein, meaning to be pure was used by the Byzantines exclusively for matters of morality, to be clean from bad thoughts, passions, pleasures, sins, crimes, and hardly ever for the ethnic purity of a country or a region. In ancient writers, we come across the

²⁵ Pausanias, 5.1, 1–2, 380–381; *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 10.57 (Lemerle), 12 (Dujčev); Mazaris, 76.17–26; Bon 1951, 63 n. 3, 73–74; Westerink 1972, 241; Koder 1976; Kalligas 1990, 16–18, 48–54; Kislinger 2001, 37–38, 55; Curta 2011, 279–280; Anagnostakis 2012, 105–106, 107–108, 111–113 and passim; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 111–112, 115 with analysis.

²⁶ *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 10.56–58, 62–70 (Lemerle), 12, 18 (Dujčev); Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 109, 111.

²⁷ *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 10.58, 71 (Lemerle), 12, 22 (Dujčev).

²⁸ *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, 9.36–11.76 (Lemerle), 12, 22 (Dujčev); Curta 2011, 279–280; Anagnostakis 2012, 105–106, 107–108.

use of *kathareuein* for a place, but not corresponding to its sense articulated in the *Chronicle*, mainly with the meaning of a road or a region being free from dangerous beasts, poisonous plants, lepers, unclean people or thieves. The closest examples to the *Chronicle*'s use of *kathareuein* exist in the *Roman History* of Appian, referring to a street or space that is clear or free of enemies (*ὁδὸν καθαρεύουσαν πολεμίων*)²⁹, and in Pausanias, who speaks of the island of Sardinia being free of poisonous plants except for the Sardinian plant (*καθαρεύει καὶ ἀπὸ φαρμάκων ἢ νήσος ὅσα ἐργάζεται θάνατον*).³⁰

We believe, however, that the issues referring to purity in the *Chronicle*, regardless of any purposes they may have served, while also having a pronounced ethnic character (control of the western part by Slav conquerors), were ultimately exploited quite differently and conceived in a completely 'physical' and 'administrative' way. We could say that it is something similar to dealing with wild, savage nature on the one hand and the subjugated, tamed nature on the other. In the first case intervention is not easily allowed, while in the second it is subjugated to the state. The concepts of occupation and control of space are close to equivalent considerations concerning the taming of the wilderness and its transformation into managed landscapes, a process practiced by saints and monks in the Byzantine countryside with the establishment of monasteries.³¹ Spatial control and managing of the Peloponnese seems to have been a central element in Byzantine state strategy and ideology in the 10th century. There seems to be a paradoxical correlation between Byzantine domination and the open areas (lowland areas), where physical contacts have allowed the development of administrative activities, compared to areas that are difficult to obtain and therefore controlled only by

²⁹ Appian, 3.9, 67, 80–81; 4.12, 99, 306–307.

³⁰ Pausanias, 10.17, 13, 644–465.

³¹ Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 128–129; della Dora 2016, 109, 118–144, 148, 170.

military operations (mountainous areas and inaccessible areas). Porphyrogennetos described certain regions of the Peloponnese, where populations tended to revolt (like the Melingoi and the Ezeritai), as maintaining separate identities but still subject to state taxation.³²

The exploitation of another kind of spatiality appeared again with the restructuring of the partitioned Peloponnesian space, this time with reference to fiscal and political claims, settled by the granting of privileges on the eve of and shortly after the Frankish conquest. A type of this administratively partitioned spatiality was extant during the following centuries, but without any reference to purity or to other spatial discriminations: the chrysobull of Alexios III Angelos, dated 1198 and preserved in Latin, refers to ‘*orion*’ (ὄριον, regional delimitation): the ‘Orion Patron et Methonis’, which included the western parts of the Peloponnese, and the ‘Orion Corinthii, Argus et Nauplii’.³³ In the *Partitio Regni Graeci* a third part, from Lakedaimon to Kalavryta, was put forward as a reasonable complement to the restoration of spatiality and filled the gap between the other two sides of the peninsula.³⁴ This demarcation of the partitioned administrative space of the Peloponnese appears completely official and adjusted to the physical features of the landscape. The problem of control related to purity, as encountered in the sources of the Middle Byzantine period, separating the Peloponnese in two parts, was no longer a fundamental issue. Challenges regarding spatial control

³² *De Administrando Imperio*, 49.1–8, 40–44, 65–71, 229–231, 50.1–82, 232–237; Anagnostakis – Kaldellis 2014, 128–131.

³³ *I trattati con Bizanzio*, 130; Tafel – Thomas, 264–265, 468–470; Kordosis 1981, 94; Anagnostakis et al. 2002, 79; Anagnostakis 2012, 104.

³⁴ Zakythinos 1941, 248–252; Bon 1951, 100–102; Bon 1969, 120–125.

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strongly re-emerged with the Frankish conquest and the partitioning yet again of the Peloponnese, this time into a *Despotate* and a *Principality*.³⁵

So, from the Roman era up to the period of Frankish rule, the partition of the eastern section centered on Corinth and the western one centered on Patras was based primarily on the formation of territorial and power relations, as well as on the capacities of control and communications. It is our contention that the ethnological, cultural or other administrative particularities of each section constituted the consequences and not the causes of the partitioned space of the Peloponnese.

MAPS

Map 1: Strabo. Book VIII, vol. 4, map n. 8.

Map. 2: Yannopoulos, 1993, 390.

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³⁵ Jacoby 1973, 874–875, 877–878; Kalligas 1990, 70–79, 96–97; Anagnostakis 2012, 104; Jeffreys 2013, 11–12; Ragkou 2018.

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