From Gortyn to Heraklion? A Note on Cretan Urbanism During the 8th Century

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From Gortyn to Heraklion? A Note on Cretan Urbanism During the 8th Century
Recent scholarship on Late Antique and early Byzantine Gortyn has claimed that the turning point of its urban fabric occurred primarily in the 8th rather than the 7th century. The study of its cityscape during this historical period is still in progress, but the current state of research appears...
to outline a specific picture. The *Praitōrion* area, as a political and public space, seems to continue to function until the early 8th century, after which it was infringed upon by agricultural installations; its nearby western artisanal and residential quarter, the so-called ‘Byzantine houses’, expands itself eastwards by encroaching upon the main axial road that bordered the governor’s palace along its western side. The edifice identified as the episcopal church shows important hints of a protracted use until the 8th century, while the settlement around Hagios Titos (modern dedication) probably increased in devotional, residential and demographic importance, since it was the focus of the programme of urban requalification carried out by the Metropolitan Andrew of Crete in the 720s. The Acropolis must have also gained in importance and benefitted from new fortifications built in the late 7th or early 8th century. In overall terms, it can be stated that the lower part of the city continued to exist as an organised system of districts whose distant model ascended to that of the Justinianic period until the first third of the 8th century. Only after this date does Gortyn seem to become a different town compared to how it was in Late Antiquity by changing its cityscape and transforming or reducing the nuclei of its inhabited sectors.

Along with modifications to the urban fabric of Gortyn, a major transformation in the governance of the island occurred in the 8th century. Until the 7th century, Crete had been ruled by a series of governors whose office had been qualified since the early 4th century as ὑπατικός (*consularis*), a classification which appears to last throughout the 4th and the 5th century. In the 6th century this qualification seems to transform into that of ἀνθύπατος (*proconsul*), a term which presumably employed the same meaning as ὑπατικός. The office of ἀνθύπατος and the functions

3. Baldini et Alii, Gortina, Mitropolis e il suo episcopato (as above, n. 1).
4. The office was constituted after the separation of the former united province of Crete and Cyrenaica. Mention of it in *Notitia dignitatum, accedunt Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae et Laterculi provinciarum*, edidit O. Seeck, Berolini 1876, Or. I, LXXV; lists of the *consulares* of Crete in Late Antiquity: *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* [henceforth *PLRE*], by J. R. Martindale, II, AD. 395-527, Cambridge 1980, *fasti*, 1285 (Fortunatianus Servilius, Callinicus 1); and *PLRE* III, 1488 (Helias 1).
5. The passage from ὑπατικός / ἀνθύπατος must have occurred during the early reign

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connected to it continued to operate more or less during the same time frame in which the area of the Praetōrion began to lose its political vocation, and despite the institutional history of the island, it eventually came to assume a different character as compared to the past. This form is marked by the appearance of a new officer, whose formal title was βασιλικὸς σπαθάριος καὶ ἄρχων Κρήτης. He is witnessed in at least eight seals dating from the second half of the 8th to the first quarter of the 9th century. Evidence about his functions is meagre, but based upon indications which denote other officers styled with the same title in Cagliari, Malta, Dyrrhachion, Cyprus, Chios and Cherson, one can hypothesize that he exerted some judicial functions, supported the officers of the central administration and was entrusted with the task of controlling the commercial activities that took place on Crete. The latter function would seem certainly appear to be the case of a certain Ioannes ἄρχων καὶ παραφύλαξ Κρήτης, as other bullae belonging to officers bearing the same title known to have been active in Abydus, Thessalonica, Nicaea, Ephesus and Amorion confirm. Moreover, it is not clear at all where the residence of this new officer was. The discovery of a seal pertaining to a certain Antiochos ζωτικούλαμιος

of Justinian: see Helias περιβλεπτὸς ἀνθύπατος quoted in a Gortynian inscription dated to 539: Inscriptiones Creticae opera et consilio Friderici Halbherr collectae, curavit M. GUARDUCCI, I-IV, Roma 1935-1950, IV, 460 [henceforth IC]; A. BANDY, The Greek Christian Inscriptions of Crete, Athens 1970, 31 [henceforth BANDY]. Last known mention of such an officer is in a seal, still unpublished, found in the area of the cathedral of Mitropolis, which bears evidence of a certain Christodoulou. The seal has been inspected by K. Sidiropoulos, who is inclined to date it to a period ranging from 550 to 600. I thank my colleague Isabella Baldini for this communication. ἀνθύπατοι are attested still in middle Byzantine period (see N. OIKONOMIDES, Les listes de préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles, Paris 1972, 294), but their office is different from that of Late Antiquity.

