

SOMA 2011

Proceedings of the 15th Symposium on
Mediterranean Archaeology, held at the
University of Catania 3–5 March 2011

VOLUME I

Edited by

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Archeologia, opzione internazionale



Università di Catania
Scuola di Specializzazione in
Beni Archeologici



General Association of
Mediterranean Archaeology



Turkish Foundation for
Underwater Archaeology

BAR International Series 2695 (I)
2015

Published by

Archaeopress
Publishers of British Archaeological Reports
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED
England
bar@archaeopress.com
www.archaeopress.com

BAR S2695 (I)

SOMA 2011 Proceedings of the 15th Symposium on Mediterranean Archaeology, held at the University of Catania 3–5 March 2011

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ISBN 978 1 4073 1342 9 (Volume I)
ISBN 978 1 4073 1343 6 (Volume II)
ISBN 978 1 4073 1344 3 (Set of both volumes)

Printed in England by Information Press, Oxford

All BAR titles are available from:

Hadrian Books Ltd
122 Banbury Road
Oxford
OX2 7BP
England
www.hadrianbooks.co.uk

The current BAR catalogue with details of all titles in print, prices and means of payment is available free from Hadrian Books or may be downloaded from www.archaeopress.com

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Archaeological Excavations at Istanbul's Lake Kucukcekmece–2010

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'Istanbul Prehistoric Researches' began archaeological studies of the northern coastlines of Istanbul with an international science team as part of the 'ITA Project'. During these studies, under the leadership of Sengul Aydingun, evidence of all occupation periods was found from prehistoric to Ottoman times. The ITA project expanded into an international and interdisciplinary project that included specialists from several Turkish and European universities. This international team began excavations in 2009 at Istanbul's Lake Kucukcekmece (Map 1), after preliminary land and underwater researches in 2007 and 2008. This lake is located at the junction of the sea way between Istanbul and the Mediterranean, some 30km only from the centre of Istanbul. There is still a connection between the lake and the sea for boats that was cut much wider in the past. It was a safe natural harbour for ships going back and forth between the Aegean and the Black Sea.

Our previously known history is changing drastically after recent explorations and excavations in Istanbul. Gathered from this history, we know that the colony of Byzantium, established by Megara around 660-658 BC, must have taken control of the trade route between the Black Sea and Mediterranean. On the other hand, because of the position on the Golden Horn and the geography between Sarayburnu-Yenikapı, Byzantium had its own excellent natural harbours. These two features provided the necessary infrastructure needed to become a trade centre. The rate of high taxes they paid to Delos-Attic League in the 5th century BC shows this need. From cereals to slaves, many cargoes from the Black Sea and Mediterranean were exchanged here. From the 2nd century BC, with Rome's advances in the region, cheap grain was widely traded from ports on the Golden Horn and along its north and south coasts. From the 6th century it is known that the empires controlled the grain stocks in the city. The grain ships of the open sea needed to unload before Istanbul due to reasons such as storms and other hazards and storage features built at Bozcaada (Tenedos) by Justinian. Another likely safe anchorage would have been in the area of Lake Kuçukcekmece.

During underwater and coastal researches in 2008, many remains indicated two natural harbours and a settlement probably from the Late Roman period in and around Lake Kucukcekmece. For example side-scan sonar images taken during these studies prove the frequent use of this port. Despite the fact that only a little area was initially scanned, it appears that there were finds of at least six post-Roman/Byzantine iron anchors (in V and T anchor form) from the waters close to the port area (Figure 9). Moreover on the south coast of the lake there were images understood to indicate some sort of wooden quay pillars.

Excavation works were carried out in different parts of the peninsula roughly in the middle of the lake in 2009 and 2010. The first point of attention was the tip of the peninsula, on which we believe a sizeable ancient port was situated. We gave it the name of 'Great Harbour'. The second point was to the north-east,

where a smaller port was encountered; this latter we named 'Small Harbour' (Map 2). A good Roman road was also excavated.

The Great Harbour

Before the surveys in that particular zone (appearing in our map under the area codes A6 and A7) dense vegetation was first cleared away to reveal both the remains of the buildings and allow thorough geophysics work. The excavations in the Great Harbour began on the tip of the peninsula, very close to the lakeshore. During that works some trenches were dug and at a depth of 50cm, a wall previously noted during the geophysics, was reached.

In the Great Harbour and its surrounding area, harbour walls made of regularly cut stones and rubble (some lying under farm buildings from Ottoman period) and a cistern were found. The existence of a channel from the cistern to the lake was established during the excavations. The same channel was also discovered during the geophysics works done by a team from Bristol University. The same team also undertook a number of dendrochronology samples on the wooden remains from the cistern. Because of the length and craftsmanship of the harbour walls, and how the tip of the peninsula was shaped into the lake, it is believed that this was originally a large antique harbour; there are also ruins of a lighthouse at a distance of 300m from the shore.

