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# Two Sides of the Medallion: Byzantine Attaleia and Naples during the Passage between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (from 6th to 10th centuries)

FERMUDE GÜLSEVİNÇ\*

## Abstract

This article examines the transformation of the Byzantine cities, Attaleia and Naples, between the 6th and 10th centuries and challenges the prevailing notion of widespread urban decline in the Byzantine world during this transitional period. Naples, the administrative heart of the Byzantine Duchy in the Tyrrhenian Sea, and Attaleia, the capital of the *Kybirrhaiotai* naval theme and a critical base for imperial maritime power, reveal unique paths of urban adaptation and resilience. By analyzing archaeological evidence, including hagiographies, papal letters, and historical narratives as well as coinage, seals, harbors, and pottery, this study demonstrates that these cities remained well-integrated into the Byzantine cultural and economic network, or Byzantine *Koine*. These findings emphasize that Attaleia and Naples were not isolated relics but active participants in Byzantine connectivity, providing a nuanced perspective on the dynamics of continuity and change within Byzantine *koine*.

**Keywords:** Byzantine *koine*, Attaleia, Naples, *Kybirrhaiotai*, Tyrrhenian, Mediterranean

## Öz

Bu makale altıncı ve onuncu yüzyıllar arasında Bizans dünyasının geçirdiği değişim sürecini gerileme olarak değerlendiren tarih anlatısına karşı çıkarak iki Bizans şehri olan Attaleia ve Napoli'nin adaptasyon sürecini incelemektedir. Tiren Denizi'nin kalbinde yer alan Bizans'a bağlı Napoli Dukalığı ve donanmanın merkezi olan *Kybirrhaiotai* temasının başkenti Attaleia'nın kendilerine özgü tarihçeleri, siyasi ve askeri güçleri, ekonomik aktivitelerinin, Bizans'ın imparatorluk gücü ve etkileriyle karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alındığı bu makale yazılı ve arkeolojik kaynakları analiz ederek, Napoli ve Attaleia'nın periferide kalan yaşam alanları değil, sosyo-politik, ekonomik ve kültürel hayatta aktif rol alan şehirler olduğunu ve kıyı şehirleriyle adaları kapsayan, Akdeniz'in iki yarısını birbirine bağlayan Bizans *koine*'si içinde önemli bir rol oynadıklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bizans *koine*'si, Attaleia, Napoli, *Kybirrhaiotai*, Tiren Denizi, Akdeniz

## Introduction

What is a city? How do we perceive a settlement as a city? Which features and characteristics led us to match a place with the concept of urbanity? What is the main purpose of founding cities and trying our best to keep them alive? Indeed, every civilization builds settlements such

\* Dr. Fermude Gülsevinç, Koç Üniversitesi, Anadolu Medeniyetleri Araştırma Merkezi (ANAMED), İstanbul, Türkiye.  
E-mail: fermudegulsevinc@gmail.com ; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9779-545X>

as cities, urban centers, capitals, towns, villages; their names could be *polis*, *civitas*, *medina*, metropolis, megapolis, but they functioned in similar ways throughout history. So, in other words why do humans need cities as if the existence of cities is one of the pillars of civilizations?

Indeed, these questions have their impact on the history and historiography of Byzantine urbanism between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, since the transformation of cities is still an ongoing debate, ranking amongst the controversial topics splitting into two opposite sides: discontinuity<sup>1</sup> and continuity.<sup>2</sup> Discontinuity focuses on the disappearance of the *curiales* / *bouleutai*, fortifications, the attacks first of the Persians and later the Arabs, the loss of provinces, the dispersal of the networks, and the aftermath of plagues. On the other hand, continuity provides notions of transformation, adaptation, and resilience of urban life with its own peculiarities, communication within and between the cities and finally trade routes during the so-called Dark Ages.

The scholarly narrative surrounding Byzantine cities during the so-called “Dark Ages” has often emphasized themes of decline - shrinking populations, fortified urban cores, and economic stagnation. Historians have typically framed these cities as modest, isolated enclaves facing frequent threats from warfare, instability, and disease. However, as Lavan argues, this period of urban history warrants examination in its own right,<sup>3</sup> rather than being viewed solely as a prelude to later recovery in the ninth and early 10th centuries.<sup>4</sup> This study, therefore, focuses on the coastal cities of Attaleia and Naples, highlighting their distinctive development within the Byzantine *koine*. Both cities present contrasting yet complementary perspectives on urban life in the Byzantine Empire. Attaleia, as the administrative center of the *Kybirrhaiotai* naval theme, showcases the strategic and economic significance of maritime capitals. Naples, while technically part of the Southern Italian duchies under Byzantine sway, evolved a unique local identity, blending Neapolitan, Roman, and Byzantine influences. These examples challenge the reductionist view of Byzantine urbanity as uniformly militarized and economically dormant. Instead, recent archaeological finds suggest a diversity of urban experiences, with cities maintaining vitality through trade, maritime activities, and local governance.<sup>5</sup> By comparing Attaleia and Naples, this work aims to illustrate the multiplicity of Byzantine urban experiences, emphasizing the role of maritime networks, trade, and regional diversity in shaping urban life. These cities, each with distinct geopolitical and economic roles, provide insights into the broader dynamics of Byzantine urbanism, underscoring the complexity and heterogeneity of the empire’s coastal and inland cities known as the Byzantine *koine*.<sup>6</sup>

### “O all the sea within Gades! O all the sea beyond Gades”: the Byzantine *koine*

The history of Byzantine cities must be viewed within the broader context of the Mediterranean, as Wickham notes, given that the Roman administrative and economic structures were anchored at a Mediterranean level.<sup>7</sup> Following the collapse of the so-called Roman tax spine

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Bakirtzis and Zavagno 2024, Bouras 2002, Foss 1996, Haldon 1990, Jones 1973, Kazhdan and Cutler 1982, Liebeschuetz 2000, Saradi 1988.