6. See the quotations of sources by S. COSENTINO, in BALDINI ET ALII, Gortina, Mitropolis e il suo episcopato (as above, n. 1), 245, n. 37.

7. D. TSOLGARAKIS, Byzantine Crete from the 5th Century to the Venetian Conquest [Historical Monographs, 4], Athens 1988, 173-177.


9. See the evidence quoted by S. COSENTINO, in BALDINI ET ALII, Gortina, Mitropolis e il suo episcopato (as above, n. 1), 246, fn. 40.
καὶ βασιλικὸς χαρτουλάριος, on Saint John’s Hill, the Gortynian acropolis, made it possible to suggest that the ἄρχων moved his headquarters there\textsuperscript{10}. Partial shifting of urban settlements to hilltop sites, a well-documented phenomenon during the ‘dark centuries’ across the empire, is known to have also occurred in Crete, as in the cases of Pyrgi (Eleutherna) and Knossos\textsuperscript{11}. On the other hand, there are at least two circumstances that cast doubt over the case for the continued residence at Gortyn of the Cretan ἄρχοντες. Firstly, none of their seals have been found in situ since for the most part they have come from the antiques market of Istanbul\textsuperscript{12}. Secondly, an episode from the eighth century bios of Stephen the Younger mentions a praitōrion that seems to be situated not in Gortyn, but in Heraklion (ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρακλείου)\textsuperscript{13}. In former literature, such information had been interpreted as a reference to a residence built by Emperor Heraclius in Gortyn\textsuperscript{14}. Although today’s archaeological research has indeed identified a

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\textsuperscript{10} The seal has been edited (without proposing a date) by G. Rizza – V. S. M. Scrinari, \textit{Il Santuario sull’Acropoli di Gortina}, I [Monografie della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente, 2], Roma 1968, 118; new analysis and a tentative attribution to the 7th century by TsoGarakis, \textit{Byzantine Crete} (as above, n. 7), 362, n. 165a and TsoGarakis, The Byzantine seals (as above, n. 8), n. 30.

\textsuperscript{11} At Pyrgi (Eleutherna) the seal of a πατρίδης καὶ ἀπὸ ὑπάτων has been found which has been dated to the 8th century: TsoGonaki, Les villes crétoises aux VIIe et VIIIe siècles (as above, n. 1), 280; from Knossos comes the seal of Ioannes βεστήτωρ (καὶ) πρωτονοτάριος βασιλικοῦ σακελλίου dated by its editor to the 8th / 9th century: A. Dunn, A Byzantine fiscal official’s seal from Knossos excavations and the archaeology of the dark-age cities, in \textit{Creta romana e protobizantina}, eds. M. Livadiotti – I. Simiakaki, I, Padova 2004, 140-141.

\textsuperscript{12} TsoGarakis, The Byzantine seals (as above, n. 8), passim.

\textsuperscript{13} In this episode the Cretan ἡγούμενος Paul, after having refused to step on an icon, is tortured by the ἀρχισατράπης τῆς νήσου, Theophanes Lardotyros, in ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ πραιτωρίῳ τοῦ Ἡρακλείου: \textit{Vita Steph. iun.} 58 (see M.-F. Auzepy, \textit{La vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre}, introduction, édition et traduction, Aldershot 1997 [Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 3], 258-259).

restructuring phase of the governor’s residence at Gortyn during the reign of Heraclius, it has also proved beyond any doubt that when the Life of Saint Stephen was composed (in the second half of the 8th century) this complex had definitely ceased to function. When Stephen the Deacon was writing the Life of Stephen the Younger, the Praitōrion of Gortyn had become an area for the production of olive oil and the storage of grain.

