



Summary :

The Megarian colony of Byzantium was surrounded by an extensive "chora", which extended from Selymbria and Bizanthe (Raedestus) in the west to the mouth of the Black Sea in the east-northeast. This area comprised several settlements, mainly of fishermen and farmers, as well as commercial posts of other Greek cities. The resources of this area were considerable and varied: fishing, wood felling, agriculture and commerce in particular secured prosperity for the city.

Geographical Location

Byzantium

1. Historical and archaeological research

If we have to rely on little amount of information for reconstructing the historical background and topography of the city of [Byzantium](#), the data concerning its administrative territory, its "chora", are really few and far between. Sparse mentions in literary sources and some archaeological remains, mainly pottery and inscriptions, give us a dim picture of the boundaries, the settlements, the cult and the daily life in this area, which has been inhabited constantly from antiquity up to the present. Fortunately some infrastructure works, such as the construction of the submarine tunnel of Marmaras and the construction and expansion of the metro network in modern Istanbul recently shed more light to the archaeological remains.¹

2. The hinterland of Byzantium

The rich Megarian colony of Byzantium was a Greek nucleus along the Thracian littoral provided with an extensive hinterland, mainly inhabited by [Thracian tribes](#).² Through the narrations of the wars of [Byzas](#), founder of the city, and his wife, Phidaleia, against the Thracian and [Scythian tribes](#), mythology offers a symbolic account of the difficulties faced by the first colonists in order to secure their position in the area. They managed, however, to control an extensive territory, which offered them domination over crucial parts of the [Bosporus](#) as well as the exploitation of natural resources, such as timber and the fertile soil of the plains.

3. Extent and topography

This "chora" of ancient Byzantium was not always firmly defined. Nor is our information always undisputable and illuminating about its exact boundaries.

In various times, it extended from Selymbria (modern Silivri) up to the cape Phileas at the opening of the Black Sea. As neighbouring cities are referred the Samian colony of Bizanthe (later Rhaedestos) and the Megarian colony of Selymbria to the west and Salmydessos to the northeast. To the north lay an area where the Thracian tribe of Astae dwelled. According to [Strabo](#) it was in that area, at a settlement called Calybe or Cabyle, that Philip II had deported the meanest and cruelest people of his kingdom.³ The northeastern part of the "chora" of Byzantium was covered by the lake of Derkon (modern Derkoz gölü). The latter lay at a distance of 32 kms northwest of Byzantium and was renowned for its white fish, the "delkanoi", mentioned by Athenaios at his "Deipnosophists".⁴ There, during the Roman era the settlement called Phinepolis was built.⁵ A plausible etymological explanation related Phinepolis with the soothsayer Phineas, known from the Argonauts' myth, whose eyes were devoured by the Harpies. At the mouth of the Bosporus to the Black Sea there were two small islands, one close to the Asian shore, the other close to the European one. They bore the name Cyaneai. The chora of Byzantium probably enclosed also the forest area known later as Belgrade, where the river Hydaris flew. In Byzantine times there was an aqueduct which brought water to Constantinople. It is possible, however, that the initial aqueduct was constructed in the Roman period.

Slightly to the south the cape Simas was located, where lay a recreation forest for the inhabitants of Byzantium.⁶ A statue of Pandemos Aphrodite was there, possibly dedicated by the Megarian hetaira Simaetha. Further to the south, at a location nearby the



sea, there was the Serapeion of Polybius, which is probably identified with the site of later Tarabya.⁷

It seems that the Byzantines had allowed other cities to found commercial posts in this zone. We thus learn of a settlement of Ephesians, of Lycians, of Myrleians as well as of the Thasians and Rhodians further to the south. The foundation of the town of Apameia is dated to the Hellenistic period, which has been identified with the Byzantine Hebdomon, later known as Makrochori.⁸ For Hellenistic Apameia we don't have any information, yet we could suppose that it was a Seleucid foundation, as attested by its dynastic name.⁹ We know that Hebdomon was part of the building programme of [Constantine the Great](#) during the [foundation of Constantinople](#). A summer palace was built there, surrounded by a park for imperial hunting.

