

Ainos – A Hub between Sea and Inland

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Ainos, today Enez, is located in the westernmost area of Turkish Thrace, in the direct vicinity to the Meriç/Evros (ancient Hebros) estuary, which is today the border between Turkey and Greece. Due to a siltation process, Enez is today 4 km distant of the shoreline. In Antiquity and in Byzantine times it had been a harbour city at a bay open to the sea.

History of Ainos

Ainos was founded as a Greek colony in the late 7th or 6th century BC and had been an important member of the Delian league in the 5th century BC. The production of wine and its export is proven by stamps on amphorae of the 5th and 4th centuries BC. For this period Ainos was considered to be amongst the wealthiest cities of the northern Aegean. In Hellenistic and Roman times, the importance of Ainos seems to have declined. The main argument for this was the reduction of the coin production. The city flourished again during Late Antiquity. In Byzantine times, Ainos was still a trade hub. Since 1265, the Venetians established a commercial settlement at Ainos and between 1384 and 1453 it was ruled by members of the Genoese Gattilusi family.

Monuments and Archaeological Research

Although archaeological research in Ainos started in the early 20th century and is continuously conducted by the Istanbul University since the 1980's, the development of the topography in ancient and Byzantine times are still unclear in many aspects. The best-known monument of Byzantine Ainos is a large 12th century AD church, situated inside the Byzantine castle (fig 1.5). Another church of remarkable dimensions called Kral Kizi Kilisesi is situated southeast of the city (fig. 1.17). The construction of the church can be dated in the period from the late 6th to the 9th century AD. Also, traces of a preceding church can be recognised.

Structures datable in Antiquity are less known. A Roman villa (fig. 1.9) and a well-built section of a street give at least an indication that in Roman times the city was not as poor as it was believed based on the study of local coinage. Two large ancient cemeteries, located respectively southeast and east of Enez, existed until the Late Antiquity. They were a major subject of the excavation activities of the Istanbul University team and yielded extraordinary grave furniture.