Scepticism toward a possible transfer of the Cretan governors from Gortyn to Heraklion could be motivated from the widespread opinion which deems that the latter could not have been a significant settlement before the Muslim conquest of the island. The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, for instance, lists Heraklion under the entry «Chandax» and unhesitatingly attributes its foundation to the Arabs. As a matter of fact, the Synekdēmos of Hierokles – a list of towns and provinces of the empire assembled early in the reign of Justinian but based upon administrative records from the time of Theodosius II (408-450) and Marcian (450-457) – mentions twenty-two towns in Crete without including Heraklion among them. Evidently, in Late Antiquity the modern Cretan capital did not have enough institutional importance to be classified as a ‘town’ from an administrative point of view. However, this does not mean that it was devoid of any form of settlement. Strabo had already (Geogr. X 476, 7) mentioned it, describing it as the port of Knossos, and its existence as a settlement had undoubtedly continued until the early and late Roman period. This is confirmed by a fifth-century funerary inscription found in Gortyn concerning a certain Theoktistos.

The marble slab on which it is engraved is in a bad state of preservation, so that the epigraph can only be read by means of heavy integrations. At any rate, it seems to refer to an individual of high social standing that was born in Heraklion and ended his life in Gortyn. Yet even if we do not want to rely on this piece of evidence, another funerary inscription dated to the 6th or 7th century confirms the existence of a settlement in Late Antique

15. See above, n. 2
16. See above, n. 2.
17. See ODB I, 409 (entry by T. E. Gregory).
19. IC IV, 508; Bandy, 45.
Heraklion. In this case, the stone on which it is carved was found in the foundations of a house located near the present Historical Museum at Heraklion. Moreover, the Passion of the Ten Saints, a hagiographic text possibly written in Gortyn during the late 6th or early 7th century, lists among the martyrs Euarestos, who was a native of Heraklion.

The so-called *Cosmographia* by the Anonymous of Ravenna composed towards the late 7th or early 8th century includes the *civitas* of Eraclium among the twenty-four towns that are described with reference to Crete. This work is of great historical value; it is written in Latin, yet filled with Greek terms to such an extent that some scholars have presumed it was derived from an original Greek model. Furthermore, it makes use of sources which are not attested elsewhere, such as the Ostrogothic geographers Athanarid, Marcomir and Heldebald. Its author not only reuses former geographical and administrative materials, but he also tries to adapt them to his time. The Anonymous of Ravenna predates by nearly a century and half the first mention of Heraklion as an episcopal see, as found in the acts of the Second Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (787). I am well aware that this evidence has been evaluated with great caution or even rejected by some scholars.

20. Bandé, 60.


24. F. Staab, Ostrogothic geographers at court of Theoderic the Great. A Study of some sources of the Anonymous Cosmographer of Ravenna, *Viator* 7 (1976), 27-58: 54 thinks that the abovementioned authors were active at Theoderic’s court between 496/497 and 507.

due to the fact that it includes three homonymous bishops who signed respectively as Theodoros ἐπίσκοπος ῾Ηρακλείας, Theodoros ἐπίσκοπος ῾Ηρακλειουπόλεως, and Theodoros ἐπίσκοπος ῾Ηρακλειουπόλεως ἤτοι Πιδαχθόης. The see of the first, Herakleia, has effectively been difficult to determine, since there existed at least three towns with this name in the empire: in Thrace, Caria and Honorias (Pontus). However, the see of the second and third bishops (῾Ηρακλειούπολις) clearly shows a different toponymy compared to the town of the first bishop (῾Ηράκλεια). Additionally, since one of the two ῾Ηρακλειουπόλεως has been identified as Pidachthoë, in Armenia II, I do not see evident reasons to doubt that the other may correspond with Heraklion. The form registered by the Anonymous of Ravenna, civitas Heraclii, is just a Latin translation of the Greek ῾Ηρακλειούπολις. Moreover, in the acts of the council of 787, his titular places his signature among the bishops of Crete, precisely between the bishops of Lampe and Knossos. The fact that Heraklion is not mentioned in the Notitiae episcopatum 2 and 3 should not be deemed as sufficient reason to deny the existence of a bishopric in Heraklion in the second half of the 8th century. Regarding the section concerning Crete, the Notitia 2 seems to be based upon the Συνέκδημος of Hierokles.

