

INTERPRETING THE
SEVENTH CENTURY BC
TRADITION AND INNOVATION

EDITED BY

XENIA CHARALAMBIDOU AND CATHERINE MORGAN



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the Seventh Century BC
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Cover images: Sanctuary of Herakles by the Elektran Gates at Thebes.

Foreground: dinos or louterion depicting Herakles killing the Centaur Nessos while abducting Deianeira
(© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports: Archaeological Receipts Fund; photograph: S. Mavromatis).

Background: concentration of unpainted jugs massed together in the ash altar (photograph: V. Aravantinos).

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31. Panhellenes at Methone, Pieria (c. 700 BC): new inscriptions, graffiti/dipinti, and (trade)marks

Yannis Tzifopoulos, Manthos Bessios and Antonis Kotsonas

Abstract: According to ancient sources, Methone in Pieria was established by Euboean colonists from Eretria in 733/2 BC. Excavation (ongoing since 2003-04) of a rectangular pit, apparently used as an *apothetes*, on top of the lower eastern hill, revealed a huge quantity of pots, potsherds, and other remnants of the activities of nearby workshops. 191 of these pots and potsherds bear inscriptions, graffiti/dipinti, and (trade)marks, the majority of which (157) date to c. 700 BC. The great majority, 166 pots and potsherds (amphorae and sympotic vessels), bear non-alphabetic symbols, marks, graffiti and very few dipinti, most probably signs of ownership and/or trading. Of the remaining 25 amphorae and sympotic vessels, 18 bear alphabetic symbols, marks, and graffiti, which again probably denote ownership and/or trading activities, and seven bear complete or fragmentary inscriptions. This unique and unexpected group from Methone should be added to the chronologically comparable groups from Lefkandi, Eretria, Oropos and Thebes, from Hymettos and Attica, from Pithekoussai and Cumae, and especially from Kommos in south Crete, where the same variety of vessel provenance and incised inscriptions, symbols, and (trade)marks is clearly evident. The new Methone group presents evidence for: trading and economic activities during the colonization period; the early phase of the alphabet and its scripts and techniques, the Greek language and dialects, and competence in writing in commercial and sympotic contexts; and, finally, for literary beginnings in Greece, which soon afterwards emerge with Archilochos' *Panhellenes* at Thasos.¹

One of the questions posed by Plutarch in his *Quaest. Graec.* (293a-b) is 'who are the men repulsed by slings', to which the answer is the Eretrians who colonized Methone. These Eretrians were expelled from Corcyra by Corinthians under Chersikrates (or Charikrates), and sailed back to Eretria, where their former compatriots, awaiting them at the seashore, prevented them from disembarking by showering upon them missiles from slings. Thus 'repulsed by slings', the Eretrians of Corcyra were forced to leave again and sail north, where they settled in an already existing settlement which they named Methone after its former occupant, Orpheus' ancestor Methon.²

Methone was of strategic importance in the Thermaic Gulf because its harbour was naturally protected from the south wind, the main problem for ships sailing the Gulf. It also offered access to many natural resources, particularly timber (**Figure 31.1**). Methone's two



Figure 31.1 Pieria. (Map: Y. Tzifopoulos, M. Bessios and A. Kotsonas).

¹ For full publication of the finds from Methone see Bessios *et al.* 2012.

² Plu. *Quaest. Graec.* 293a-b: τίνες οἱ ἀποσφενδόνητοι; Κέρκυραν τὴν νῆσον Ἐρετριεῖς κατῴκουν· Χαρικράτους δὲ πλεύσαντος ἐκ Κορίνθου μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ τῶ πολέμῳ κρατοῦντος ἐμβάντες εἰς τὰς ναῦς οἱ Ἐρετριεῖς ἀπέπλευσαν οἴκαδε. προαισθόμενοι δ' οἱ πολῖται τῆς χώρας εἴργον αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀποβαίνειν ἐκώλουν σφενδονῶντες, μὴ δυνάμενοι δὲ μῆτε πείσαι μῆτε βιάσασθαι πολλοὺς καὶ ἀπαραιτήτους ὄντας ἐπὶ Θράκης ἐπλευσαν καὶ κατασχόντες χωρίον, ἐν ᾧ πρότερον οἰκῆσαι Μέθωνα τὸν Ὀρφέως πρόγονον ἱστοροῦσι, τὴν μὲν πόλιν ὠνόμασαν Μεθώνην, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν προσοίκων ἄποσφενδόνητοι προσηνομάσθησαν.