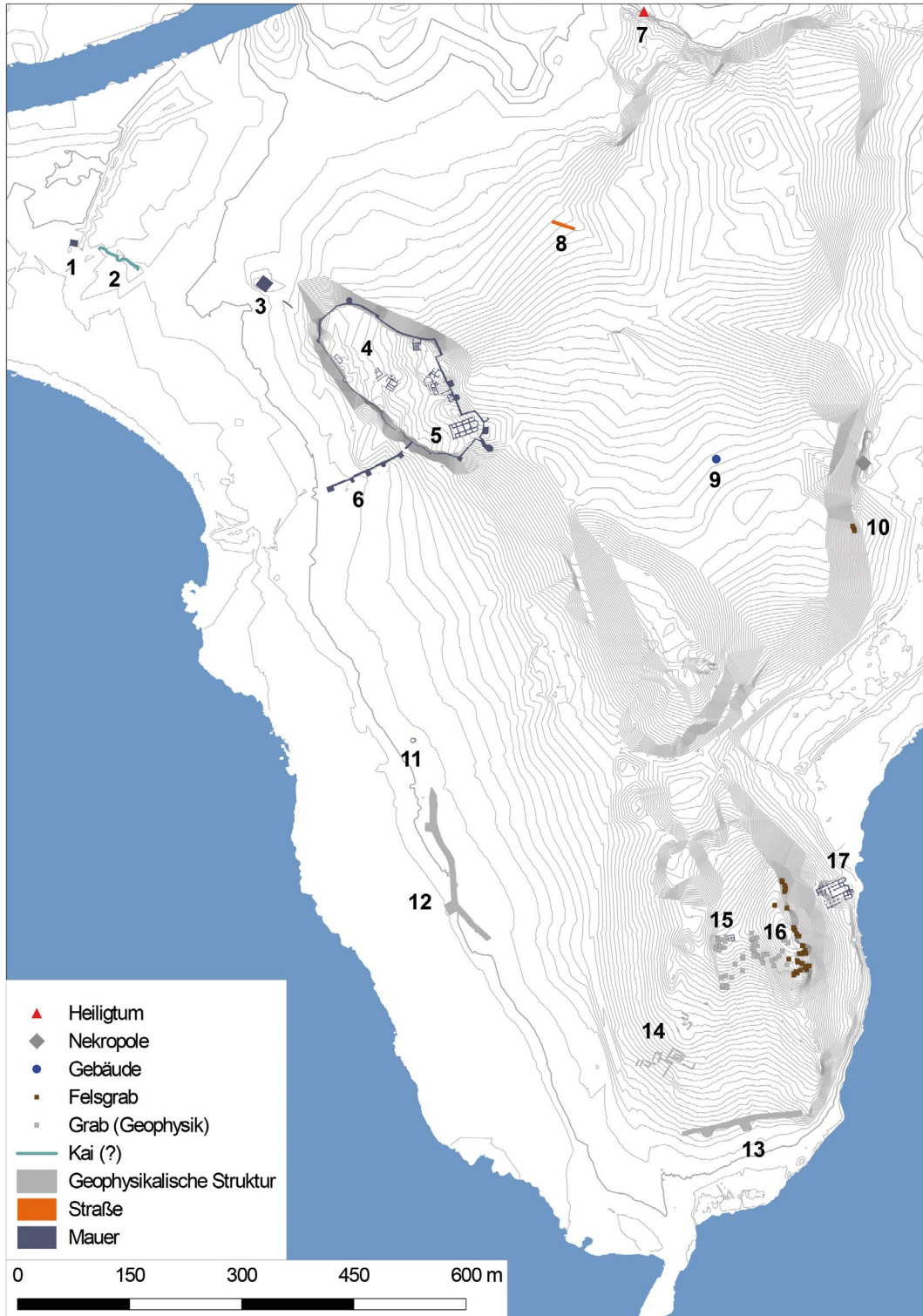


Fig. 1: Map of the remains in the urban area of Ainos-Enez.

The Ainos Project (2012–2018)

The multidisciplinary project entitled “The Thracian harbour city Ainos in Roman and Byzantine Times – Development of a Hub in a Changing Environment” is part of the Priority Program of German Research Foundation “Harbours from the Roman Period to the Middle Ages”. It is conducted by the author together with Prof. Helmut Brückner (University of Cologne). During the field campaigns the littoral zones were investigated extensively by geophysical prospections and geoarchaeological drillings.

One of the major results was the detection of two sections of an unknown ancient city wall on the land tongue south of the modern city (fig. 1.12–13). The section in the west is following a zigzag line, which is a characteristic feature of Hellenistic city walls. It shows that the extension of the city was larger than estimated before and that it was built at a time of an assumed decline.

Byzantine fortifications near the lagoon, west and northwest of the Byzantine castle, had been interpreted as a part of a harbour. The main monument is a long wall of 130 m with 5 towers, which is orientated towards the lagoon (fig. 1.6). Future excavation may show that the wall had been erected with three towers in the middle Byzantine era, probably not before the 11th century AD. Two rectangular towers belong to a later period, which can be dated by an emblem of the Gattilusi family, Genoese ruler of Ainos from 1385 to 1453. Also the geoarchaeological research provides information on the development of this area. There has been no water between the walls in Byzantine times. A harbour could have been at the western front end of the wall where a low sedimentation rate between the 11th century BC and 14th century AD may indicate the dredging of a harbour area.

The major research focus of the project has been the harbour sites. Huge masonry in the water was described by Albert Dumont who visited Ainos in 1868, but the information is confusing. Potential harbour sites could be identified by the interpretation of geoarchaeological drilling cores in different areas around the ancient and Byzantine city. The survey and the documentary sources strengthen the impression of a large-scale use of the big lagoon and the possible existence of an outer harbour southwest of the city.

Apart from the building structures, pottery and marble building elements were investigated to examine the trade connections of Ainos. The pottery fine wares from late Hellenistic to the late Roman era show a constant import especially from workshops from Asia Minor from the 1st century BC to the 7th century AD and also from North Africa starting from the 2nd century AD.

The use of marble is noticeable from the Roman Imperial time onwards. The main source was the Proconnesus Island in the Sea of Marmara. The capitals, in particular, demonstrate that large-scale buildings were erected in Roman Imperial and early Byzantine times. This hints at the wealth of Ainos during these periods.

Image Credit

Fig. 1: © A. Cramer & Th. Schmidts, RGZM.

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