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26. Theodoros ἐπίσκοπος ῾Ηρακλειουπόλεως: Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum, series secunda, III, Concilium Universale Nicaenum Secundum, edidit E. Lambez, (Concillii actiones IV-V), III/2, Berlin – New York 2012, 508, 17 (subscription at the IV session, but with incongruous Latin translation as episcopus Heracliuspoleos id est Pidachthoe); 806, 25 (subscription at the VII session); Theodoros ἐπίσκοπος ῾Ηρακλείας ibid. vol. III/3 (Concillii actiones VI-VII, adiuvante U. Duibelzig,indices confecit G. Duursma) Berlin – New York 2016), 800, 11 (subscription at the VII session); Theodoros ἐπίσκοπος ῾Ηρακλειουπόλεως ἤτοι Πιδαχθόης: ibid., 818, 10 (subscription at the VII session), and 836, 7 (subscription of the profession of faith). See also PMBZ I, respectively 7591, 7589, 7590.

27. LAMBERZ, Die Bischofslisten (as above, n. 25), 51.

28. J. Darrouzes (in Notitiae Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, Paris 1981, 15, 19: henceforth Notitiae episcopatum) states that the Notitia 2 corresponds to an evolution datable to the 8th century. E. Kountoura-Galaki, Η Ἐικονοκλαστική ΝΟΤΙΤΙΑ 3 και το λατινικό της πρότυπο, Σύμμεικτα 10 (1996), pp. 35-73: 70, 71 considers the Notitia 2 as an earlier stage of the transformations happening in the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the reign of Leo III (which were systematized in the Notitia 3), while C. Zuckerman, Byzantium’s Pontic Policy in the Notitiae Episcopatum, in Io. (ed.), La Crimée entre Byzance et le Khaganat khazar [Centre de Recherche d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance,
purpose of the Notitia 3 have been debated by scholars so much that it is
difficult to ground it any solid assessment. It should be noted that Notitia 3
registers Hierapetra and Siteia; the latter appearing here for the first time
in ecclesiastical lists concerning the Cretan bishoprics, while the former is
quoted with the post-Roman form of ‘Hierapetra’ and not ‘Hierapidna’, as
in the Συνέκδημος and Notitia 2. Regarding Siteia in particular, it appears
more logical to think that this new episcopate would have been founded
during the 8th century rather than the 9th century, considering the new
political situation of Crete after the 820s. Unfortunately, in the only
ecclesiastical taxis with an official character, namely the Notitia 7 (compiled
between 901 and 907 under Patriarch Nicholas I and Emperor Leo VI), the
ecclesiastical geography of Crete is completely lacking.

In the last twenty years, archaeological investigations have given a more
dynamic image of Roman and post-Roman Heraklion. The excavations
made in the so-called northern extension of the Archaeological Museum
during the years 1993-1996 have revealed a Roman building with mosaic
floors, pottery, lamps and coins (dating from Hellenistic times until the
reign of Emperor Theophilus). Furthermore, a revision of old and new

Monographies 25], Paris 2006, 201-230: 206 postpones chronologically the Notitia 2 to the
Notitia 3.

30. G. I. KONIDARIS, Αἱ μητροπόλεις καὶ ἀρχιεπισκοπαὶ τοῦ οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριαρχείου καὶ ἡ ‘τάξεις’ αὐτῶν [Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinisch-neugriechischen Philologie], Athina 1934, 23 followed by P. YANNOPoulos, Μετροπολες του Πελοποννησου μεσοβυζαντιν: έν ουγκουν στην εισοδηματικη και στην εκκλησιαστικη ιστορια της Κρητης, Byz 63 (1993), pp 388-400. 397 (who considers the text earlier that the VII ecumenical council); KOUNTOURA-GALAKE, Η Έικονοκλαστική ΝΟΤΙΤΙΑ 3 (as above, n. 29) and V. PRIGENT, Les évêchés byzantins de la Calabre septentrionale au VIIIe siècle, Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome, Moyen Âge 114/2 (2002), 931-935 maintain that the Notitia 3 was composed during the reign of Constantin V; DARROZÈS (Notitiae episcopatum, 32) thinks that it was produced in the 9th century, probably toward the end of it, while LAMBERZ, Die Bischofslisten (as above, n. 25) 24-25 is skeptical about its historical value; ZUCKERMAN, Byzantium’s Pontic Policy (as above, n. 29) 206 argues for a
date between 787 and 805 “or, better, between 802 and 805”.


