

Ioannis Eliades

The Byzantine Harbors of Cyprus as a springboard for communication and interaction between Constantinople and the Mediterranean

ABSTRACT

The island of Cyprus on the crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean became since the Antiquity an important stopover for the merchants from the East to the West and from the Black Sea and the Aegean to Egypt. The route along the southern coasts of Cyprus was the most preferable for the ships because of the favorable winds from the West and the better protected gulfs, anchorages and ports. Hagiographical texts, archeological findings and monuments testify an intense maritime activity.

The Byzantine harbors of Cyprus played an important role for the transportation of grain from Egypt to Constantinople since the early Byzantine period and after the Arab raids. Furthermore it became an important stepping stone to the communication of East and West with the Holy Land. Products from the East were traded in the city-ports of the island with western products. The commerce and the safety during periods of peace made the island and its cities prosperous, as can be deduced from the rich villas and the complexes of basilicas and monuments during the Byzantine Era and even later during the Frankish and Venetian dominion. Although the commerce and the ports during the Ottoman rule were mostly declined, the capitulations as a result of the Turkish-Russian War gave new impulse to the maritime activity.

The activity of the main ports of Cyprus and their connection to Constantinople will be examined in our presentation and the artistic interaction between Constantinople and Cyprus will be highlighted.