<sup>2</sup> For more information: Brandes and Haldon 2000, Crow 2016, Curta 2016, Dey 2015, Ostrogorsky 1959, Lavan 2021, Tzivikis 2020, Veikou 2015, Vryonis 1971, Zavagno 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Lavan 2021, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Haldon 1990, 45-47.

<sup>5</sup> Decker 2016, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur 2007, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Wickham 2005, 136-44.

in the sixth century, the Mediterranean became a more fragmented and diversified space.<sup>8</sup> This fragmentation, however, should not obscure the broader interconnections between regions beyond the traditional Byzantine heartlands of Anatolia and the Aegean. A wider geographic perspective allows for a deeper analysis of urban centers, emphasizing gradual change rather than sudden rupture, and the importance of a *longue durée* approach to understand the transformation of Byzantine cities.<sup>9</sup>

The Early Medieval Mediterranean, despite its less complex economy compared to the classical era, maintained strong connectivity from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Black Sea.<sup>10</sup> Material culture, especially pottery, provides key evidence for tracing local, regional, and Mediterranean-wide movements.<sup>11</sup> Pottery, particularly ceramics, reveals socio-cultural dynamics and the composition of the Byzantine *koine*, and in this sense the shared cultural and economic space uniting the Mediterranean.<sup>12</sup> Maritime activities, visible through sea routes and harbors, reflect the political, social, and economic life of communities. Even in the absence of extensive literary sources, artifacts like amphorae, seals, coins, and ceramics offer insights into trade networks, regional exchanges, and cultural practices across coastal areas. Specifically, the distribution of pottery, like the globular amphorae used between the seventh and 10th centuries illuminates commercial relationships, indicating where goods were produced and consumed. These artifacts help reconstruct networks of exchange and the organization of trade routes across the Aegean, the Black Sea, and the broader Mediterranean.<sup>13</sup> Coastal and inland distribution patterns also suggest the significance of both cabotage (coastal shipping) and tramping trade in sustaining the Byzantine *koine*. Archaeological evidence from shipwrecks further attests to the vitality of these networks, indicating that small settlements and islands, alongside major urban centers, played integral roles in the Byzantine *koine*.

The Byzantine *koine* is not a strictly defined notion or physically mapped region, but rather a cultural and economic network encompassing both land and sea. It was characterized by shared material culture: pottery, coins, and seals signal a common identity across diverse Mediterranean communities under Byzantine influence.<sup>14</sup> This network underscored the role of islands, which served as more than military outposts or sites of exile. They were vital administrative, economic, and cultural centers, deeply integrated with the empire's fiscal, naval, and administrative systems. Archaeological evidence from islands like Crete, Cyprus, and Sicily underscores their importance in the Byzantine *koine*.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, coastal cities, for example, Attaleia and Naples, illustrate the enduring significance of urban centers within this interconnected maritime world. These cities were not isolated or stagnant; rather, they served as dynamic administrative, naval, and socio-economic hubs that linked the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean. Their harbors, trade routes, and urban centers were central to maintaining Byzantine connectivity. This reveals that, despite the apparent uniformity of Byzantine control, local communities of coastal cities and islands engaged in diverse exchanges, contributing to the complex and vibrant nature of the Byzantine *koine*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Zavagno 2021, 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> Crow 2016, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur 2012, 347-49; Gerousi 2015, 131-33.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur 2018, 281-82.

<sup>12</sup> Zavagno 2021, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Vroom 2016, 157-58.

<sup>14</sup> Veikou 2015, 51-53.

<sup>15</sup> Zavagno 2021, 130.

<sup>16</sup> Zavagno 2019, 134-44.

## Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue:

### Cities in Transition - Attaleia and Naples

Here we are confronted with the transformation of imperial administration. Therefore, the Byzantine heartlands were divided into themes during the period under scrutiny. In this sense, drawing a picture of the Anatolian themes and their capitals leads us to scholars such as Foss, Haldon, Treadgold, and Lightfoot, yet my intention regarding the theme of *Kybirrhaiotai* is not only to frame it as a part of thematic system, but also to see in the overarching Byzantine *koine* the urban vitality of Attaleia during the so-called Dark Ages. Obviously proposing a full-fledge narrative or composing every aspect of its urban life is a difficult task. However, one may start with the structure of the *Kybirrhaiotai* and its capital city Attaleia. Indeed, Attaleia, after suffering severely from devastating Arab attacks, did not simply follow a downsizing and fortification process as shown by other settlements in Pamphylia.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the *Kybirrhaiotai* originated from the *Karabisianoï*, and its territory was a kind of patchwork, including the southern coastline of Anatolia and the Aegean islands with its *strategos* was located in Samos, rather being a formal theme.<sup>18</sup> During the middle of the seventh century, the *Karabisianoï* was literally replaced by the *Kybirrhaiotai* since it was constructed as a naval theme with its capital, Attaleia. It surrounded the same area of the *Karabisianoï*,<sup>19</sup> encompassing southern Anatolia, including Caria, Lycia, and Pamphylia as well as the Dodecanese. Its peculiar geography had the *Kybirrhaiotai* to correspond to the requirements of any frontline settlement. Arab attacks caused the Attaleiotes to play a major role in the naval stage of the Arab-Byzantine Wars during the seventh and 11th centuries.<sup>20</sup>