32. Both sees are quoted no more in the episcopal τάξεις until Notitia 13, which dates
to the Comnenian age.

33. Notitiae episcopatum, 7, pp. 53-55; 270-288 (text).

34. Ηράκλειο. Η άγνωστη ιστορία της αρχαίας πόλης, ed. A. IOANNIDOU-KARETSOU,

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archaeological data has helped bring forth the conclusion that in the early Byzantine period Heraklion was endowed with fortifications, a walled enceinte going towards the sea which reused previous Hellenistic structures, and a system of trenches facing the hinterland\textsuperscript{35}. Evidence concerning the town during the 7th and 8th century also includes an inscription recently analysed by Georges Kiourtzian\textsuperscript{36}. The epigraph was found in Heraklion in 1960, and was an element of reuse discovered during the restoration undertaken on the northern sector of the Venetian walls\textsuperscript{37}. It is engraved on a white, plinth-like marble block just over a meter and a half (57 cm X 63 cm) in width and height. The front of the block displays the epigraph, while upon the left and right sides two different types of crosses are carved\textsuperscript{38}. The rear side of the block is undecorated, a particular that makes it possible to believe that the artefact’s original position was close to a wall.

The text reads as follows:

††† ὅροι τῆς ἁγιωτάτης ἐκκλησι[ας] / οθὲν ἀπεστράφη ὁ διάβολος ὁ διάβολος ὁ[ρόι] μήσας εἰσέλθην καὶ φλέξε / τὴν πόλιν † συμπληρωμένου τοῦ μη(νὸς) Ἰουνίου τοῦ ἐπί ἱνδικτιῶν[ας] διά †

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36. KIOURTZIAN, L’incident de Cnossos (as above, n. 14). The epigraphy has been edited for the first time by S. LOGIAIDOU-PLATONOS, Ἰστορική ἐπιγραφή ἐξ Ἡρακλείου, it (as above, n. 21), 47-58: 48 (= Ηράκλειο. Η ἁγνωστὴ ἱστορία [as above, n. 34], 39) and then re-edited by BANDY, 61.

37. LOGIAIDOU-PLATONOS, Ἰστορικὴ ἐπιγραφή (as above, n. 21), 47.

38. SYTHIAKAKI – KANAKI – BILMEZI, Οι παλαιότερες οχυρώσεις (as above, n. 35) 395 question the chronology of the inscription to 671 (they do not quote the edition by Kiourtzian) on the basis of the sculptural decoration of the artifact, which, according to them, would recall artistic motifs of late 10th – early 11th century; however, the examples pointed out by them do not seem to support their inferences.

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«Boundaries of the most holy church from which the devil, when he tried to enter the city for burning it, was repelled. When the month of June was coming to an end, in the 14th indiction».

I do not want to reexamine all the elements of the inscription, but simply want to touch upon the more relevant points which concern the topic being discussed in the present article. The date of 30 June worked out by Logiadou-Platonos, as has already been argued by Kiourtzian, is certainly wrong, because it is based on a defective reading of a group of letters that she interprets as HMD, written below the frame in which the epigraph is engraved. Moreover, her reading of Δ, as Δ(ευτέρα), is inconsistent with Greek epigraphic habit, in which the numerals are normally used as letters. This implies that as far as the date is concerned, the only inner element of the text is the 14th indiction (7th century: 611, 626, 641, 656, 671, 686; 8th century: 701, 716, 731, 746, 761, 776, 791; 9th century: 806, 821, 836, 851, 866, 881, 896).

Now, I would like to focus attention on the locution ἁγιωτάτη ἐκκλησία. The premise is that it appears very unlikely that the block, due to its weight, was carried to Heraklion from the outside in order to be re-employed in the Venetian walls. This entails, as a starting point, that the inscription would have been incised in Heraklion. If the church in question is that of Knossos, as it has been supposed, the text would confer to Heraklion a certain civic importance, for it defines it as a town (πόλις). If this is not the case, the conclusion is that Heraklion would have already been an episcopal see at the time the inscription was carved. The text, with its evocative language, opens the door to speculation whether the «devil» mentioned in it may be identified with Muslim raiders or internal political opponents. The meaning of «devil» is to be interpreted in a metaphoric sense, being a literary equivalent of “enemy”. In his analysis, Kiourtzian shows that narrative Byzantine sources from 7th to 10th century never use the term ὁ διάβολος in reference to the Muslims. This seems convincing, and I am myself sceptical.


