

# The byzantine cemetery-hermitage of Saint Onufrius (Onoufrios) in Methoni, south-western Messinia, Peloponnese, Greece)

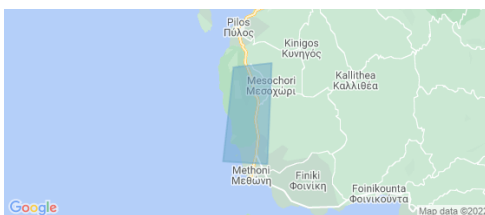
Data source: Own research and secondary literature

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*\* Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

Entry tags: Religious Complex, Archaeological monument, Monument, Religious Place, Medieval Christianity, Monasticism, Tomb, Cemetery, Catacomb, Monastery, Open-Air Sanctuary, Religious Group, Greece

Agios Onoufrios (Saint Onuphrius) is a rock-cut monumental complex lying on a hill not far from the important medieval castle-town of Methoni (Modon), in the province of Messinia, in the Peloponnese region of south-western Greece. The complex was developed in part of a probably ancient limestone quarry that occupies the slope of the hill. The habitation pattern, that is a previously disused quarry eventually at some time re-occupied for funerary and religious-ascetic purposes, was widespread and common in the soft bedrock landscapes of south Mediterranean. Initially, Agios Onoufrios was formed as a fourth century CE cemetery that included rock-cut tombs, arched recesses purposed for entombment widely known as arcosolia (reminding catacomb formation, extremely rare in Greece), and shaft graves. Other rock-cut constructions such as niches and tables served for funerary-ceremonial purposes. Many centuries later, most probably from the 12th century CE, it was converted to a hermitic settlement. It was probably then and onwards when several modifications took place, in order for chapels and hermitages to be shaped. Alterations were made in the complex such as the construction of interior walls for the separation of the dwelling cells and the religious spaces such as chapels. Niches, apses, recesses were carved and murals were painted so as to cover the new religious needs. Also, channels of harvesting rainwater and storing cisterns were hewn for securing subsistence. As for the naming of the complex, there is a sole reference of the Montagna de San Nufrio in a Venetian document of 1386, supposedly named after a certain hermit Onoufrios that chose to occupy the abandoned site.



Date Range: 300 CE - 1500 CE

Region: Methoni, Peloponnese, south-western Greece

Region tags: Greece

Hill on the mountain of Agios (saint) Nicholaos (Nicholas), north-east of Methoni at Peloponnese periphery, south-western Greece

## Status of Participants:

✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## General Variables

### Sources and Excavations

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

– Source 1: Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς : a Greek academic archaeological journal

– Source 2: Armoloi...(see bibliography): a Greek academic volume

### Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oqE74-HjBw>

– Source 1 Description: A video documentary showing the site and the monument

Has this place been the focus of excavation (pre-modern, illicit, or scientific):

Answer 'Yes' for each period or type of excavation.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: Δ. Πάλλας, Άνασκαφή παλαιοχριστιανικού κοιμητηρίου έν Μεθώνη, Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς 1967, 22-27. Δ. Πάλλας, Ό Άγιος Όνούφριος Μεθώνης. Παλαιοχριστιανικόν κοιμητήριον - βυζαντινόν άσκητήριο, Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς 1968, 119-176.



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1967, 1968



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavation of early christian cemetery (-hermitage) at Agios (Saint) Onoufrios, Methoni

### Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

– Other [specify]: yes, a limestone quarry

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

Other features might be ground clearing, terracing, other modifications of the local environment.

– Yes



Type of feature

– Terracing

– Clearing

– Other [specify]: quarry

Is the place situated in an urban or significantly urbanized area:

– No

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

– Yes

↳ Are there settlements in close proximity to the place:

– No

↳ Are there routes of travel in close proximity to the place:

– Yes

Is the place situated far removed from non-religious places of habitation:

– No

### Structures Present

Are there structures or features present:

Instructions: Answer once for each structure/feature or group that can be differentiated.

– Yes

↳ A single structure

– No

↳ One single feature

– Water channel

↳ A group of structures:

– Yes

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– Yes

↳ A group of features:

– Yes

↳ Are they part of a single design/construction stage:

– Yes

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Other [specify]: funeral/subsistence needs

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– No

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– No

### Reasons for Creation/Construction/Consecration

Is the place used for the worship of/communication with non-human supernatural beings:

– Yes

↳ Dedicated to a supernatural being:

– Yes [specify]: Christ

↳ Dedicated to more than one supernatural being:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of a semi-divine human being:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of non-divine ancestors:

– No

Was the place commissioned/built by an official political entity:

A political entity is a local power structure that leverages a workforce.