Figure 31.2 Ancient Methone from the northwest.
(Photograph: M. Bessios).

advantages (its location and timber) are mentioned in several texts and inscriptions of the fifth century BC. For it seems that when Athens suppressed the revolt of Euboea in 446 BC, the former Euboean colonies became Athenian strongholds. Methone, the safest harbour in the Thermaic Gulf, became a member of the Athenian League, paying a tax of three talents or 18,000 drachmae. Also, the site played an instrumental role in facilitating Macedonian exports to Athens, especially wood for its increasing naval needs. As the Macedonians consolidated their power under Philip II, the Athenian stronghold at Methone, being so close to both the old and the new capitals of the kingdom, became a constant threat both strategically and economically, a threat that Philip could no longer tolerate. Three years after he secured Pydna and its harbour, Philip besieged and annihilated Methone in 354 BC (D.S. 16.34.3-5), at which time, purportedly, he lost his eye. Philip forced

the population to abandon the city, allowing the inhabitants to take with them only one piece of clothing, and distributed the land to Macedonians.

These scanty references to Methone in the surviving literary and epigraphical sources set up only modest expectations of fieldwork. These expectations, however, have been confounded by archaeological discoveries made

since 2003. After briefly introducing the Methone excavations, we will present the extraordinary discoveries, unique and unprecedented for Macedonia, of inscriptions, graffiti/dipinti, and (trade) marks. Dating to the last decades of the eighth century, the Methone find is a prelude to significant historical developments through the seventh, such as: trade and colonization; the introduction of the alphabet, the development of local scripts and dialects; and the sympotic and literary contexts. The Methone find forces a re-evaluation, or better a re-interpretation, of these historical processes and their wavering between tradition and innovation.

Excavations at Methone have begun to bring to light the ancient site at the southern tip of the Haliakmon river delta, c. 35km south of Thessaloniki and immediately north of modern-day Agathoupolis (Figure 31.2). Methone occupies two hills (Figure 31.3) which were once located by the sea, before sediments deposited by the rivers Axios, Loudias, and especially nearby Haliakmon pushed the coastline some 500m to the east of the site. On the eastern, lower hill, habitation began in the late Neolithic (5200 BC) and continued throughout the Bronze Age (3000-1100 BC), while a Late Bronze Age (1400-1100 BC) cemetery has been