Attaleia was built on fertile plains located between the Taurus and Pisidian Mountains, and the plain was an offspring of the Kestros and Eurymedon Rivers. During Roman times, heavy traffic passed on three trade routes from the coastline to Anatolia's inland, directed to Caria, Lycaonia, and Cappadocia. As a coastal city with the access to such routes leading to economic centers, Attaleia had gained importance in time with its peculiar position and advantages. The 10th century Arab traveller, Ibn Ḥawqal, noted that Attaleia was a strong fort with a fertile hinterland.<sup>21</sup> The plain of Attaleia was rich in history. Termessos, Phaselis, Perge, Aspendos, and Side were still alive, even if shrunk in size or their fortifications erected in the so-called Dark Ages.<sup>22</sup> Krallis observes regarding the historiography of Byzantine cities: "The sunken cities of the gulf of Attaleia were the stuff of legend but also an interesting reminder of the past's presence.... The dead cities that lay submerged, just beneath the sea-level, belonged in the material world."<sup>23</sup> However, as cities on the Gulf of Attaleia, Patara and Side present us a different aspect. Their walls were constructed with care to impress people from the above-mentioned cities, rather than being built in such haste, to prevent hostile attacks of the Arabs. As Peschlow concludes that the foci of settlement both secular or ecclesiastical were located out of the city walls in Patara.<sup>24</sup> This is in tune with Attaleia's wall construction as its impressive set of walls

<sup>17</sup> Foss 1996, 23-29

<sup>18</sup> Haldon 1990, 217.

<sup>19</sup> Cheynet 2006, 115.

<sup>20</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Krallis 2019, 58-60.

<sup>22</sup> Zavagno 2021, 106.

<sup>23</sup> Krallis 2019, 57.

<sup>24</sup> Peschlow 2017, 286-88.

provides us with a careful projection of the identity of Attaleiotes and imperial power. In this light is Foss's conclusion wherein he remarks that even though this city is better known from literary sources instead of its material culture. Unfortunately, the lack of sufficient archaeological record providing us with a better picture of the urban settlement of Attaleia, it seems to me that the uninterrupted existence of the city is made possible by its strong walls and natural protection which came from the mountain range.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking of these city walls, the *droungarios* Stephanos Abastactus restored the ancient walls in 910 during the reign of Leo VI (866-912) and again refurbished by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (905-959).<sup>26</sup> Inscriptions, still visible on the walls, display the mentality which shaped the imperial perspective of Attaleia, therefore, the local understanding of their city. Leo VI's inscription basically pictures emperor as a pious father, always acting with justice and treating all subjects as his own children who fortified the walls with a second layer.<sup>27</sup> Krallis interprets Leo's inscription as an imperial duty to be performed, even for the most distant subjects to remind them the presence of the emperor's hand on them. However, perceiving Attaleia as "an outpost, far away from imperial administrative, economic or cultural gravitation" would not give justice to the complexity of its urban structure and functions during the period under scrutiny. Leo VI may have wanted to send an imperial message, a reminder of his presence to be displayed. Another inscription, harkening back to the early 10th century, commemorates the extensive wall renovations and proclaims Attaleia as "of all cities the best fortified, pride of the Romans and rampart against the infidel Hagarenes."<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Hagarenes are more likely the Arabs, and the reason behind of the wall reinforcement was the increased Arab attacks. The third inscription mentions *droungarios* Stephanos Abastactus who played a role in the renovation process. All the inscriptions were visible on the walls, thus representing imperial power as well as the locals harmonizing with each other. These inscriptions could be ideally paired with the inscriptions on the walls of Thessaloniki and Ancyra, because it is clearly seen that the inscriptions on the walls aimed to display their urban pride, rather only to show the imperial hand on a faraway local population.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as a frontier city, Attaleia was a forward base for the Byzantine fleet and the capital of *Kibyrraiotai*. Therefore, the city hosted the most important naval force with the exclusion of the imperial fleet in Constantinople. Speaking of the capital, Attaleia was eight days removed from Constantinople on the fast imperial post horses that travelled across Anatolia. Therefore, one may reach Attaleia from Constantinople embarking on the ships via the sea-routes, so in this light, this thematic capital was both near and far from the gravitational pull of the capital.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, Attaleia was a forward base of the imperial navy and centre of the *Kibyrraiotai* Theme, the empire's most important naval force, if one excluded the imperial fleet in Constantinople. There were two divisions of the fleet (*droungai*); one located in Attaleia, under the so-called admiral of the Gulf (*Droungarios toy Kolpou*), and one on the Island of Kos. Next to them, there were two leaders of the ground forces located in other cities of the theme. Eight days from the capital on the fast imperial post horses that travelled across Anatolia, and fifteen days on the more circuitous sea routes, Attaleia was both near and far from empire's nerve center.

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<sup>25</sup> Foss 1996, 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> Foss 1996, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Krallis 2019, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Hellenkemper and Hild 2004, 301.

<sup>29</sup> Bakirtzis 2005, 15-32.

<sup>30</sup> Krallis 2019, 62.

