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BYZANTINE CHURCHES OF ENEZ (AINOS) IN EASTERN THRACE

ÖZGE ÖZGÜR

The ancient city of Ainos was built on the east coast of the Maritsa (Meriç) river, where the river joins the sea. The city is located on the west of ancient Lake Stentoris (today Gala Lake) and was established on the 7th century BC as a colony of the Aiolians. The excavations at Ainos proved that the city was continuously inhabited since Neolithic era. Ainos was connected in the north to Adrianopolis by sea and by overland route, in the east to Gallipolis and Constantinople and was situated in a very important location. In 148 BC the city was conquered by the Romans and during the Byzantine era it became the capital of the Rhodope region of the Europa province. The location of the city attests its importance as a major commercial center. Today the ancient city of Ainos is situated 3.5 km inside from the coast. Throughout the prehistoric ages, Ainos had two ports and the point that Meriç (Maritsa) River joins today the sea used to be a gulf. Ainos, the most important port city of Eastern Thrace, besides joining the Aegean Sea with the hinterland of Eastern Thrace, was situated at the end of the shortest and most secure road between the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. During the middle ages the city preserved its importance and as it continued to unite the Aegean islands to Thrace, it was a significant commercial center. Ainos remained a major commercial center until the beginning of the 19th century.

1 Research Fellow at the Hellenic History Foundation (IDISME).
3 Hasluck 1908-1909: 249.
4 For an geographical analysis of Ainos and the Maritsa River see Göçmen 1974.
5 Ardel 1959: 139; Erzen 1972: 236.
In the Byzantine period, the name of Ainos is mentioned for the first time by Procopius. The historian Procopius states that many Thracian cities, city and castle walls as well as the city walls of Ainos were restored under the rule of Justinian I.6 Between the 7th and 11th centuries although we have limited information about the city, Ainos functioned as a religious center. It was initially a bishopric part of the Trainopolis Metropolis, but starting from the 4th century it became an archbishopric and was promoted to a metropolis before the 11th century, 63rd in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.7 In 1885 the new established neighbor city Dedeağaç (modern Alexandroupolis), together with fourteen villages separated from the Metropolis of Maronia and became part of the Metropolis of Ainos, and soon after the new residence of the Archbishop of Ainos became the city of Dedeağaç.8

Alexios I had his military headquarters in Ainos when he was fighting against the Pechenegs in 1091.9 To honor his victory over Pechenegs he built the Monastery of Theotokos, known as “Skalotin”.10 After the 11th century, known as the era of Komnenian Dynasty, the city gained higher importance. In the 12th century Ainos became a large trade market area for the monks of the neighboring Monastery of Kosmosoteria of Ferres where they sold their products. Thanks to its port, the city became an important commercial center with its most important incomes deriving from salt production and fishing. 15th century historian Kritovoulos describes Ainos as a big polis that trades with the neighboring islands Imvros and Limnos. Thanks to its strong city walls it resisted the attacks of Bulgarians and the Tatars in 1265. According to the historian Chalcocondyles the residents of the city welcomed the Gattelusi Dynasty to take over the city in 1384, and until the conquest of the Ottomans in 1456 Ainos remained as a Genoese city.11

From the middle ages until the beginning of the 20th century the Maritsa river played an important role in the commercial activities of Ainos. From the beginning of the 20th century, the river changed its route and the old city’s port was closed due to flooding. In 1847 several attempts were made to clean

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6 Procopius 1940: 89.
7 Samothrakis 1963: 45.
10 Samothrakis 1963: 46.
the river without success. In the beginning of the 19th century the city was highly active in commerce, especially on wool, cotton, leather, silk, wax, copper commerce. In the end of the 19th century the city was planned to be a station in the Rumelian Railway Project of the Ottoman Empire. However in 1870 it was excluded from the project, due to the unsuitability of the port. With the closure of the port, the city started to lose its commercial importance. Instead, the neighboring port city of Dedeağaç was decided to become a station in the Rumelian Railways. With the completion of the Dedeağaç-Edirne railway line in 1873 most of the residents of Ainos moved to the neighboring Dedeağaç. As a result, the population of Ainos which was approximately 10,000 before the construction of the railway line, diminished dramatically to 4,500 in the aftermath of the construction. On the eve of 1922, the population of Ainos was reduced down to only 2,000-2,500 people.