Three miles farther away from Hebdomon towards the west there was Byzantine Dekaton, corresponding to the earlier Region or Myrmex Locus, modern Küçükçekmece.¹⁰

Along the shores of the [Golden Horn](#) there were small settlements of fishermen.¹¹ Due to the marshy soil, the area was called "Foul Sea". On the north shore of the Golden Horn there was cape Drepanon and the Gulf of Auleis, whereas at the opening of the Golden Horn towards the Sea of Marmara was Cape Sykeon, i.e. present-day Galata. Some more capes were formed along the shores of the Bosphorus further to the north, where fishermen's villages, commercial posts and several sanctuaries were scattered.

We know that a settlement called Phoinice was situated 10 kms NW of Byzantium, towards the Sea of Marmara. It is possible that it functioned as a commercial post as well as a fishing port. During the Ottoman period it was known under the name St. Stephanos. The area where Phoinice was built was marshy, a fact which caused problems to the inhabitants throughout time.

Finally to the "chora" of Byzantium one could ascribe the famous "tower of Leander" (later called Maiden Tower or Kiz Kulesi) at the opening of the Sea of Marmara, between Byzantium and Chrysoupolis. This originally constituted a guarding post built by the Athenian general [Alcibiades](#) in 408, in order to control the movements of the Persian fleet.

4. Sanctuaries and temples

Along the shores of the Golden Horn as well of Sykeai, later [Galata](#), there was a large number of sanctuaries, built on idyllic locations and dedicated mostly to deities of the Greek pantheon: sanctuary of Gaea, sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, sanctuary of Hera and Pluto, sanctuary of the Skironides, sanctuary of Athena Skedasia, sanctuary of the nymph Semystra (a remain of the former city built in the busom of the Golden Horn). The sanctuary of Amphiaraios as well as the tomb of the hero Hipposthenes from Megara dominated the hill of cape Sykeai. On the north shore of the cape Sykeai lay two important sanctuaries: that of Artemis Phosphoros and that of Aphrodite Praeia. Farther north, at the area of present-day Tophane, the Aeanteion, sanctuary of the Megarian hero of the Trojan War Aias Telamoneios was located. The same area was chosen by the Ptolemies for the erection of their dynastic temple, for reasons of political propaganda. The temple was dedicated to [Ptolemy II Philadelphos](#).¹²

Along the shores of the Bosphorus lay even more sanctuaries, whereas in the same area commercial posts of other Greek cities were also located, such as Rhodes (Rhodion Perivoloi), and Thasos (around present-day Ortakoy). Peter Gyllius¹³ also mentions an altar dedicated to Alios Geron, (i.e. Phorkys or Proteus), who had been mythologically connected to the expedition of the Argonauts.

Finally, in the area of modern Bebek, close to [Rumeli Hissar](#), there were two more sanctuaries, that of Artemis Diktyinna and Hermes. In the upper part of the Bosphorus, near modern Emirgan, there was the sanctuary of Hekate, whereas in modern Büyükdere (Vathykolpos) there was an altar dedicated to the Megarian hero Saros and two more altars further to the north, dedicated to Apollo and the Mother of Gods. The inhabitants of Byzantium believed that at that spot Medea, on her way from Colchis together with the Argonauts, had planted a laurel.