Ahrweiler states that the seat of the *strategos* was most probably Attaleia, therefore, his subordinates also dwelt in or around the city.<sup>31</sup> An imperial representative (*ek prosopou*) was stationed in Syllaion, a fortified site near Attaleia, located on the route linking Attaleia and the southern coast with inner Anatolia via Amorium and Nicaea, with Constantinople as the terminus.<sup>32</sup> According to his hagiography, Saint Anthony the Younger's family moved to Attaleia where he became an imperial officer in the city. Therefore, he was promoted to *ek prosopou* in 821 or 822 of the *Kybirrhaiotai*. His *vita* claims that he held the position until 825, and hints that he may have been became the *strategos* of the theme and led the repulsion of an Arab attack on either Attaleia or Syllaion. His *vita* implies that the *strategos* of the *Kybirrhaiotai* and an Arab admiral negotiated. The incident informs us that both parties were accustomed to each other and familiar with the customs and rules of maritime borders between the Byzantines and the Caliphate.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, one of the earliest mentions of the *strategos* of the *Kybirrhaiotai* is a certain Krateros. Even though little is known about him, he held the position in the early 820s. He was promoted to the position by the emperor Michael II the Amorian (770-829) after the failed expedition to retake Crete. He launched a new operation around 827-829; therefore, the new expedition was initially successful but failed because of the night attacks. Krateros fled to Kos where he was captured by Arabs then crucified.<sup>34</sup>

Eustathios is another example who was the only *strategos* mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus. He writes that Eustathios was *protospatharios*, *asekretis*, and *ek prosopou* of the *Kybirrhaiotai*. Indeed, the usage of titles is ambiguous in the sources, but it seems that he was the *strategos* of the theme, rather being its deputy.<sup>35</sup> According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, Eustathios had a conflict with the *katepano* of the Mardaites, Staurakios Platys, over jurisdictional matters. They were proteges of the *logothebes tou dromon*, Himerios. Eustathios wrote directly to Leo VI making strong accusations against the *katepano*. Therefore, he managed to transfer the authority of *katepano* to himself.<sup>36</sup> He remained in position until the succession of a certain Niketas who the son of Ioube (Hellenized form of Ayyub) who was appointed as the *strategos* of the *Kybirrhaiotai* by Alexander in 912. He was the one who wrote the petition for his son Aberkios to be appointed as the *katepano* of the Mardaites to the emperor.

Another example comes from Theophanes who mentions Basil Hexamilites as a *patrikios* and the *strategos* of the *Kybirrhaiotai* in 955. He writes how the Muslim fleet in Tarsus had been a threat to the Byzantines. According to Theophanes, Basil sent a Byzantine fleet against the Tarsians, therefore sinking many ships with the help of Greek fire.<sup>37</sup> This incident is also echoed in the narrative of the Arab historian Ibn el-Athir. He says that the naval battle took place in 956 and caused the death of at least 1,800 Tarsians.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, this victory was

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<sup>31</sup> Ahrweiler 1996, 82.

<sup>32</sup> Niewöhner 2007, 130-31.

<sup>33</sup> Halkin 1944, 290-93.

<sup>34</sup> Makrypoulias 2000, 351.

<sup>35</sup> Ralph-Johannes et al. 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Const. Porph. *DAI*. 241-43

<sup>37</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, 62-72.

<sup>38</sup> Ralph-Johannes et al. 2013.

crucial for the Byzantine navy as it crippled the Muslim fleet and paved the way for Nikephoros II Phocas (912-969) and his expedition against the Emirate of Crete around 960-961.<sup>39</sup>

In this light, we are encouraged to reassess Attaleia's urban profile and local population with a different pair of eyes. The administration of the *Kybirrhaiotai* was divided into two different groups: *droungai* and *tourmai* as the *droungarioi* of Attaleia and Kos and *tourmachai* indicate that. Each *turma* was usually headed by a *tourmaches*. In some cases, an *ek prosopou* could appoint himself to the post. Haldon states that a *tourmaches* was attached to the governing *strategos* for each theme and resided in the thematic capital and held different titles such as *spatharokandidatos*, *spatharios* or *kandidatos*.<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, we are confronted with the existence of the *katepano* of Mardaites, whose affiliation has remained a controversial subject. Concerning the Mardaites, Constantine Porphyrogenitus claims that Caliph Abd al-Malik (646-705) and Justinian II (669-711) had an agreement on resettling 12,000 Mardaites from the Arab border to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>41</sup> Theophanes describes them as Byzantine guerillas since they were mountain people and hard to control. However, they played an important role during the Arab-Byzantine Wars.<sup>42</sup> Mardaites are mentioned also in *De administrando imperio* as Constantine Porphyrogenitus illustrates their organization in the Byzantine naval system.<sup>43</sup> He mentions the existence of the *katepano* of Mardaites in Attaleia, writing how Alexander was persuaded to appoint a certain Aberkios as the *katepano*. Also, Porphyrogenitus says that the Mardaites operated in the Byzantine naval wars against Arabs, since the Mardaites were deployed as part of the navy. However, one must be cautious about reassessing the role of the Mardaites in Attaleia. For it seems that they were temporarily recruited into the navy rather being a permanent body of the Byzantine fleet. On the other hand, they numbered over 5000 men and resettled in Attaleia. However, we also see groups of Mardaites in Peloponnesus, Nikopolis, or Cephalonia when they were fighting on the frontiers.<sup>44</sup> At the outset, it is noteworthy that, in the beginning of ninth century, the *Kybirrhaiotai* comprised almost 70 ships in the harbour. Therefore, in the expedition against Crete (960-61), the *Kybirrhaiotai* could count on 31 war galleys, 16 *pamphyloi*, 15 *dromos* with 6000 oarsmen, and 700 marines.<sup>45</sup> The Byzantine fleet that anchored in Attaleia was lastly mentioned during the unsuccessful naval raid against Constantinople in 1043. Then the theme became purely a civil province ruled by a *krites* and later a *doux*.<sup>46</sup>