Ainos as a major settlement in Thrace, like the other cities of Thrace such as Adrianopolis (Edirne), Bizye (Vize) and Selmybria (Silivri) housed some of the most remarkable examples of the Byzantine art. In the present study, it is aimed to identify this architectural heritage of the Byzantine Empire in today’s border city Enez-Byzantine Ainos. We will also trace the monuments until today, though without delving into the reasons of their possible demise.

The Byzantine Monuments of Ainos

During the Ottoman era the Byzantine monuments of Ainos drew the attention of various scholars. For instance, the president of Russian Archeological Institute of Constantinople, Byzantinologist F. I. Uspenskij, who visited the city in 1910, explored the Monastery of Skaloti. In 1912, a group of scholars from the same institution visited Ainos as well as the Eastern Thrace cities of Ipsala (ancient Kypsela), Ferres, and Dimetoka (modern Didymotiko). However, the systematic study and record of the Byzantine monuments of Ainos was first made by Georgios Lambakis who first visited the city in 1902. During the visit of the latter in the region and following the

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12 Hasluck 1908-1909: 250-251.
13 Ardel 1959: 140.
15 Papulidis 1989: 570.
establishment of the railroad in the neighboring Dedeağaç, the city of Ainos had already lost its importance with most of its residents having moved to the other side of the sea. Yet Lambakis hails Ainos as the “great museum of Christian art”. Following the defeat of the Greek army in Asia Minor in 1922 and the evacuation of Greek population of Ainos, the destruction of the city continued, resulting in the loss of its feature as a museum entirely. The monuments that Lambakis photographed and recorded have been destroyed entirely. For this reason Lambakis’ archives have immense importance in the understanding of the vast cultural heritage that once Ainos housed.

**Byzantine Churches of Ainos**

During his visit in 1902, Georgios Lambakis records 22 churches in total, including the ones that were converted into mosques. Samothrakis states that there were 20 churches in the city until 1923, five of them giving daily service whereas the rest functioned on their saint’s day. Lambusiadis who visited the city between 1920-1922 records that there were total 70-72 churches and chapels in the city but only 3 of them were held daily masses. However a modern historian Papazotos, in his valuable article where he evaluates all the sources, concludes that there were total 26 Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches, including the converted ones.

**Church of Theotokos or Agia Sophia (St. Sophia) (Fatih Mosque)**

There were four Byzantine churches in the acropolis of Ainos. The most important of them was the church of St. Sophia, the church of Holy Wisdom. This church was converted to a mosque initially after the conquest of the Ottomans under the name Fatih Camii (The Mosque of the Conqueror). Although the church was dedicated to St. Sophia, the residents of Ainos

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16 Lambakis 1908: 34.
17 Lambakis 1908: 35.
18 Samothrakis 1944: 10-11.
19 Lambusiadis 1941: 13.
preferred to refer to the church as St. Constantin.\textsuperscript{21} This church was the main one used by the Archbishopric of Ainos before the conquest; and the presence of the fresco of Virgin Mary in the main entrance of the church suggests that the church was probably named as Theotokos.\textsuperscript{22}

With its 21x38 meter long spacious construction, this church is much vaster when compared to the churches of middle and late Byzantine period in Constantinople. It is a basilica with a dome, with a cross-shaped naos.\textsuperscript{23} The construction date of the building varies: While some scholars date it to the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, others state that it was built during the Paleologian Dynasty.\textsuperscript{24} After the conquest of Ainos it was used as a mosque until it was ruined by a major earthquake in 1965.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{picture1.png}
\caption{Picture taken by Georgios Lambakis in 1902. In the acropolis of Ainos three of four Byzantine churches can be seen. On the far left is St. Sophia, in the middle is the Church of St. George of Neakesaria, on the right side is the Church of Theotokos Chrisopege / Zoodohos Pigi (Georgios Lambakis Archive, Byzantine and Christian Museum)}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Samothrakis 1944: 12; Lambakis, 1908: 37. \\
\item[22] Papazotos 1992-1994: 122. \\
\item[23] For an analytical comparison of its plan with the other buildings in Constantinople and Anatolia, see Ousterhout 1985. \\
\item[24] Eyice 1969: 329; Ousterhout 1985: 263. \\
\end{footnotes}
The Church of Theotokos Chrisopege / Zoodohos Pigi

