



In this area, with a beautiful landscape of green 'schinos-trees' and old immured villages, the centuries seem to have stopped passing by. But these trees are not only for the viewers pleasure:

They also produce the famous resin mastic, which is one of the most important products of the island. Unsurprisingly there used to be around 27 villages in the region that were named as "Mastixochoria", as they were the hometowns of the cultivators of the mastic. Their roots date back to the time of the Byzantine Empire, but their entity was consolidated during the period of the Italian Empire. Later, the Genovese were the ones that took care of the guardian form and fortification of the Mastixochoria. The aim of these actions was mainly the defense against the possible invasions, but also the plain control of the important and powerful monopoly of mastic, as it can only be harvested in this area.

Later, when Chios island was dominated by the Turks, the interest was focused on the preservation of the mastic-monopoly, imposing big penalties onto smugglers, while at the same time assuring the inhabitants a well-off life. Therefore, even though those people who were producing mastic could not enjoy the slightest part of their natural wealth, they did not face problems during the Turkish occupation.

However, all the southeast villages were heavily damaged by the earthquake in 1881, which

only 24 mastic villages survived. Nevertheless some of them are still in very good conditions. The most important and the biggest one is Pyrgi, and some others are Mesta, Olympi, Kalamoti, Armolia, Kallimiasa, Nenita and Vessa. Altogether they are very beautiful places, each one with a different culture and interests.

In this area the villages' houses were arranged in a special way: The external houses formed a big wall in order to protect the mastic-growers from pirates' raids. Usually, the villages are built around a tower and form labyrinths of small streets and passages, intending to confuse any possible invader.