At this point of the trajectory, we also gain a slightly clearer picture of the socio-political composition of Attaleia since the city provided soldiers and equipment for a great part of the Byzantine fleet. A *droungarios* is mentioned in the literary sources as early as 697. The Mardaites, led by the *katepano*, were relocated in the city.<sup>47</sup> For instance, the aforementioned petition of Niketas for Aberkios shows that the title of *katapeno* was not something honorary. Rather it had importance as the owner of the petition asked the emperor himself for his

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph-Johannes et al. 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Haldon 1999, 115-16.

<sup>41</sup> Const. Porph. *DAI*. 94-95.

<sup>42</sup> Theoph. *Chron*. 92-94.

<sup>43</sup> Cvetkovic 2017, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Sahnner 2023, 144-45.

<sup>45</sup> Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, 549.

<sup>46</sup> Ahrweiler 1966, 131-35.

<sup>47</sup> Cvetkovic 2017, 66-72.

son's assignment to the office. This petition has another aspect, for it shows that Attaleiotes composed an influential group in Constantinople, lobbying at court in favour of their city and people.<sup>48</sup> Successful naval leaders tended to dominate their positions in Constantinople and the palace. For example, a serious controversy took place between the *strategos* and *katepano* during the reign of Leo VI (866-912), and Leo had to settle the debate by himself.<sup>49</sup> Attaleia and its urban elite seem like a well-organized and militarized body which managed to protect its vitality during the period since the city was the home of the Byzantine fleet that served as a military bulwark against the Caliphate's naval forces.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, faced with the prosperous Muslim world and beyond, Attaleia was not only a thematic capital but also an economic hub as its harbour served as an entrepot, for its urban elites and naval forces fuelled the demand and consumption. The harbour of Attaleia, located in front of the city walls and Hadrian's Gate, was a kind of liquid sphere where the vessels sailing to and from Anatolia's shores. As mentioned before, Attaleia sent 16 *pamphyloi* and 15 *dromos*. According to Kızıltan and Kocabaş, in the Byzantine navy the *dromos* was generally in naval activities while the *pamphyloi* might also be used for commercial activities.<sup>51</sup>

With these remarks, one may feel puzzled and hesitate to regard Attaleia as an important city. However, Attaleia seems part and parcel of the Byzantine *koine* by developing a strong sense of administrative and military relevance. On the one hand, it was an important part of empire, but at the same time one may safely assume that Attaleia had peculiar governmental structures in administrative, military, and fiscal terms. For example, the *droungarioi* of the fleet was not only an admiral, but he was also in charge of commercial activities or arranging urban life. Attaleia operated slightly differently in comparison with the inland urban centers in Anatolia. On the one hand, the city actively played the role of nautical center with its constantly reinforced walls and base for soldiers and marines where locals were bounded with the military system. On the other hand, the city acted as a commercial hub where cross-cultural relationships were taking place and shaping daily life, as Michael Attaleiotes describes his hometown in his *History*.<sup>52</sup> With these remarks, we are encouraged to see a maritime thematic capital which does not present us a declining settlement pattern. Instead, it was woven into the Byzantine *koine*. In this sense Attaleia could ideally be paired with another settlement pattern on the Western side of the Mediterranean: Naples.

Naples was never one of the main urban centers in Southern Italy during the Classical Age.<sup>53</sup> With the administrative changes of Diocletian and Constantine, Italy was divided into the provinces, and Naples was placed in the boundaries of Campania whose chief town was Capua. Despite its secondary rank, Naples had gradually gained importance, visibility, and prosperity over time. Its privileged position had grown further during the fifth century. The prosperity of late Roman Naples was probably determined by the increased relevance of local agricultural production in the food supply of Rome, after Africa fell to the Vandals in the beginning of fifth century.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Naples managed to adopt its new role as the main harbor of the region of Campania. For instance, archaeological reports show that the city walls,

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<sup>48</sup> Const. Porph. *Them.* 123-25

<sup>49</sup> Foss 1996, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Zavagno 2021, 106-10.

<sup>51</sup> Kızıltan and Kocabaş 2015, 116.

<sup>52</sup> Attal. *Hist.* 497.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur 2002, 147.