The second Byzantine church in the acropolis of Ainos is Theotokos Chrisopege or Zoodohos Pigi; both of the names are the titles of Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{26} It was first excavated in 1971 by Afif Erzen. According to Lambakis records, a stone panel was attached to the church wall, dating the church to the Gattelusi Dynasty period, 1422-1423. However this panel no longer exists. The church functioned until 1892.\textsuperscript{27} During the excavations two tombs and 15\textsuperscript{th} century frescoes were found.\textsuperscript{28}

The Church of Agios Gregorios Neakesarias (St. George of Neakesaria)

The church was located in the borders of the acropolis (Picture 2). With its four windowed high-dome that was rebuilt during the Paleologian Dynasty, the structure was built in the middle Byzantine period. Its ruins came to light with the excavations in 1985. After the 1877-1878 Russian-Turkish War the first bell tower was built in this church. It functioned until the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and closed for economic reasons soon after.\textsuperscript{29}

The Church of Theotoku Pandovasilissa

It was a small church between the borders of the acropolis that could only house 25 to 30 people. Although we cannot have exact information on its date, its rare name and its inscription suggest that it was a Byzantine church. Some scholars date it to the 8\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{30} A small basilica with total six columns on north and south, the church functioned until 1890.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} Samothrakis 1944: 14; Lambakis 1908: 39.
\textsuperscript{27} Ousterhout and Bakirtzis 2007: 56; Lambakis 1908: 40. For a detailed analysis of this stone panel see Perrakis 1992-1994.
\textsuperscript{28} Ousterhout and Bakirtzis 2007: 57; Erzen 1972: 239.
\textsuperscript{29} Samothrakis 1944: 15.
\textsuperscript{31} Lambusiadis 1941: 15.
The Church of Agios Ioannis Prodromos (St. John the Forerunner)

The church was located on the lower district of Ainos, in the Greek school backyard. Lambakis photographed the church, which was a *metochion* of the Monastery of St. Pandeleimon in the Yenice (Maistros) village. In the records it is mentioned as the Church of Timiu Prodromu ke Ioannis Vaptistu. The dome was erected during the period of Paleologian Dynasty. In 1961 it was destroyed by treasure hunters. It had a Greek cross plan with four columns; with frescoes on its left wall.

![Northwestern part of the lower district of Ainos. Picture taken by Lambakis in 1902, on the far right is the Church Agios Ioannis Prodromos with its high dome](Georgios Lambakis Archive, Byzantine and Christian Museum)

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32 Samothrakis 1944: 17.
The western part of the church was a later addition. Lambakis dates the church to 13th - 14th centuries. However Papazotos, stressing its similarities with the Church of St. Sophia in the acropolis, dates the church to 12th century. It was renovated in 1680; today it is completely destroyed.

The Church of Panayia Faneromeni

This church was located in the south of St. Sophia, out of the acropolis in the lower district of Ainos. It was partly built in a rock and had one apse. On its iconostasis there was an 18th century icon. Lambakis says that in a clear sky the lights of Samothraki island, even the Mount Athos could be seen.

The Church of Agios Evplos (The Mausoleum of Yunus Bey)

The church was built on the southern Ainos, near the port. It was a small church or a chapel and was converted to a mausoleum after the conquest of the Ottomans. While some sources date it before 11th century, others date it to 14th-15th centuries. It is a high domed, cross-planned church. Probably it was originally built as a small chapel of a cemetery. The original entrance of the building is on the west, but was closed after its conversion to a mausoleum and a new entrance was opened in the adjacent wall. During the conquest of Ainos the military commander of the Ottoman army Has Yunus Bey, a Catalan by birth, was buried in the nearby Byzantine chapel of St. Evplos. Until 1922 the mausoleum was taken care by Greek residents of the district. The saint’s name day was celebrated each year on the 11th of August. It is the only Byzantine monument of Ainos that stands intact.

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34 Lambakis 1908: 26.
36 Ousterhout and Bakirtzis 2007: 59.
38 Lambakis 1908: 28.
Conclusion

In this article the Byzantine churches of Ainos (today Enez), a small border town in Eastern Turkish Thrace, have been examined. Once “a great museum of Christian art”, Ainos, housed Byzantine monuments of outmost importance in terms of architectural and artistic value that could easily compete with the ones in Constantinople. Today only two of them remain. Both of them are converted to Muslim sanctuaries. While St. Sophia, the metropolitan church of Byzantine Ainos, today’s Fatih Mosque, awaits to be restored, the small chapel of St. Evplos, today the mausoleum of Yunus Bey, with the Ottoman tombstones in its yard, stands as the sole remnant of the old Ainos.

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