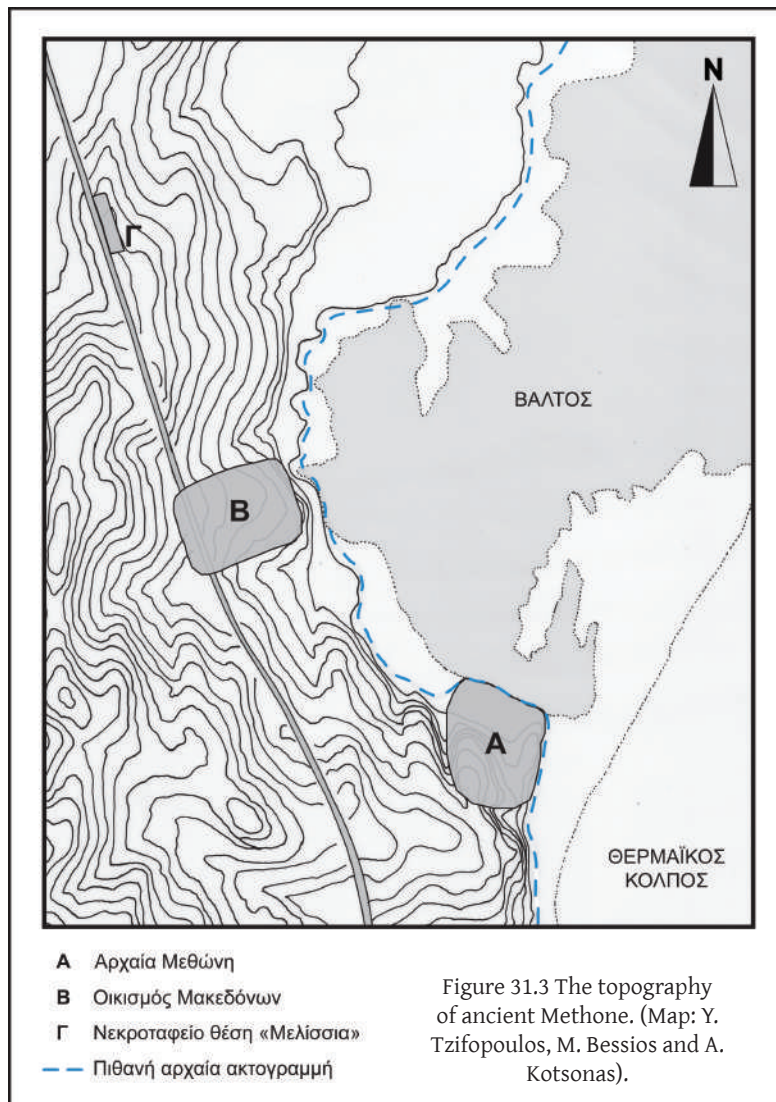


Figure 31.3 The topography of ancient Methone. (Map: Y. Tzifopoulos, M. Bessios and A. Kotsonas).



Figure 31.4 The agora of ancient Methone. (Photograph: M. Bessios).



Figure 31.5 Methone: the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: M. Bessios).

located on the western, higher hill. During the Early Iron Age (1100-700 BC), habitation extends over both hills: finds from the eastern hill seem to confirm not only the incident narrated by Plutarch (see above n. 2), but also the traditional date of 733/2 BC for the arrival of the Eretrians. Thus the literary tradition that Methone was the oldest southern Greek colony on the northern shores of the Aegean is well grounded.

Eretrian settlement at Methone was not accidental. At both Methone and nearby Pydna, Euboean-style pottery indicates that the western shores of the Thermaic Gulf were in contact with Euboea back in the ninth century. The arrival of the Eretrians, and of colonists from other parts of the Greek world, invigorated the Methonaian economy, as the archaeological record suggests. By the end of the eighth century, Methone became a major commercial and industrial centre: the excavated part of its Archaic agora (Figure 31.4) has produced evidence for workshop activity involving different materials.

At a slightly higher elevation, on the top of the eastern hill, a rectangular pit was revealed (3.6 x 4.2m, over 11m deep). It had apparently been used as an *apothetes* or dump (Figure 31.5) and was filled with a huge quantity of stones, mudbrick, timber, pots,

potsherds, and remains of the activities conducted in nearby workshops. The lower and original fill dates to the late eighth and early seventh century; overlying layers, created after the *apothetes* had been filled, are associated with the erection of two overlying terrace walls and domestic depositions dating from the seventh and sixth centuries.

The lower deposit is extraordinary for the great amount of pottery it contained, which comes from different regions of the Aegean (Figures 31.6-11) and also from Phoenicia. While imports from Euboea are not abundant, locally produced imitations of Euboean styles are. Likewise, imports from Corinth, the Cycladic islands, and Ionia and Aeolis in Asia Minor are limited, whereas imports from Athens, Samos, Chios, and Lesbos are not. The many imports found in this deposit suggest long-distance trade, with the wide range of amphora types represented particularly informative in this respect. The discovery of these amphorae in a late eighth-century context establishes that the widespread production and distribution of Greek transport amphorae was an eighth- and not a seventh-century development. Because of their importance as evidence for systematic trade in subsistence goods, the amphorae from Methone are now the subject of interdisciplinary research, with Evangelia Kiriati, Xenia Charalambidou, and Noémi Müller (British School at Athens, Fitch Laboratory) conducting petrographic and chemical analysis, and Maria Roumpou (University of Reading) residue analysis.

More astonishing was the discovery of 191 pots and potsherds which bear inscriptions, graffiti, and (trade)marks, the majority of which (157) date from 730 to 690 BC. The inscribed pottery mostly includes transport amphorae and sympotic vessels, while pouring and storage vessels are clearly underrepresented. These patterns are also manifested in the



Figure 31.6 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.7 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.8 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.9 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.10 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.11 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio'. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.12 Methone: Samian amphora from the 'Ypogeio' with potters' and owners' (?) alphabetic marks.

(Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.13 Methone: pottery from the 'Ypogeio' with potters' and owners' (?) non-alphabetic marks.

(Photograph: O. Kourakis).

assemblages of early inscribed pottery from Eretria, Pithekoussai, and especially Kommos (the site closest to Methone in this respect).

Both the place of discovery of these inscribed vessels, Methone in Pieria, and the date, 730-690 BC, are remarkable because excavations in the northern Aegean have so far yielded hardly any inscribed, incised, scratched or painted finds of such an early date (there are a few exceptions from Torone, Karabournaki, and Krania/Platamon in southern Pieria). Most of the pieces from Methone are scratched or incised after firing, but there are rare instances of marks made before firing (**Figure 31.12**; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 362-4 no. 17). The great majority of the material, 166 pots and potsherds (mostly amphorae and sympotic vessels), bear non-alphabetic symbols (**Figure 31.13**; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 362-4 no. 17, 463-4 no. 130, 475-6 no. 145, 478-9 no. 149, 489-90 no. 162), marks, graffiti, and very few dipinti (**Figure 31.14**; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 384-5 no. 34, 433-4 no. 94), which are probably signs of ownership and/or trading.



Figure 31.14 Methone: pottery from the “Ypogeio” with non-alphabetic dipinti. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.15 Methone: pottery from the “Ypogeio” with alphabetic marks. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).

Of the remaining 25 amphorae and sympotic vessels, 18 bear alphabetic characters, marks, and graffiti, which again probably denote ownership and/or trading activities (Figure 31.15). However, the remaining seven, mostly sympotic vessels, bear complete or fragmentary inscriptions. These are listed below in ascending chronological order, according to their letter form (admittedly a subjective criterion):

1. c. 700 on an amphora of unknown provenance coated in black slip: *vacat*² Θεο() *vacat*, a name abbreviated, whose circular letters were incised with a compass (Figure 31.16; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 347-9 no. 5);
2. 700 on an amphora from Lesbos: *vacat* Ἀντεφύδεος *vacat* (Figure 31.17; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 345-7 no. 4);
3. c. 700 on a skyphos from the Thermaic Gulf, retrograde: *vacat* Σχενι() *vacat* (= <Χσ>ενι())= <Ξ>ενι()), an abbreviated name (Figure 31.18; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 369-70 no. 22);
4. c. 730-720 on a local drinking cup, retrograde: *vacat* Ἐπιγέ[νεος² ἔμι²] (Figure 31.19; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 343-4 no. 3);

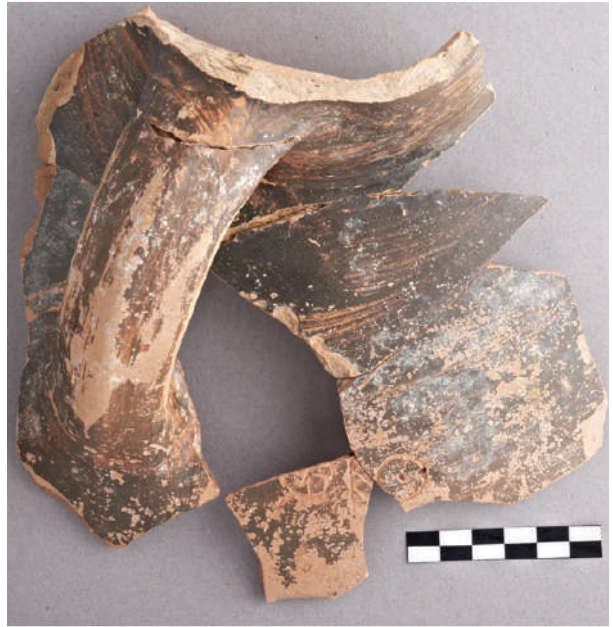


Figure 31.16 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 347-9 no. 5.
(Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.17 Bessios *et al.* 2012:
345-7 no. 4. (Photograph: O.
Kourakis).



Figure 31.18
Bessios *et al.* 2012:
369-70 no. 22.
(Photograph: O.
Kourakis).



