Settlements in the Territory of a New Capital in Late Antiquity. A Contribution to the Historical Geography of the Land to the West of Constantinople in Late Antiquity*

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Abstract: There is no information yet on how the land surrounding Constantinople was administered; however, it is clear that the area was neither connected to the praefectus urbi in charge of the capital's administration, nor to the vicarius in Herakleia in charge of the Europa province.

Key words: administration, fortification, land, territory, urban centre, rural settlement.

A great part of Byzantion's city territory in the region of Thrace was organized as imperial and senatorial lands when Constantinople became the capital of the Roman Empire on May 11th 330. As a consequence, garrisons where military forces were deployed, and magnificent summer resorts appeared in the area, along with villages. The fortification walls called The Long Wall (Makra Teikhe) built during the reign of Anastasius between the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea to the west of Silivri, on the Silivri Karacaköy line, confined the land by making this new territory a closed area to the very west of the new capital (Proc. De. Aed. 4.9.2-8) (Map).

The land in between the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea, confined by the Bosphorus to the east, with three lagoons called Delkos (Derkos, Durusu), Küçükçekmece and Büyükçekmece, is an extremely fertile peninsula of great geostrategic importance. Two large settlements in the area, Athyra (Büyükçekmece) and Rhegion (Küçükçekmece), can be found in the Synekdemos lists of Hierocles, which indicates that they did not have an independent administration. Almost the entire territory surrounding Büyükçekmece and Küçükçekmece belonged to the emperor or the senators.

In this area, between Constantinople's Land walls which were built at the beginning of 5th century, and the Anastasian Wall built in the same century, two officers titled vicarius were in charge. The civilian of these administrators was the praetorian prefect of the East, and the military one was magister militum praesentalis. The area administered by these two vicarii was clearly a separate state. These two units of

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1 On the transformation of Byzantion into the new capital of the Empire under the name of Constantinople see: Janin 1964, 4-6; Dagron 1974; Müller-Wiener 1977, 19 ff.; Mango 1985; Berger 1988; Lile 2003, 44; Zahariade / Marcule 2015, 38; Koder 2016, 71; Berger 2011, 7; 2016, 664. For discussions on the process of the formation of new institutions in the capital Constantinople see Alföldi 2004.
2 For the study of Anastasius' fortifications in the last century see: Croke 1982, 74-78; Crow / Ricci 1997, 235-262; Meier 2009, 146-147; Koder 2016, 72.
administration were combined and transformed into one single office called praetor Iustinianus in Thracia in 535. This administrator was in charge of the construction of public buildings and held military and civic power (Wiewiorowski 2011, 385-410). However, Hebdomon (Bakırköy) might not have been subject to the praetor’s exercise of judicial power. If this assumption is right, it can be suggested that Hebdomon was part of the new capital Constantinople. This estimation of Procopius may be evaluated as proof indicating that he wrote his books on the buildings while adhering to the geography of the central administration that was ruling the Roman State in Late Antiquity. The first book of Procopius was most probably written drawing on the prefect’s archive of Constantinople, whereas his fourth book was created referring to the Illyricum and Thracia administrations. This should be the reason behind Procopius’ discussion of Hebdomon and Rhegion in different books.

Rhegion was the first large settlement after Hebdomon, at the southeast corner of the Küçükçekmece Lake, on a hill located today at beginning of the road to the Cennet district. According to Procopius, emperor Justinianus had the road between Rhegion and Strongylon Castle (Kyklobion, Zeytinburnu) repaired. During the repair works, a bridge was built at the point where the sea and the lagoon unite and where a wooden bridge had passed since the first half of 4th century AD (Proc. De Aed. 4.8). On the hill where Rhegion resided, Arif Müfid Mansel conducted excavations in the 1940’s and discovered the remains of the great imperial palace built in the 5th–6th century AD. Today, only a couple of granite columns and wall remains can be seen as part of these ruins.

In recent years, during the excavations of the northwest coast of the Küçükçekmece Lagoon, conducted by Assistant Professor Şengül Aydıngün of Kocaeli University’s Archaeology Department, remains of a fortified structure expanding to a large area have been discovered. Amongst the remains, there are ruins of a harbour, a cistern and well preserved water channels, as well as building remains with brick walls and opus sectile decorated floors, pointing to the possible presence of a palace built there in the Late Antiquity. This may be in fact the location of the Melantias Palace mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, where prominent troops of the East waited for a couple of weeks before Emperor Valens took off to Edirne in AD 378 to campaign against the Goths moving to Thrace from the Balkans. The remains of imperial palaces on both sides of the Küçükçekmece Lagoon support the possible existence of summer complexes and settlement buildings along the Küçükçekmece Lagoon and the north shore of the Marmara Sea.

