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BATHONEA. A SITE THAT NEVER EXISTED

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Keywords: Bathonea, Byzantion, Byzantium, Küçükçekmece Lake, Hekatosysts

The excavations conducted on the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece aroused a significant degree of interest both in academic circles and among the public. It was strongly emphasized that the excavated ruins were part of a lost city known as Bathonea and that the unearthing of this city was a momentous discovery for the world of archaeology. Quite unfortunately, this intense campaigning encouraged a number of scholars and academics to believe in the existence of a city called Bathonea. However, this brief article will seek to demonstrate that the ruins excavated on the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece are not associated with a city or settlement named Bathonea and will further pose that a city named Bathonea never existed in history. Therefore, the name Bathonea is the name of an hekatostys affiliated with Byzantion, and therefore directly points to a community within the demographic structure of Byzantion.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bathonea, Byzantion, Byzantium, Küçükçekmece Gölü, Hekatosysts

İstanbul il sınırları içindeki Küçükçekmece Gölü kıyısında yürütölen kazı çalıřmaları toplumda ve akademik camiada büyük bir ilgi ve merak uyandırdı. Açığa çıkartılan kalıntuların Bathonea adlı kaybolmuş bir kente ait olduđu ve bu kentin yeniden ortaya çıkartılmasının arkeoloji dünyası için büyük bir keřif olduđu vurgulandı. Ne yazık ki bu yoğun kampanya bazı bilim adamlarını da Bathonea adlı bir kentin varlığına inandırdı. Ancak bu kısa yazı ile Küçükçekmece Gölü kıyısı üzerinde ortaya çıkartılan kalıntuların Bathonea adlı bir kent veya yerleşimle ilişkili olmadığı, dahası Bathonea adlı bir kentin tarihte hiç bir zaman mevcut olmadığı ortaya konulmaya çalıřılacaktır. Bathonea, Byzantion'a bađlı bir hekatostys adıdır, yani doğrudan Byzantion'un demografik yapısındaki bir cemaati işaret etmektedir.

The excavations conducted on the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece under the direction of Assoc. Prof. řengöl Aydıngün of Kocaeli University aroused a significant degree of interest both in academic circles and among the public¹. It was strongly emphasized that the excavated ruins were part of a lost city known as Bathonea and that the unearthing of this city was a momentous discovery for the world of

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¹ For studies in the area, see Güldođan 2008; Aydıngün 2013; Öniz-Kaya-Aydıngün 2014; Aydıngün 2015.

archaeology². Wikipedia currently offers the following information on Bathonea: “Bathonea is the name of a long-lost ancient Greek city that was located on the European shore of the Sea of Marmara, 20 km west from Istanbul in Turkey”. Citing excavation director Ş. Aydingün as a source for its 2015 article on the subject, *Current World Archaeology* published the following headline: “Bathonea. Discovering a Lost City where Europa Meets Asia” (Aydingün 2015). Furthermore, the official website of the excavation carries the name “Bathonea.org” and the site includes various news articles from newspapers and journals on how “Bathonea is the lost city.” In addition, a simple Google search provides access to hundreds of local and international links on news pieces / articles about the city of Bathonea. Quite unfortunately, this intense campaigning encouraged a number of scholars and academics to believe in the existence of a city called Bathonea. While T. Russel, for example, correctly characterizes Bathonea as an *hekatostys* in some place in his book, he nonetheless writes the following in another place in the same book: “Bathonea is also the name of an important settlement at Lake Küçükçekmece dating back to the fourth century AD, which possessed a harbour and a lighthouse”³. Hence, as of 2007, the media hype on the “discovery” and the intense campaign about the excavation led to the “creation of a new city”. However, this brief article will seek to demonstrate that the ruins excavated on the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece are not associated with a city or settlement named Bathonea and will further pose that a city named Bathonea never existed in history⁴.

I must first note that the entirety of the ancient cities in and around Küçükçekmece that sources (literary works, epigraphic and numismatic data, or archaeological finds) from Antiquity shed light

² For news articles from newspapers and journals, see “İstanbul’un atası mı bulundu?” Cumhuriyet Bilim Teknik, October 12, 2008; “Avrupa’nın Tarihine yolculuk”, *Milliyet*, 15.8.2009; “Küçükçekmece sularında kayıp yerleşimler”, *National Geographic Türkiye*, October 2008: 38; “İstanbul’da antik bir kent bulundu”, Atlas web 2008; “İstanbul’un kayıp şehri”, *National Geographic Türkiye*, November 2008: 59-73.

³ Russel 2017:16, note 31; 224. On the other hand, the structure of *hekatostys* was practiced before Constantine the Great; we don’t know whether it existed after Byzantium became the capital of Roman Empire, too.