– No

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Yes



Groups:

– Men

– Other [specify]: hermits

Was the place thought to have originated as the result of divine intervention:

– No

Was the place created to mark or commemorate the birthplace of a supernatural or human being:

– No

Was the place created as the result of an event:

– I don't know

Was the creation of the place sponsored by an external financial/material donation:

– I don't know

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

– Other [specify]: entombment at first/ for recluses, monasticism at a later stage

Was the place built specifically for housing scriptures/sacred texts:

– No

## Design and Material Remains

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### Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– Yes

↳ Are any of the structures attached to or associated with a landscape feature:

– Yes

↳ Are any of the structures attached to other structures:

– Yes

↳ Is there a hierarchy among the structures:

– No

Is monumental architecture present:

Monumental architecture is defined here as a built structure that surpasses average human proportions and in general is larger and more complex than is necessary to fulfill the structure's utilitarian function(s). Examples of monumental architecture include Mesopotamian Ziggurats, Egyptian Pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Mesoamerican Pyramids, North American and Aegean burial mounds, etc.

– No

Is the structure/feature made out of natural materials:

Answer [Yes] for each material type

– Yes

↳ Earth

– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:

– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:

– No

↳ Sand  
– No

↳ Clay  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– I don't know

↳ Plaster  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– I don't know

↳ Wood  
– No

↳ Grass  
– No

↳ Stone  
– Yes

↳ Is this material sourced locally:  
– Yes

↳ Is this material lacking in the local natural environment:  
– No

Is the structure/feature made out of human-made materials

– Yes [specify]: hewn

## Decoration

Is decoration present:

– No

– Yes

↳ Is decoration part of the building (permanent):

– Yes

↳ On the outside:

– Yes

↳ On the inside:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration attached to the building, i.e. movable reliefs or tapestries

– Yes

↳ Is the decoration figural:

A figural representation is defined here as one that contains the depiction of discernible human, anthropomorphic, animal, or zoomorphic forms. In general, it differentiates between animate and inanimate beings, as well as between narrative compositions and still life, landscapes, abstraction, etc. Answer [Yes] for each type of figure depicted

– Yes

↳ Are there gods depicted:

– No

↳ Are there other supernatural beings depicted:

– Yes

↳ Are there humans depicted:

– Yes



↳ Are there animals depicted:

– No

↳ Are there animal-human hybrids depicted:

– No

↳ Is the decoration non-figural:

– No

↳ Is the decoration hidden or restricted from view:

– No

↳ Are there statues present:

– No

↳ Are there reliefs present:

A relief as opposed to sculpture carved on the round is a work of sculpture in which the figures project from a background support, generally a flat surface. Reliefs can be carved out of stone, clay, or a similar material.

– No

↳ Are there paintings present:

– Yes

↳ Are they panel paintings [movable]:

– No

↳ Are they wall paintings:

– Yes

↳ Type

– 'True' fresco

↳ Paintings representing the gods worshipped at the place:

– No

↳ Paintings representing mythological narratives:

– No

↳ Paintings representing human/historical narratives:

– Yes

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: a painted and engraved cross

↳ Are there mosaics present:

– No

↳ Are there inscriptions as part of the decoration:

– No

↳ Other type of decoration:

– Yes [specify]: engraved and painted cross

## Iconography

Are there distinct features in the places iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not)

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic)

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract)

– No

↳ Portrayals of afterlife  
– I don't know

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols)  
– Yes

↳ Humans  
– Yes

↳ Supernatural narratives  
– I don't know

↳ Human narratives  
– Yes

## Beliefs and Practices

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### Funerary Associations

Is this place a tomb/burial:  
– Yes

Is this a place for the worship of the dead:  
– No

Is this a place for treatment of the corpse:  
– No

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

Co-sacrifices are animal/human sacrifices prompted by the death of the primary occupant of the tomb/burial.

– No

Are grave goods present:  
– No

Are formal burials present:

– No

### Supernatural Beings

Is a supreme high god is present:

– No

Does the supreme high god communicate with the living at this place:

– I don't know

Are previously human spirits present:

– No

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:

– No

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– No

Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Is the supernatural being/high god present in the form of a cult statue(s):

– No

### Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– No

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– No

## Ritual and Performance

### Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– No

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– No

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– No

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– No

### Pilgrimage and Festivals

Are pilgrimages present:

– No

Is this place a venue for feasting:

– No

Are festivals present:

– No

### Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– No

Is healing present/practiced at this place:

– No

Do rituals occur at this place:

Rituals are visibly enacted behaviors by one or more people for the purposes of religious observance.

– No

## Institutions and Scriptures

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### Religious Specialists

Are religious specialists present/in charge of this place:

Religious specialists are individuals whose primary duties within a population group are not concerned with subsistence or craft production but the maintenance of the religious landscape and culture of the group.

– No

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– No

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– No

Are there formal institutions for the maintenance of the place:

Institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders

– No

### Bureaucracy

Is there a formal bureaucracy present at this place:

A bureaucracy consists of a hierarchical system of accounting and rule maintenance primarily concerned with material wealth.

– No

Does this place control economic resources (land, goods, tools):

– No

### Public Works

Does this place serve as a location for services to the community:

– No

### Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– No

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– No

### Bibliography

#### General References

Reference: Sophia Germanidou. The harvesting and management of water in the rock-cut cemetery and hermitage of Saint Onoufrios in Methoni, Messinia. (Paschalis Andoudis , Dimitris Drakoulis), Armoloi - Studies in Honor of Prof. Argyris Petronotis. Thessaloniki: Stamoulis Publishing House.