<sup>54</sup> Savino 2009, 244.

which faced the seashore, saw an uninterrupted sequence of restoration between the fifth and sixth centuries, apparently related to maritime activities.<sup>55</sup>

During the beginning of the sixth century, Naples had a pivotal role as Justinian (482-565) started *Renovatio Imperii* and Belisarius (505-565) besieged Naples. Procopius' narrative on warfare is rich in details both on urban fortifications and on how local populations reacted to the arrival of the Byzantine army. Byzantine troops experienced difficulties in convincing the Neapolitans to surrender. Since its city walls were seemingly impenetrable, Belisarius apparently managed to get in thanks only to Byzantine soldiers luckily discovering the tunnels of the old aqueducts.<sup>56</sup> Recent archaeological research shows that these walls were refurbished after the city came under Byzantine control. But it is possible to assume that restorations took place after Naples was under direct threat from the Lombards at the end of sixth century.<sup>57</sup> The arrival of the Lombards drastically changed the geopolitical framework of Campania as they managed to control over Capua and its hinterland. In this sense, Naples became the pivot of Byzantine defensive strategies against the new invaders. The hills around the city to the north and west, and Mount Vesuvius enclosing it on the east formed a sort of natural boundary between two different areas of the territorial entity formerly called Campania.<sup>58</sup>

By the end of the sixth century the letters of Pope Gregory (c. 540-604) provide us with a rather interesting observation. Naples hosted both the heads of the civil and the military authority as the titles of *iudex Campaniae* and *magister militum* indicate. Therefore, they were not the only figures who played a role within the circle of local elites. Ecclesiastical authority held an outstanding socio-economic position as performed by the bishops. Gregory's letters documented the existence of other magistrates like *maior populi*, flanked by a group of *seniors* or *principals*.<sup>59</sup> Naples was involved in the changes of Byzantine imperial administration that had gradually taken place during the seventh century.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, when the Byzantine Empire went through the transformation of administration, Naples had its own fair share too. The *Praetorian prefecture* was delivered into the hands of military commanders with several functions previously held by civil *magistrates*.<sup>61</sup> Here, one may safely claim that this change of power should have implied the birth of Byzantine duchies along the coastline of Tyrrhenian Sea, and the *duces* were directly appointed by the Constantinopolitan authorities.

Naples became one of the newly created political entities. The first known *dux* is a certain Basil who received power at the end of seventh century. The appointment of Basil shows that a new elite was born that went hand in hand with Byzantine administrative circles as they were recruited among the local population. Their wages were paid mainly by allotments of public land. Furthermore, those in charge of the single units and garrisons distributed the towns and their territories amongst them. In the eighth century, when written sources again became sufficient, we see that nearly all the most prominent members bear military titles such as *tribunus*, *comes*, and similar.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Martin 2005, 23-74.

<sup>56</sup> Procop. *Goth.* 8.5, 21-29.

<sup>57</sup> Marazzi 2021, 408.

<sup>58</sup> Zanini 1998, 272-76.

<sup>59</sup> Brown 1986, 34-46.

<sup>60</sup> Cosentino 2008a, 138-41.

<sup>61</sup> Cosentino 2008a, 143.

<sup>62</sup> Marazzi 2021, 412.

During the late seventh and early eighth centuries, Naples gained a certain degree of self-administration but still was a part of the imperial *oikumene*. Things changed quickly after 730 when Ravenna was cut off from the Byzantines by an aggressive Lombard military policy, culminating in the exarchal city's conquest in 751. Papal claims to the legitimate inheritance of imperial power led Rome away from Byzantine obedience.<sup>63</sup> Naples followed a different path. After the second half of the eighth century, the Neapolitan aristocracy managed to run the appointment of the *duces* independently, choosing them from among local elites. But this change should not imply that the Neapolitans declared their city as a fully independent duchy. Although being autonomous in exercising power, the *duces* never cut their ties with the empire. Instead, they sought imperial recognition for their appointment from the *strategos* of Sicily, the highest imperial representative in Italy after the fall of Ravenna. And they continued to date documents according to the years of reign of the Byzantine emperors.<sup>64</sup> Bonding strongly with Constantinople while being a part of a Byzantine *koine* helped Naples build relationships with their neighbors such as the Amalfitans, Gaetans, Lombards, and Arabs.<sup>65</sup> They kept economic relevance in Mediterranean trade since the Neapolitans had links with the Byzantine heartland. In return, Naples remained a privileged observatory used by Byzantine diplomats for keeping an eye on the evolution of the Italian political situation.<sup>66</sup>

Reminiscent of the example of Attaleia, Naples since the eighth century also had to forge a relationship with the Arabs as a frontline. However, we are confronted with a peculiar direction after the ninth century. The Neapolitans hired Arab mercenaries to help them against the siege led by Prince Sicard of Lombard Benevento (r. 832-839). In the end, Sicard signed an agreement with Naples known as the *Pactum Sicardum*. What is peculiar here is, first, Naples performed a different role than it should have played; second, there was a political shift between the power dynamics. It is also interesting to see that when Arabs had raided Ischia, the Amalfitans and Gaetans responded to the call from the Sicilian *strategos* but not the Neapolitans.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, the Neapolitans demonstrated rather an ambivalent response to the call, less deferential toward the Byzantines.<sup>68</sup> However, the tension escalated quickly as the Arabs planned to have Ponza as their base for raids in 842. Sergius of Naples (?-864) decided to drive the Arabs off and summoned the Amalfitans, Gaetans, and Sorrentini to make an alliance. This union managed to win, settling matters for the moment.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, the complex relationships between these Southern players changed the alliances once again. For example, the Arabs conquered Byzantine Messina with help from the Neapolitan fleet in the mid-ninth century.<sup>70</sup> In this light, one can safely notice that the political relationship between Naples and Constantinople had been changing by the ninth century. But Naples played an important role as a maritime city and foci of authority as a part of the Byzantine *koine*.<sup>71</sup>

Byzantine influence was not fading since Byzantine administrative and cultural elements were cemented in the Neapolitan characteristics. For example, Sergius was famous not only

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<sup>63</sup> Treadgold 1997, 487-89.