⁴ But for the response to the claim of “a long-lost city” by the author of these lines see Tekin 2009a; Tekin 2009b; Tekin 2010 (all in Turkish).

upon is already known. The emergence of a lost city like the proverbial Atlantis should not be expected from the region. In Classical and Hellenistic ages, the *territorium* of Byzantion possibly extended all the way to the starting point of the *territorium* of Selymbria (modern-day Silivri)⁵. By extension, Küçükçekmece and environs were most certainly a part of Byzantion; there could not have been a separate city of “polis” status in that region. After all, even Küçükçekmece was a village (*kome*) known as Rhegion⁶ in Antiquity and was part of Byzantion. Therefore, Rhegion and its environs was, in reality, Byzantion “itself”; they cannot be seen as an independent or separate formation in terms of political and social structure. That being the case, the search for a city in or around Rhegion implicitly suggests the search for another city within the *territorium* (political borders) of Byzantion, which is highly erroneous. The socio-political relationship between Byzantion and the affiliated village of Rhegion is clearly evidenced by the tomb inscriptions discovered in the area (Taşlıklıoğlu 1959; Lajtar 2000: no.30-35). As one of the relatively more important colony cities of the Classic and Hellenistic ages, even Selymbria (Silivri) had evolved into a small settlement -possibly under the rule of Byzantion- during the Roman Empire; in other words, even Selymbria was no longer a city.

As a geographical location, Bathonea is not mentioned in any sources by any of the writers of Antiquity, which include leading geographers such as Strabo and Ptolemaios. Nor is it indicated on the map entitled *Tabula Peutingeriana*, originally dated to Late Antiquity, but discovered in the 16th century. Furthermore, it is not included in the *Tabula Imperii Byzantini-Ostthrakien* tome, which can be characterized as a collection of regional monographs that contain significant historic and geographic research. Finally, contrary to current claims, Bathonea is not mentioned as a toponym in the inscriptions on tombs. As the social structure (and sub-units) of the Byzantion people was less known, Bathonea was erroneously presumed to be the “name of a geographical location” and thus one of the objectives of the archaeological excavation initiated on the

⁵ For Byzantion see, Miller 1899; Merle1916; Hanell 1934; Newskaja 1955; MacDonald 1976; Russel 2017.

⁶ For Rhegion see, Oberhummer 1914; Eyice 1978.

shores of Lake Küçükçekmece became centered on the question of whether or not the ruins and finds from the area belonged to the city or settlement named Bathonea. Yet, similar social structure units are also observed in the main city, or metropolis Megara and its colonies (Hanell 1935: 74, note 1; 142; Russel 2017: 224-226). As Byzantion was a Megaran colony, the same social structure was implemented there as well.

The search for Bathonea as a settlement is based on an article of Semavi Eyice penned more than thirty years ago. In the said article, Eyice writes, “While the existence of a small settlement named Bathonea near Küçükçekmece can be surmised based on certain tomb inscriptions, the exact location of this settlement remains unknown.” (Eyice 1978: 2). It appears that archaeologists sought to associate the ruins and finds they discovered on the shores of the lake with a certain settlement and concluded that the site in which they were found could be the “city” allegedly mentioned in sources as Bathonea.

Flowing into Lake Küçükçekmece, the creek currently known as Sazlı Dere was called Bathynias in Antiquity⁷. The name Bathonea is mentioned in only two inscriptions to date. One of these is located on a sarcophagus currently preserved in the garden of İstanbul Archaeology Museums. The sarcophagus features several groups of inscriptions dated to 1st century A.D. The inscription that concerns us reads as follows: Δαμας Ρουφου Βαθωνηας ετων λγ επι Κοιν(του). Here, we see that Damas, the son of Rufus of Bathonea lived for 33 years and that the inscription is dated by the eponymous officer (Quintus). After being published by Arif Müfit Mansel (Mansel 1957) first, the sarcophagus and the inscription were re-published by Jeanne and Louis Robert (Robert 1959: 207, no. 252), Nezih Fıratlı (Fıratlı 1964: 122, no.205; 148), and Adam Lajtar (Lajtar 2000: 218-219, no. 315). In all these publications Bathonea is recognized as an *hekatostys*, and not as the name of a city!

⁷ For Bathynias see, Oberhummer 1899; TIB 12; Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, 4.18; Ptolemaios, *Geographia*, III.11.4 (6); Strabo, *Geographika* VII, frag. 55 (56); Appianos, “Mithridateios”, XII.1.

The second inscription in which the name Bathonea is mentioned comes from a broken stele discovered in Eski Ereğli (modern-day Gümüşyaka) between Silivri and Marmara Ereğlisi. Dated to the Roman Imperial period, only a small portion of the stele has survived to date. Dedicated to the Goddess Hygeia, the stele's fourth line from the top reveals the name Bathonea in full. This inscription was published by G. Seure⁸, L. Robert (Robert 1946), N. Fıratlı (Fıratlı 1964: 148; 164) and M. H. Sayar (Sayar 1998: 419, no. 304).