40. This objection had already been raised by L. Politis in the discussion of the contribution by Logiadou-Platonos (see Logiadou-Platonos, Ἱστορικὴ ἐπιγραφὴ [as above, n. 21, 36], 55).

41. Kiourtzian, L’incident de Cnossos (as above, n. 14), 178, 180 (the Author thinks that the πόλις in question is Knossos).
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about the understanding of the term as an equivalent for «Muslims». A Latin inscription from Carales (Sardinia) reinforces this interpretation: *Metatu sancti Longini centurionis: hic abes a Domino diabule* («In the metatum of St Longinus stay away by the Lord, you devil!»)\(^42\). Here it is patently clear that with the term «devil» the writer of the short composition meant any transgressor of the holy space pertaining to the *metatum* of St. Longinus. The same meaning applies to our inscription, which is a ὅρος, indeed, a boundary mark\(^43\). Contrary to the Caralitan epigraph, the Cretan one implies two different actions. Not only does it blame whoever dares to violate the sacred space of a church, but it implies that such a violation had consequences upon the whole community, for the enemy – the devil – wished to burn the entire town. Beneath the formulaic language a real military event is hidden. For the reasons explained above it is improbable that this event referenced a Muslim attack against Crete. What this event really was, it is impossible to establish. Kiourtzian framed it within the context of the clashes between the ‘Greens’ and ‘Blues’ prior to the seizure of power by Emperor Heraclius, whose fleet in its route from Africa to Constantinople

\(^{42}\) Edited by L. Porru, *Una caserma intitolata a s. Longino centurione nella Cagliari bizantina*, in *Quaderni. Soprintendenza archeologica per le provincie di Cagliari e di Oristano* 6 (1989), 205-211, who thinks that the word ‘metatum’ refers to a military building devoted to St Longinus. In early medieval Latin, it means any kind of ‘lodging’ or ‘accommodation’ (see *Du Cange Lat.*, s. v. *metatus; metatum*). In Greek, the verb μητατεύω signifies to ‘mark off’ (see *Lampe*, s. v.); it is probable, therefore, that the expression used in the inscription of St Longinus refers to any ‘delimited space’ with a particular function, not necessarily connected to the military sphere. L. Pani Ermini, *Le città sarde nell’alto medioevo una ricerca in atto*, in *Materiali per una topografia urbana. Status quaestionis e nuove acquisizioni* [Mediterraneo tardoantico e medievale. Scavi e ricerche, 10], Oristano 1995, 55-67: 61 and F. Virzi, L’iscrizione per San Longino centurione da Cagliari: osservazioni sulle intitolazioni ai santi militari, in *Città, territorio, produzione e commerci nella Sardegna medievale. Studi in onore di Letizia Pani Ermini* ed. R. Martorelli [Agorà, 17], Cagliari 2002, 551-557: 557 both believe that the inscription was walled in the enceinte of Caralis, which leaves me skeptical for the explicit presence of the word ‘metatum’. I would rather think it refers to a room attached to a church, such as a sacristy or a warehouse.

may well have stopped on Crete. Consequently, he dates the inscription to 611. Its palaeography, however, displays forms of cursive writing as the article τοῦ in ligature or δ in minuscule at line 5 that seem to fit well with a later date than the early 7th century. As a simple suggestion, I note that 821 (better: 1 September 820 – 31 August 821) is one of the years coinciding with a fourteenth indiction. In this same year, Thomas the Slave attempted to capture Constantinople with joint forces on both land and sea. Thomas had the support of the majority of the themes of Asia Minor as well as those of Macedonia and Thrace along with the fleet of the Cibyrrhaeots. In his scheme, the fleet gathered as planned on Lesbos on 1 September 821, but hostility between Michael II and Thomas had begun before September 821, and I wonder if our text does not preserve the memory of an attack led by the Cibyrrhaeots against Heraklion in June 821, considering that until 822 the theme of Hellas was on the side of Michael II.