<sup>64</sup> Russo Mailler 1988, 123-26.

<sup>65</sup> Skinner 2013, 154-58.

<sup>66</sup> Falkenhausen 2018, 24.

<sup>67</sup> Kreutz 1991, 22.

<sup>68</sup> Sambon 1919, 74.

<sup>69</sup> Jo. Deac. *Gest. Neap.* 60, 432.

<sup>70</sup> Marazzi 2007, 146.

<sup>71</sup> Falkenhausen 2018, 23-24.

for his military skills but also his capability to have diplomatic relationships. He was well-educated and had a political awareness which led him to stay in touch with Mediterranean events. One should also mention that the knowledge of Greek was not exceptional in Naples; rather, it was commonplace among the citizens.<sup>72</sup> Maybe direct connections between Naples and Constantinople became frequent, but travellers moved around for reasons other than just bringing dispatches to a far-flung province. In fact, the harbor of Naples and its facilities functioned greatly during the early Middle Ages and used not only by the Neapolitans but also by the Amalfitans and Gaetans. For Naples offered what their native cities could not: space and easy connections with the densely populated region behind it. Indeed, Neapolitan society concentrated on the management of the complex network of trading routes not only crossing their city but also on the Tyrrhenian Sea which connected them with the Byzantine coastlines.<sup>73</sup>

Byzantine influence on Naples can also be traced from the material remnants unearthed in Naples and its surroundings. For instance, the catacombs of San Gennaro, used throughout the early Middle Ages, were covered with wall paintings. Decorations and motifs mostly drawn from a bucolic and idyllic repertoire, they reminded their audience of examples from the Great Palace in Constantinople, the Neonian Baptistery in Ravenna, and the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia.<sup>74</sup> The Baptistery of San Giovanni in Ponte, a product of the patronage of Bishop Severus of Naples (r. 364-409), dates to the fifth century and was used during the early Middle Ages. This small edifice proves the power that urban elites had as well as the different types and political uses of it, since it clearly indicates the presence of local patronage. The local contributions to embellish the city allow us to think of deliberate strategies to connect local wealth and political capital, as well as social prestige, to the Constantinopolitan models of references.<sup>75</sup>

On the other hand, the excavations on Piazza Municipio exposed more than 4000 coins between 1996-2016. Alessia Rovelli and her preliminary study of these coins show that 23% of the finds harkens back to the sixth and seventh centuries, including Byzantine coins either struck in Constantinople, Rome, or Naples. The Capitoline mint is common among other finds in the catacomb of San Gennaro; lower denomination coins such as *pentanummi* or *decanummi* were unearthed dating up to the seventh century. In the middle of the sixth century, the coinage from Rome is interrupted, as the last evidence is Justin II's *pentanummi* in Latium and Campania.<sup>76</sup> This could be related to the Lombard invasion as well as to the new orbit of a Sicilian mint where Naples also entered. On the other hand, Constans II's journey in Italy became another turning point for the relationships of Constantinople and Naples,<sup>77</sup> and the emperor ordered the installation of a new mint in Naples, striking coins in three metals. It is difficult to attribute the work to Naples's atelier, and it seems less significant in comparison with Rome and Sicily. The Neapolitan mint continued to strike coins after becoming an independent duchy. One example of the mint's activities is the *folles* of Stefano III (?-832).<sup>78</sup> It is certain that the Neapolitan atelier produced bronze coins after 663 during the reign of Justinian

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<sup>72</sup> Delogu 1968, 47-62.

<sup>73</sup> Russo Mailler 1988, 156.

<sup>74</sup> Liccardo 2010, 374-88.

<sup>75</sup> Bruzellus and Tronzo 2011, 25-26.

<sup>76</sup> Marani 2022, 196.

<sup>77</sup> Cosentino 2008b, 581-90.

<sup>78</sup> Prigent 2021, 358-60

II (685-695), while minting in silver appeared a century later. Coins with the mint mark NE were found such as a *decanummus*, *pentanummus*, and a half *folles* attributed to Constantine IV (652-685) as well as a *nomisma* of Leo III. On the other hand, even though Naples had an atelier, it returned to the Roman orbit evidenced by a hoard of 129 gold coins unearthed at the harbor of Ischia and a silver *siliqua* of Constantine V (718-775) minted in Rome.

Speaking of material evidence, one must mention the pottery and ceramic distribution which help to highlight the trade routes, commercial activities, as well as the customs and habits. Pottery acts like a common denominator during the period under scrutiny. As Wickham cogently remarks, “For pottery, we can discuss the organization of production, the distance moved by-products; and quantitative analyses of the full range of dated wares found on any given site can often tell us how much came from where in any given period.”<sup>79</sup> Ceramics, especially globular amphorae produced in coastal and insular areas of the Byzantine *koine*, point to the shared customs and values as well as wide-scale trade routes between the seventh and ninth centuries.<sup>80</sup> Even though Byzantine ceramic production in Naples is an interesting but understudied area, archaeological reports provide us with insights. Many globular amphorae found in Naples were likely used for the transportation of goods to and from other parts of the empire. Archaeological excavations around the harbor of Naples have uncovered fragments of such amphorae, suggesting that Naples likely both imported and produced pottery. Naples also was introduced to glazed wares which are mainly associated with Byzantine production. They were used mostly for decorative purposes for urban elites. Several excavations in and around Naples, particularly in the port area and nearby sites such as Cumae or Puteoli have uncovered evidence of Byzantine-era ceramic production and trade. These finds include amphorae fragments, local kitchen wares, and imported ceramics, indicating the city’s active role in Mediterranean commerce.