Small Harbour

2.5km from the Great Harbour, to the north-east, a variety of archaeological remains was noted. After clearing the heavy vegetation the remains of what might possibly be religious and residential areas were found on the surface, leading to the presumption that these marked the site of a sizeable antique city. One of the initial significant finds was a wide Roman road going through the ruins. With a width of 8m, such a road had to be constructed for the large volume of traffic there at the time. It is believed that it was the connecting road between a dense population centre, and their large harbour facility, and one of the most important highways of antique times, the Via Egnatia connecting Constantinople to Rome (via the Adriatic shores) and passing just to the north of the peninsula.

It is thought that the antique city lay close to the small harbour with its two piers (Figure 1), which was discovered in 2009 within the ruins of late Ottoman farm houses. The initial digging was carried out on the south pier. An area of 3 x 10m was cleaned and dug to a depth of 1m. The pier was constructed with regularly cut stones and rubble, with some of the larger stone blocks fixed with iron clamps. After the excavations in 2010, a new road, different from the other road mentioned previously, was found below the surface. The excavated part of the road shows that it was 3.40m wide and longer than 160m (Figure 2). Some of the

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trenches by the coast of the lake indicate that a long quay system was probably constructed there (Figure 3).

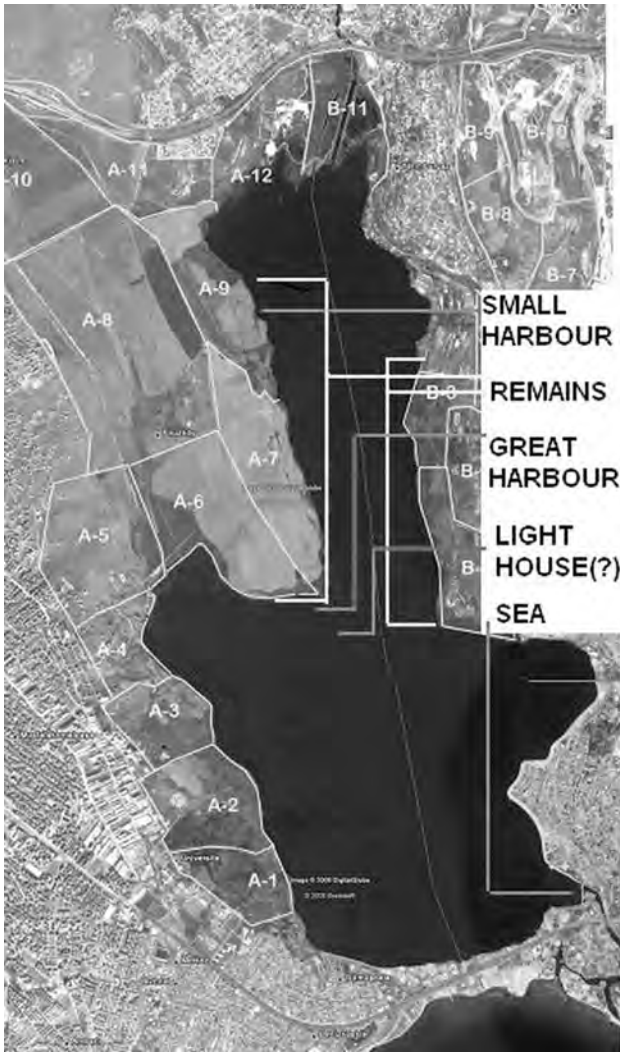
From the evidence of the iron clamps the dating of the construction was made to the early Roman period. It is believed that this harbour gave access to the city from the sea. In antiquity, today's lake was a deep bay in the Sea of Marmara, allowing navigation for all sizes of ships. While the works on the south pier were progressing, further land clearance was done to try and provide a better understanding of the northern pier. The distance between the two piers is approximately 100m. To the north and south of the Small Harbour the walls on the shore continue for a long distances to a height of one or two courses. Between these stones some reused materials were encountered. These included a column capital of Corinthian style of the 1st/2nd century BC, a

broken column, column bases, and some regular cut stone blocks with holes in them. At some parts of this long wall there were square or rectangular-shaped large stone blocks, believed to belong to buildings constructed on top of the sea walls.

The measuring and drawing of the Small Harbour, the sea walls, and the traces of the buildings have been completed. The excavation of the Small Harbour revealed a great number of Roman and Early Byzantine ceramics and 50cm below the surface two Ottoman coins and a 'Wheel of Fortune' carved on a rock were found. Iron nails, ceramic fragments and many other remains were uncovered in the harbour area, suggesting the presence in the past of a shipyard. Excavations at this harbour will continue in the forthcoming seasons.



MAP 1. ISTANBUL AND LAKE KUCUKCKEMECE



MAP 2. POSSIBLE HARBOURS AND OTHER REMAINS AT LAKE KUCUKCKEMECE



FIGURE 1. ONE OF THE PIERS OF THE SMALL HARBOUR

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FIGURE 2. THE ROAD CONNECTED TO THE PIER



FIGURE 3. A POSSIBLY FRAGMENT OF THE QUAY SYSTEM