In summation, a number of coherent indications in our evidence make it possible to believe that Heraklion experienced a strong institutional, geo-strategical and demographic strengthening during the 8th century. Whether this process actually involved the birth of a new episcopal see or the transfer of the ἄρχων Κρήτης to the town remains, at the current state of research, a hypothesis. At any rate, it is evident that this process had to mature into a framework of long-lasting modifications which affected the ties between Crete and Constantinople rather than within the immediate political contingency. The hegemonic role of Gortyn in the insular territorial organisation, still visible in the classical age, was confirmed under Roman imperialism. Between the 1st and the 3rd century AD, imports to the island

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44. KIOURTZIAN, L’incident de Cnossos (as above, n. 14), 190-191.
45. KIOURTZIAN, L’incident de Cnossos (as above, n. 14), 190-191.
46. The comparison between the Heraklion epigraph and the honorary inscriptions concerning Emperor Heraclius, Constantine III and Fabia Eudocia engraved on marble columns (on which see L. GASPERINI, Le iscrizioni gortinie di età tardoantica e protobizantina, in Creta romana e protobizantina [as above, n. 11], 157-162: 161) shows a substantial palaeographic difference among the two witnesses (see for example letter ν, α, ε and γ).
49. TREADGOLD, The Byzantine Revival, 239.
originated largely from Africa and the Aegean; Italic or Spanish goods had little role, while those coming from Syria and Palestine seem to have been negligible. Beginning in the early 4th century, Gortyn started moving its economic gravitation from West to East. The sole western supplier remained the powerful African pottery industry; but apart from this, the Cretan metropolis, unlike the 3rd century, began importing wines, fish sauce and olive oil from the Aegean, Asia Minor, Palestine, Syria, Cilicia, Cyprus and Egypt. The eastward shift of the Gortynian commercial axis was motivated by several factors, among which the administrative separation from Cyrenaica and the birth of the new capital on the Bosphorus were the most important ones. The latter – namely the rise in importance of Constantinople – had the far-reaching consequence of attracting economic resources which came from several regions of the eastern Mediterranean basin. Until the 7th century, the development of the big Constantinopolitan market did not have consequences upon the Cretan economy, since the geographical position of the island allowed it to intercept trading flows along routes that had both north-south and east-west directions. The route followed by the Alexandrian embolē – Palestinian and Syrian coast, Cyprus, Rhodes, Kos, Samos, Chios, Lesbos, Tenedos and Abydos – enabled Gortyn to easily connect itself with this vital commercial corridor. Moreover, the recapture of Africa by Justinian in 533-534 emphasized the importance of the landing places of the southern Cretan coast for Carthage and Constantinople, whether they took place by means of open sea navigation via Malta or via the ports of Egypt and Cyrenaica.

However, beginning with the post-Heraclian age, this geo-economic situation changed significantly. The loss of Egypt and the need to supply Constantinople urged the central government to undertake a long-range search for food involving Sicily, Cyprus, North Africa and Crete itself.

52. Romeo – Portale (as above, n. 51), 966.
53. Romeo – Portale (as above, n. 51), 972.
55. For Sicily and North Africa see V. Prigent, Les rôle des provinces d’Occident
Hence, the Byzantine capital became the focal point of a productive hinterland surrounded by Thrace, Bithynia and the Aegean insular space. Later Cretan pottery productions (amphorae of TRC2, TRC4, TRC9 type, and perhaps LRA14, Zeest 99 / Sazanov, if the latter are of Cretan origin) have been found in the regions facing the Black Sea, where they continued to be exported until the late 7th century\(^56\). The presence of these amphorae has been associated by archaeologists to the provisioning of the military contingents that operated on the Balkan frontier. Late Antique and early Byzantine Crete was not a militarized region, neither in its social structure nor in its landscape\(^57\). This by no means signifies that the agricultural products of the island were not exploited by the central government to supply the army, because they were indeed. Proof of this is evident in the seal of a loulianos ἁπτὸ υπάτων γενικός κομμερκιάριος ἀποθήκης Κρήτης. Thus, the new political framework of the 7th and 8th centuries, which entailed a concentration of military operations in the Balkans and Asia Minor, resulted in an emphasis of the geo-strategic importance of the northern coast of Crete, to the detriment of the southern one.