Figure 31.19 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 343-4 no. 3. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.20 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 350 no. 7. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.21 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 339-43 no. 2. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.22 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 339-43 no. 2. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).



Figure 31.23 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 339-43 no. 2. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).

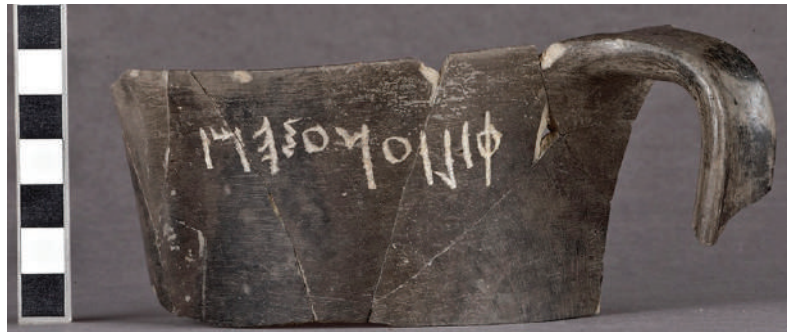


Figure 31.24 Bessios *et al.* 2012: 337-9 no. 1.
(Photograph: O. Kourakis).

5. c. 730-720 on a Euboean skyphos, retrograde: [-²]ō̄ ἐμ[ί] (**Figure 31.20**; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 350 no. 7);
6. c. 730-720 on a Euboean skyphos, retrograde: Ἡακεσάνδρο̄ ἐμ[ι^{c.22}]εἶτετο[..^{c.6} ..]ατον στρε̄[σ[ετα] ι (**Figures 31.21-23**; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 339-43 no. 2);
7. c. 730 on a mug from Lesbos, retrograde: Φιλίονος ἐμί (**Figure 31.24**; Bessios *et al.* 2012: 337-9 no. 1).

All seven texts, inscribed on sympotic pots and transport amphorae, come from the lower layer of the dump, hence their date of c. 730-690 BC. It is generally assumed that the life-span of small terracotta vessels is no more than one generation, whereas large ones may last longer. However, the dating of pottery cannot give precise answers about the date of inscriptions rendered post-firing, especially inscriptions on objects intended for private rather than public use. The date of production of the object is not always the same as the date of the inscription, unlike, for example with public state-decrees and laws, or potters' marks. Moreover, in the case of Hakesandros, the date of the poetic composition inscribed need not be the same as that of the text's incision on the cup. Consequently, in dating inscribed, especially portable objects, chronological questions about provenance, manufacture, inscribing, and usage must perforce remain relative, and take into consideration the differing stages of each action.

These seven brief texts, together with the 18 alphabetic and 166 non-alphabetic marks on pots and potsherds, comprise a group which should be added to the chronologically comparable collections from Lefkandi, Eretria, and Zarakes in Euboea; from Oropos and Thebes; from Hymettos and Athens; from Pithekoussai and Cumae in the bay of Naples; and last but not least, from Kommos on Crete, which is characterized by the variety in the provenance of the pots and the broad range of incised inscriptions, symbols, and (trade)marks (see Johnston, this volume).

All seven texts from Methone, some 'professionally' inscribed and others less so, are ownership tags using the familiar formula of the speaking object - 'I belong to X' - with the verb εἶμι inscribed or omitted. Five of them are incised sinistrorsum and two dextrorsum, a fact which implies that in certain areas of the Greek world both directions of the alphabet co-existed early on. Because of their brevity, the few letters of each text are not conclusive as to the script (local or imported) of the owner/trader or the engraver, except for Hakesandros' cup, the script of which, like the pot itself, is probably Eretrian/Euboean. But even this is of little help in identifying the origins of the poem's anonymous composer, and perhaps even of the owner Hakesandros. The seven texts from Methone, however, do emphasize one crucial fact which is often overlooked in discussions of Archaic local scripts: although Methone was, according to Plutarch, an Eretrian colony and one would expect the Eretrian script to have been widely used at the site, the variety of letter-shapes in these texts (**Figure 31.25**) suggests that not all literate inhabitants of the site were from Eretria/Euboea. It seems that the concept 'local script' cannot be applied to these few texts from Methone, or perhaps even to all texts incised on portable objects. A more nuanced approach is required for sites at crossroads and/or major trading routes (e.g. Kommos and now Methone), where more than one script and more than one dialect would have inevitably been employed. With reference to dialect, the texts from Methone, like the majority of early Greek inscriptions, employ the shapes of E for ε, η, ει, and O for ο, ω, ου. The brevity of the texts hinders the identification of the spoken dialect, although Ionic is the primary candidate.