The two aforementioned inscriptions featuring the name Bathonea are dated to the Early Roman Imperial period. However, there is no doubt that the traces of the *hekatostys* structure in Byzantion must have dated as far back as the Hellenistic, and even Classical period. Indeed, a resolution made on behalf of the Byzantion (Byzantium) Advisory and City Council (Boule) as well as the Citizens' Council (Damos) alludes to *hekatostys*: In an inscription honoring Eudemos of Seleukeia, who embraced and aided the locals and their city during the reign of King Antiochus IV of Seleucus, the citizens of Byzantion collectively decided that –in addition to other privileges- Eudemos could register himself in any *hekatostys* of his choosing (Heberdey-Wilhelm 1896: 114-115; SIG³ II: 644/5.47 and 62). This also proves that *hekatostyes* of Byzantion existed at least in the Late Hellenistic Age.

It is no coincidence that works by writers of Antiquity only mention a creek called Bathynias and not a location named Bathonea. For, the Bathonea mentioned in the inscription is not a toponym, but points to an ethnic group. In Antiquity, cities (*poleis* or *apoikiai*) were not merely a physical entity (city, country side, village, etc.), but were considered a whole in terms of the population (demos) they encompassed. The population was divided into various subgroups. Affiliated directly with the city (*polis*, *apoikia*) all these ethnic groups had subdivisions within. Recognized as part of the city, the densely populated *komes* also had land; their inhabitants lived

⁸ Seure 1912: 558 ff. However, the name in question has been erroneously identified with the Bathynias Creek.

upon a piece of land with a given name (Gabrielsen 2007; Hansen 2004: 117 ff.). Yet, sub-ethnics such as *phyle* or *hekatostys* were not identified by their toponym, but by the name of the ethnic class to which they belonged. In other words, the criteria was not toponomic, but rather ethnic. Another, or perhaps the most important, role of these subdivisions was to establish the connection between citizens living in the town center and in the periphery (Gabrielsen 2007:186).

I must stress here that the aforementioned inscriptions include the title *hieromnemon*. This is particularly important, as it reveals that the names mentioned in the inscriptions are associated with Byzantium. We are aware that the head of the state carried this title in Byzantium (Hanell 1934: 156 ff; 205; Russel 2017: 224). As it is evident that Küçükçekmece and its environs were under Byzantium rule, the settlements in this area must therefore belong to subdivisions living together as a *kome* (village) or *phyle* (community) of Byzantium. It is known that the people of Byzantium were classified in groups of one hundred known as *hekatostys*⁹. Therefore, the name Bathonea mentioned in both inscriptions is the name of an *hekatostys* affiliated with Byzantium, and therefore directly points to a community within the demographic structure of Byzantium. This kind of an ethnic class or community is not related to the present-day notion of a neighborhood, as that would indicate a place inhabited by a certain population; it is important to recall that much like the *phylae*, *hekatostyes* were also not territorial structures. It is undoubtedly correct to assume; therefore, that the Rufus mentioned in the first inscription is, indeed, of Bathonea. However, as mentioned earlier, **Bathonea is not a toponym, but the name of an ethnic group** and thus refers *not* to Rufus' provenance, but the *hekatostys* (Bathonea) with which he is affiliated¹⁰. In conclusion, we can argue that the architectural remains identified on the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece are to be **associated with Byzantium or Rhegion**, a *kome* of Byzantium, but that they bear the traces of the new development from Late

⁹ Hanell 1934: 174, note 1; 142; Robert 1946: 61-63; Robert 1959: 207, no. 252; Mansel 1957: 401; Lajtar 2000: 219; 279; Russel 2017: 224.

¹⁰ For information and interpretation on both Bathonea and Philoktorea / Philoktorea and Krateneia -the other *hekatostyes* of Byzantium- see, Mansel 1957: 404/a and 405/b); Robert 1959: 207, no. 252; Taşlıklıoğlu 1959: 553-555.

Antiquity in the region. We must reiterate once again that they can never be identified with a city or settlement known by the name Bathonea. The site might be in the territorium of Byzantion before Constantine the Great and most probably it was a district / quarter of Rhegion. On the North of the lake there was also a settlement called Melentiana / Melentias, which could be a settlement of Late Antiquity. We learn from Ammianus Marcellinus (*Rerum Gestarum Libri*, XXXI.11) that there was an imperial villa at the time of Emperor Valens. Thus, one may suggest that the site was linked to Rhegion before Constantine the Great and to Melantias (or again to Rhegion) in the late Roman and early Byzantine periods. It is hard to say that there was another settlement close to Rhegion and Melantias at the site in question during late Antiquity or before¹¹. Procopius (*De Aedificiis*, VI/III.289) says that “beyond Rhegium is a town called Athyras (modern Büyükçekmece, west of Küçükçekmece)” but does not mention any site called Bathonea. Consequently, the architectural remains along the shores of Lake Küçükçekmece show that the site functioned as an external harbour of Constantinople beyond its walls in addition to the inner harbours of Theodosius, Eleutherios, Prosfhorion, Kontoskalion but never indicate a city or a settlement called Bathonea. Other architectural remains in site may be explained by the ongoing excavations.

¹¹ For Melantias, also see Miller 1916: col. 540.

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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