In fact, the Cretan towns of the north side whose later phases have been thoroughly investigated by archaeologists such as Eleutherna and, partially, Knossos, have revealed increased economic ties with the Aegean and the
regions of Asia Minor in the early Byzantine period. Eleutherna, being too far from the coast, had no chance to emerge as a new central location on the island during the 8th century. Even Knossos did not face the sea, although it was very close to it. Heraklion had the best chance for revitalization. Its port was the terminal of a road axis that directly linked the most important production area of the island, the plain of the Μεσσαρά, to the northern emporia. From Heraklion products from the Aegean could have easily been distributed to other Cretan settlements; while products from the island could have easily been shipped for transmarine trade. If the ἄρχων Κρήτης counted among his functions that of overseeing the trading activities that took place in the ports and emporia of Crete, Heraklion had to be the best place to carry out such an activity during the late 7th and 8th century. Such a perspective, if confirmed by future investigations, would also make it possible to better understand the phases of the Muslim occupation of the island. According to Gigourtakis, the landing of the Abū Ḥafṣ’s troops would have occurred in the southern part of Crete, in an area comprised between Tsoutsouros and Keratokampos. This must have entailed, in a first phase, the conquest of the settlements situated on the southern coast,
such as Gortyn, and then a northward march. An expansion departing from the south to the north, lasting a dozen years, would lend more sense to the dynamics of the military operation led by Photeinos, στρατηγὸς of the Anatolikon, and afterward by Damianos. The description of both operations in Byzantine sources lend credence to the belief that they had safe landing places on the northern coast of the island. On the other hand, if the Cretan governor was settled in Heraklion when the Muslims landed on the island, it is understandable that they would have chosen to disembark in an area where they expected to face minor military resistance.

60. As is well known, the precise chronology of the conquest of Crete by the Muslims is disputed. After 824 and before 829, the central government launched three expeditions to take control of the island led by Photeinos, Damianos and Crateros: V. Christides, The Conquest of Crete by the Arabs (ca. 824). A Turning Point in the Struggle between Byzantium and Islam, Athens 1984, 85-88; Id., The Cycle of the Arab-Byzantine Struggle in Crete (ca 824/6-961 AD) in the Illuminated Manuscript of Skylitzes (Codex Matritensis Graecus Vitr. 26-2), Graeco-Arabica 11 (2011), 17-50; 22-24 (where he maintains that the conquest occurred gradually from 823 to 867); Tsougarakis, Byzantine Crete (as above, n. 7), 30-45; Treadgold, The Byzantine Revival (as above, n. 47), 251-257. In any case, the failed expedition commanded by Theoktistos in 843 seems to mark the end of the Byzantine hopes to recapture the island.
Η Γόρτυνα, παρότι είναι μια από τις πιο γνωστές αρχαϊκές πόλεις της Κρήτης και έχει μελετηθεί επαρκώς από αρχαιολογική άποψη, είναι αβέβαιο εάν στις αρχές του 8ου αιώνα εξακολουθούσε να είναι ακόμα η έδρα του κυβερνήτη του νησιού. Το παρόν άρθρο συνηγορεί υπέρ της πιθανότητας της μεταφοράς της έδρας του άρχοντος Κρήτης, δηλαδή του διαδόχου του παλαιού άνθυπατού, στο Ηράκλειο (ή ίσως στην Κνωσό). Η μεταφορά αυτή θα μπορούσε να είχε πραγματοποιηθεί στο πλαίσιο ενός γεωστρατηγικού μετασχηματισμού των σχέσεων μεταξύ Κωνσταντινούπολης και Κρήτης, ο οποίος επήλθε μετά τη μουσουλμανική κατάκτηση της Καρχηδόνας. Το περιστατικό αυτό οδήγησε στην ενίσχυση της οικονομικής σημασίας των κέντρων που βρίσκονται στη βόρεια ακτή του νησιού, εις βάρος των νοτίων ακτών. Τούτο φαίνεται ότι είχε ως αποτέλεσμα την ενίσχυση του οικισμού του Ηρακλείου, το οποίο, πολύ πριν από την άφιξη των Αράβων στο νησί, πρέπει να είχε λάβει ήδη κατά τον όγδοο αιώνα, τον ρόλο του νέου πολιτικού κέντρου του νησιού.