Towards the west, similar settlement locations have been discovered on the coast of the Athyra (Büyükçekmece) Lagoon (Külzer 2008, 270-274). In recent years, in the summer and autumn months the water levels of the lagoon have decreased and unknown ancient and medieval settlement remains have been revealed. Palladius mentions Athyra in his book about John Chrysostom’s life as a fortified settlement (φρούριον), and Procopius writes that Athyra was a city (πόλις). Justinianus had built a cistern there and had the walls repaired. In the later centuries, Athyra was described as a fortified settlement by the travellers. Procopius also mentions a nearby settlement called Episkopeia, which was fortified by Justinianus (Proc. De Aed. 4.8.19).
This may be the remains of a castle on the hill of Ahmediye village, previously known as Papazburgaz, on the northwest shore of the Büyükçekmece Lagoon\textsuperscript{12}. The fact that there was an ancient village or a farm on the hill of Ahmediye village has been proven through a Roman Imperial era gravestone\textsuperscript{13}.

Another suggestion about the location of Episkopeia might be Çatalca. Çatalca, located close to the Büyükçekmece Lagoon, is a Middle Age settlement area with well-preserved walls. Çatalca has been suggested as the location of the Metrai settlement by some researchers\textsuperscript{14}. The fact that Procopius emphasized the high quality of Episkopeia’s fortifications indicates that an area equipped with lots of military bases was being prepared and these military works reached the highest point with the construction of the Anastasian Wall (Makra Teikhe). The Long Wall of approximately 64 km was built at the end of 5\textsuperscript{th} century AD. This structure indicates the importance given to the protection and development of this area between Constantinople and Selymbria (Silivri) that started off as a Thracian settlement and developed over time\textsuperscript{15}. The significance of this region had been comprehended almost a century earlier by the strategic decision-making imperial institutions, hence the preservation works of Selymbria and Perinthos-Herakleia’s fortifications at the beginning of 5\textsuperscript{th} century AD during the reign of Thedosius II.

Derkos or Delkos is located 40 kilometres northwest and 20 kilometres to the east of Constantinople\textsuperscript{16}. During the reign of Justinianus, some monophysite ecclesiastics were exiled here (Σταμούλης 1934, 218-221). Delkos is included in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century AD Episcopate lists. The lake was the most important source of water fulfilling the need Constantinople. The fortified settlement of Delkos or Derkos is today called Durusu. There are some remains of fortifications to this day.

\textsuperscript{12} On the suggestion of this castle as Episkopeia see Küzer 2008, 353-354; Sayar 2017, 283-287.
\textsuperscript{13} On this and other gravestones found in the vicinity see: Sayar 1982, 291-295; SEG 32, 666; Lajtar 2000, 109, 110. On Ahmediyye village see Küzer 2008, 239-240.
\textsuperscript{14} Küzer localizes Metrai settlement in Çatalca, see Küzer 2008, 533-535.
\textsuperscript{16} On Derkos or Delkos see: Ιατράνου-Γιαννιού 1939, 161-209; Capizzi 1969, 204; Küzer 2008, 330-332.
The fact that there were villages around the lake in Antiquity and the existence of local cults worshipped by their inhabitants are known through the dedications.

Five kilometres north of Derkos, on a rock outcrop, there is a harbour settlement called Philea. This was the first harbour after leaving the Bosphorus toward the west. In this area, dedications to Heros Stomianos have been found, and these are thought to be made in order to prevent the ships from running aground while sailing on the coast of the Black Sea toward Constantinople and thinking that the north shores of the Derkos Lake would be the entrance of the Bosphorus.

During the crisis of the 3rd century AD, the Bosphorus, Southeast Thrace and the Marmara region came into prominence in terms of military strategies. The increase of east campaigns resulting in the increase of military dispatches and the intersection of land routes with sea routes in the Marmara region caused the empire's geopolitical priorities to move to this area. The cities along the route of Via Egnatia and especially Via militaris that provided safety and subsistence to the troops became more important. The fact that Byzantium was chosen as the capital and then became Constantinople, the most important centre of the empire, changed all the surrounding area’s development process. The insignificant villages in Byzantium's territory became the new centres to protect and provide for the new capital in the land of the newly founded Europa province. These settlements, previously little villages, started to be protected through the fortification works carried out by the imperial interventions and benefitted from other privileges provided by the empire. The best examples of this case are the settlements of Çatalca, Delkos, and Ahmediyu, located around the Büyükçekmece, Küçükçekmece and Durusu Lakes, which were fortified in order to prevent them from plundering by the raiders coming from the west to the new capital of the empire. Some of these settlements developed to a point where they could be even identified as cities, not only due to their acreage, but also with their growing population, and it is understood that they were the suburban settlements of the west of the new capital – Constantinople.

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17 On the inscriptions found around the Lake Terkos see: Lajtar 2000, 156, # 201 and 168, # 225.
18 On these dedications see: Robert 1955, 38-45; Lajtar 2000, 52, vd. # 21 (Terkos); 53, vd. # 22; 56, # 23 (Terkos).
21 The Via Egnatia see: Külzer 2008, 199-202; Sayar 2010, 43-45.
22 For the publications on Via militaris see Külzer 2008, 194-197.
23 On these rural settlements and inscriptions found there see: Robert 1955, 33-37; Lajtar 2000, 47, # 17, 60-70, ## 30-36 (Küçükçekmece / Rheigion), 51, # 20 (Boyalık / Çatalca), 109, # 111 (Yarmburgaz).
24 The localization of these villages and the farms in their vicinities is still being researched and documented through the finds around Küçükçekmece and Büyükçekmece Lakes. On the development of this region and its relation with Constantinople see Külzer 2008, 68-96.


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