5. Building Activity



As mentioned above, the chora of Byzantium was an area rich in natural resources. With the aid of the courses of Cydaris and Barbyses, as well as of the other rivers and torrents, timber came down to the shores of the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. This timber was initially used for building houses and ships, later on though constituted an important merchandise. The plains were fertile and procured the necessary alimentary products for the maintenance of the inhabitants and even offered a surplus. Fishing was another permanent source of income,¹⁴ as attested by the numerous fishing villages dating from antiquity up to modern times. However, trade was the spinal cord of the economy of Byzantium, and this affected the economic life and the formation of settlements in the broader area as well. Commercial posts of other cities and nations (Rhodians, Lycians, Heraclots etc.) were built along the Bosphorus. Specimens of pottery which have been discovered during the recent extensive excavations to the south of the Sirkeci railway station, i.e. at the former site of the Phosphorianos Limen, reveal that the [harbour](#) was part of a communication network among Byzantium and several Greek cities and areas, from the Black Sea, the islands of the Aegean and the shores of Asia Minor. The earliest findings attesting to this network are traced to the 7th century B.C., yet the period of intensification of the contacts is placed between the 5th and the 1st century B.C.¹⁵ A similar picture emerges from the excavations at the port of Theodosius (modern Yenikapi), where the earliest specimens of pottery are dated to the 6th-5th centuries, although they are not as numerous as those of the Phosphorianos Limen.

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1. The results of this research are presented in the guide of the exhibition *Gün ışığında: İstanbul un 8000 yılı: Marmaray, Metro, Sultanahmet kazıları* (İstanbul 2008).
 2. Polyb. 4.45.
 3. Strab. 7.6.2.
 4. Athen. *Deipn.* 10.1183.
 5. Strab. 7.6. During the early Byzantine period there was the end of the Long Walls built by emperor Anastasius.
 6. It is the modern summer resort of Sarıyer.
 7. Γαϊτάνου-Γιαννιού, Αθ., "Από την Ανατολικήν Θράκην: η επαρχία Δέρκων», *Θρακικά* 12 (1912), p. 195.
 8. Γαϊτάνου-Γιαννιού, Αθ., "Από την Ανατολικήν Θράκην: η επαρχία Δέρκων», *Θρακικά* 13 (1913), p. 108-109. As its Byzantine name suggests, the site was 7 miles from the city centre. Via Egnatia passed from there.
 9. For the Seleucid presence and the dynastic policy in the area see Avram, A., "Antiochos II Théos, Ptolémée II Philadelphie et la mer Noire", *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres Paris* (2003), pp. 1181-1213
 10. Πρόκειται για το σημερινό Küçük Çekmece.
 11. The description of the settlements along the coastline are based mainly on the "Periplus" by Dionysius Byzantius.
 12. On the dynastic policy of the Ptolemies in the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea areas. see Avram, A., "Sur la date de la divinisation de Ptolémée II Philadelphie à Byzance", in L. Ruscu et alii (eds), *Orbis antiquus. Studia in honorem Ioannis Pisonis* (Cluj-Napoca, 2004) σελ. 828-833
 13. P.Gillius, *De Bosporo Thracio*, p.142.
 14. See Strab.7.6.2 and appendix I on the fishing of palamut.



15. See Girgin, Ç., « Sirkeci' de sürdürülen kazı çalışmalarından elde edilen sonuçlar » στο *Gün ışığında: İstanbul un 8000 yılı: Marmaray, Metro, Sultanahmet kazıları* (İstanbul 2008), p. 101.

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	Γαϊτάνου-Γιαννιού Α. , "Από την Ανατολικήν Θράκην: η επαρχία Δέρκων", <i>Θρακικά</i> , 12, 1912, 161-209
	Γαϊτάνου-Γιαννιού Α. , "Από την Ανατολικήν Θράκην: η επαρχία Δέρκων", <i>Θρακικά</i> , 13, 1913, 108-156

Glossary :

	chora, the
The agricultural land (including villages and land-plots) belonging to a polis. It was bounded with the polis on an administrative and economic basis.	

Sources

Petri Gyllii de topographia Constantionpoleos et de illius antiquitatibus libri quatuor (Lugdunum 1561).

Gillius, P., *De Bosphoro Thracio libri iii* (Lugdunum 1562).

Quotations

Strabo 7.6.2

The Horn, which is close to the wall of the Byzantines, is a gulf that extends approximately towards the west for a distance of sixty stadia; it resembles a stag's horn, for it is split into numerous gulfs--branches, as it were. The pelamides rush into these gulfs and are easily caught--because of their numbers, the force of the current that drives them together, and the narrowness of the gulfs; in fact, because of the narrowness of the area, they are even caught by hand.