The 191 incised inscriptions, symbols, and (trade)marks from Methone belong to the epigraphical category of *fictilia* and *instrumenta domestica*, and thus are private inscriptions. However, as a number of them are inscribed on sympotic vessels, they also have a semi-public aspect within sympotic and trading contexts. It cannot be a coincidence that most of the earliest Greek inscriptions belong to this category, suggesting that trade and the symposium played an important role in the introduction but also the dissemination of the alphabet and its techniques. Being private but at the same time on a trading- and sympotic-public display, these brief texts advertised the literacy of their owners.

Of the seven texts, the mug from Lesbos with the retrograde owner's inscription of Philion (**Figure 31.24**) and the inscribed Euboean skyphos of Hakesandros (**Figures 31.21-23**) stand out, not only for the professional engraving



Figure 31.25 Methone: close-up of the lettering of Figures 31.17, 18, 19, and 25. (Photograph: O. Kourakis).

and their script, but most importantly, in the case of Hakesandros' cup, for the text incised on it. Although the text is fragmentary, its ending in an iambic rhythm (-]ατον στερήσ[ετα]ι = υ - υ - υ -) indicates that the inscription consisted of the ownership tag in prose in the beginning (Ἡακεσάνδρο ἐμ[ὶ] ποτέριον *vel sim.*), and then an iambic dimeter or trimeter, the oldest one attested. The secure restoration of the final word στερέ[σ[ετα]ι (the third singular form of στεροῦμαι), and the probable restoration of ὀμ[μ]άτον or χρεμ[μ]άτον “will be deprived of /lose his [money/eyes]” strongly suggests that this text, as other early inscriptions on sympotic pots, was also composed in a playful manner within a sympotic context. Hakesandros' text seems to be a forerunner of that on Tataie's lekythos from Cumae, dated to the second quarter of the seventh century BC (IG XIV 865; Jeffery 1990: 236, 240 no. 3, 456): Ταταίεσ ἐμ λῆψετοσ: ἠὸς δ' ἄν με κλέψει, θυφλὸς ἔσται. This text supplies the most probable meaning of the missing part of Hakesandros' text: “I belong to Hakesandros; [whoever steals me from him], will be deprived of / lose his [money/eyes].”

Hakesandros' poetic, but not hexametric, text brings to the fore once more the beginnings of literature in Greece. Trade facilitated the spread of the alphabet quickly and widely, and of engraving techniques within commercial and sympotic contexts, i.e. the beginnings of literacy. As soon as people learnt the alphabet (or while they were learning it), they began composing small poems and engraving them on sympotic pots, which are otherwise everyday objects. The few earliest Greek epigrams – i.e. the first epigraphical examples of attempts at poetic composition from the Dipylon oinochoe and Nestor's cup to Hakesandros' cup and Tataie's lekythos (notwithstanding different interpretations) – bespeak a playful tone expected within a sympotic context. Even if they are not the Homeric/Hesiodic epics or high lyric poetry, they are lyric and sympotic poetry *in nascenti*, a genre which they presage and which emerges sooner rather than later. Archilochos, traditionally the earliest lyric poet together with Callinus of Ephesos, active sometime between 680 and 640 BC, commemorated bitterly the colonization of Thasos by Parians and other Greeks, in a way which *mutatis mutandis* may have been applicable to Methone: ‘the misery of the Panhellenes came together running to Thasos/Methone’ (*apud* Strabo 8.6.6 in his discussion of the word Πανελλήνησ, fr. 102W: ὡσ Πανελλήνων ὀϊζὺς ἐς Θάσον/Μεθώνην συνἔδραμεν).

To sum up the analysis of the inscribed finds of Methone is not an easy task. For seldom, in our experience, has the excavation of basically a single trench produced such far reaching results, with many implications for tradition and innovation in late eighth- and seventh-century Greece, some of which are addressed in Strauss Clay *et al.* 2017.