Between the sixth and seventh centuries, commercial links between Naples and North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean continued, as the African oil amphorae were frequently used. However, the signs of transformation can be traced from the Eastern wine amphorae since Samos’ wine and oil amphorae were found in Cuma and Pozzuoli.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the presence of Eastern products was related to the increased control of Constantinople on ceramics.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, local production also increased. Campanian potters had gradually gained importance between the 6th and 7th centuries. Kilns were located both around the Gulf of Naples and the city itself since the potters produced coarse, red-painted, or cooking wares as well as amphorae in Cuma, Ischia, and Miseno. Furthermore, one must keep it in mind that the production of amphorae is estimated to have continued to the ninth century. Neapolitan potters imitated the Constantinopolitan style and production standards.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Naples also boasted a strong administrative hierarchy, economic activities, and concentrated population.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Wickham 2005, 702.

<sup>80</sup> Vroom 2021, 85-88.

<sup>81</sup> Marani 2022, 199.

<sup>82</sup> Vroom 2022, 230-38.

<sup>83</sup> Carsana and D’Amico 2010, 74.

<sup>84</sup> Curta 2016, 103.

## Conclusion

Much has been written on Byzantine themes and thematic capitals, but less on Byzantine duchies, in terms of the fortification and militarization of the topography to resist and face “the enemies of Byzantium,” to better administer the territorial remnants of an empire that would not die,<sup>85</sup> and to fulfil the fiscal needs of the imperial machinery. Little room has been given to the different levels of adaptation and resilience of these cities as well as their peculiar trajectories, dynamics, and characteristics. Therefore, a comparative look has led us to rethink the quality and quantity of coastal cities and their importance in the Byzantine *koine*. Indeed, themes and duchies heavily stemmed from the military and fiscal needs, but they do not present a single and solid pattern functioning in the same way all the time. In other words, coastal capitals had different roles in the Byzantine *koine*. Attaleia was a bustling settlement between a thematic capital on the mainland and an important harbor across Byzantine shipping routes. However, Naples was more like a gateway community where the Neapolitans played along with the Tyrrhenian dynamics in relation to different players such as the Amalfitans, Gaetans, Lombards, and Arabs as well as the Byzantines and Romans around them.

Indeed, as I have compared two Byzantine maritime cities selected from the Western and Eastern Mediterranean, this study has aimed to show that Attaleia and Naples, even though their trajectories followed different directions, functioned in relation to the parameters of the Byzantine *koine*. This comparison has been made between the features and characteristics of the Neapolitans and Attaleites in terms of socio-political, economic, and cultural terms to see if a certain model of Byzantine maritime city could be applied to each coastal urban center. However, this work provides us with a new and different picture, in that Byzantine maritime cities had distinctive roles and functioned in their own peculiar ways. Therefore, their peculiar trajectories illuminate their level of adaptation and skills of resilience.

In this light, my first conclusive point is that Attaleia was primarily a military and naval hub with a strong focus on maritime activities and Byzantine naval supremacy. The city had a fortified urban structure focused on protecting the Mediterranean coasts. Naples, however, developed as a semi-autonomous urban center with a mixed Byzantine and local identity. The city became a bridge between Rome and the Tyrrhenian Sea, as well as for the Gaetans and Amalfitans. Attaleia’s neighbors included the Arab emirates and the other Anatolian themes. These often engaged in conflicts or alliances based on maritime interests as its strategic location on the southern coast made it a frontline against Arab attacks. On the other hand, Naples interacted with Rome, the Lombards, Arab raiders, as well as the Gaetans and Amalfitans. It balanced these relationships to maintain its semi-autonomy, often negotiating and shifting alliances to better suit Neapolitan interests. The second point to highlight is the nature of the relationships between Attaleia and Naples and Constantinople since Attaleia maintained a closer military and socio-political connection to Constantinople due to its role as a thematic capital and as the base of Byzantine navy. It was more in tune with the capital to operate naval campaigns, to collect taxes, as well as to have imperial support.

Meanwhile, Naples had a more distant relationship with the Byzantine capital, characterized by nominal loyalty with considerable independence. Neapolitan connections with the capital were more cultural, economic, and religious, influenced by imperial traditions. It used imperial

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<sup>85</sup> Haldon 2016, 102.

power as a legal authority, rather being directly bound to Constantinople in military and political aspects. Another point concerns the role of urban elites since Attaleiotes and Neapolitans played different roles in their communities. Contrary to the notion of the diminished power of local elites, Attaleiotes demonstrated their influence stemming mainly from the military power that the *Kybirrbaiotai* had. The Neapolitans constructed their local power based more on semi-autonomous local and ecclesiastical elites. However, both performed a sustained and adaptive presence, organizing civic, economic, and religious life.

In this sense, one can safely conclude that the different types of Byzantine coastal cities had gradually transformed during the transitional era in relation to their peculiarities, dynamics, and features, rather providing us with a one size fits all model. Coastal cities related especially to the Mediterranean provide a picture of connectivity, adaptation, and resilience. Last but not least, one must mention that Attaleia and Naples provide us with a different picture since they should be regarded as urban settlements which had a certain level of flexibility. Their administrative, economic and cultural activities indicate a strong sense of urban pride and vitality, rather being seen as defensive outposts functioning only to protect the imperial capital.

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