

# Harbours of Byzantium

The Archaeology of Coastal Infrastructures

Edited by

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Cover: Southwestern harbour of Byzantine Kassandreia in Chalkidiki, Greece (A. Ginalis)

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## Editor's Preface

Christianity, Roman tradition and ideology, as well as Greek cultural heritage, have been labelled as the pillars of the Byzantine Empire. In fact, the real crux and enabler of power in an empire that combined the Occident with the Orient was its control over the seas. As such, seafaring constituted the formula of success for dominance of the Mediterranean, playing a key role in communication, military activities, and, especially, economic exchange. But how does one get from land to water? The linking gates are coastal installations, i.e. ports, harbours, and other infrastructures. These function as economic hubs, cultural and social meeting points, as well as gateways for communication and connection.

Even though the study of harbour sites and port networks of the Byzantine Empire constitutes a relatively new research field, it has nevertheless received significant attention over the last few years, as we can see from the instigation of various projects and the staging of conferences. However, attention is rarely paid to analyses of physical harbour remains and their impact on the general development of Late Antique and Medieval architecture, economy, or trade networks.

As such, in 2018, an international conference on the *Harbours of Byzantium* was organised at the Institute for Advanced Study of the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg in Delmenhorst, Germany. This event was intended to focus particularly on the archaeology of Byzantine coastal sites, including both harbour infrastructures *per se*, as well as associated facilities and affected landscapes. Leading scholars in the field from twelve different countries presented new material and data with which to understand the development of harbour architecture and coastal activities from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. The papers set out to cover sites from all provinces of the Byzantine Empire, stretching from Italy in the West to the Levantine coast in the East, and the Black Sea in the North to Egypt in the South. This allowed a general overview for comparative analyses and discussions on various aspects of Byzantine harbour networks and maritime connectivity.

Accordingly, the current volume provides a series of scientific papers deriving from presentations given at the conference. Beyond general approaches to the study of Byzantine harbour archaeology, the contributions offer a representative picture of harbour activities across the historical and geographical boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. Although it is impossible to reflect a comprehensive picture of the entire sweep of coastal landscapes, this work hopefully provides a basis for future comparative research in Byzantine harbour studies – on a local, regional, and supra-regional level.

The conference programme is included in the Appendices. The differences between the conference programme and the final version of this volume are explained by the fact that some scholars who submitted abstracts were ultimately unable to attend, and some who did attend and gave their papers did not submit them for publication. Fortunately, other colleagues agreed to contribute to this volume and I am most grateful to them for so doing.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all participants in the Delmenhorst Conference for presenting papers that provided unique insights, not just into ongoing excavations and investigations related to harbour installations, but also into hitherto understudied aspects of coastal infrastructures. It has been a considerable challenge to assemble this volume, and I am therefore particularly indebted to all authors who contributed and enriched this publication. Bearing in mind the time-consuming work of editing and unifying the papers, etc., as well as the difficulties brought on by the COVID pandemic, I have done my best to ensure as prompt a publication as possible.

Thanks must go here to Dr Susanne Fuchs and her team from the Institute for Advanced Study of the Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg for their support in organising the conference in Delmenhorst. I am also sincerely grateful to David Davison and Mike Schurer from Archaeopress for agreeing to publish this volume and for guiding this work through to publication, their technical help, and the quick production of the printed version.

Alkiviadis Ginalis

## 8. Bathonea (?): A Newly Discovered Ancient Port in the Hinterland of Byzantium/Constantinople

Şengül G. Aydingün

The Küçükçekmece Lagoon Lake is to be found 18 km west of Byzantium/Constantinople (modern Istanbul). The region seems to have had favourable settlement conditions for man since earliest times thanks to the presence of the Marmara Sea, the lake, and many rivers. During the initial surveys in 2007 of Lake Küçükçekmece, on the Firuzköy Peninsula (Fig. 8.1), surface finds helped the dating of the different phases of human occupation in the region. They span from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Byzantine periods. During our surveys on the coast and inland, we discovered ruins of a fortification, city walls, buildings, coastal walls, piers and harbours, a lighthouse inside the lake, grave stelae, and sarcophagi. It was quite surprising that a site so rich in archaeological remains and so close to Constantinople/Istanbul should remain relatively unnoticed by previous generations of archaeologists. Our initial geophysical surveys also gave signals that can be interpreted as showing buildings in different layers.

The existence of a length of more than 8 km of coastal walls, piers, a possible light house on a massive breakwater (Fig 8.2), bank reinforcements and terrace or retaining walls (Figs 8.3a-b), as well as abundant fragments of pottery showed us that, as well as almost all the other eras, the Hellenistic, Byzantine, and Ottoman phases are markedly represented. Additionally, many votive and grave stelae brought to the Istanbul Archaeology Museum are known to originate from around Lake Küçükçekmece and its lagoon, indicating the existence of a substantial settlement at least as early as the Hellenistic period and continuing throughout the Roman and Byzantine eras. Byzantium, founded in the 7th century BC, was supplied mostly from its hinterland; this surely would have included the area of Lake Küçükçekmece, as the entire basin at first belonged to its territory. Looking at the ancient written accounts, however, with the exception of a few brief references of a possible site called 'Bathonea', little information has come to light.

**What was the name (names) of this port city/settlement?**

It is known that the ancient name of the River Sazlıdere, which flows by the prehistoric Yarımburgaz cave and



Figure 8.1: Aerial photograph of the Firuzköy Peninsula (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

empties into Lake Küçükçekmece, 1.5 km northeast of our excavation area, was Bathynias (i.e. 'deep river'). Accordingly, ancient geographers and historians, such as Pliny the Elder, Appian (App. Mith. 1), and the cartographer Ptolemy (Ptolemy, III. 11. 6) noted western routes to and from Byzantium, mentioning Bathynias, i.e. 'We next come to the rivers Bathynias and Pydaras, or Athyras, and the towns of Selymbria and Perinthus, which join the mainland by a neck only 200 feet in width' (Pliny, IV. 18).

As early as 1912, G. Seure published an article about an honorary stele found in Marmara Ereğlisi, dating



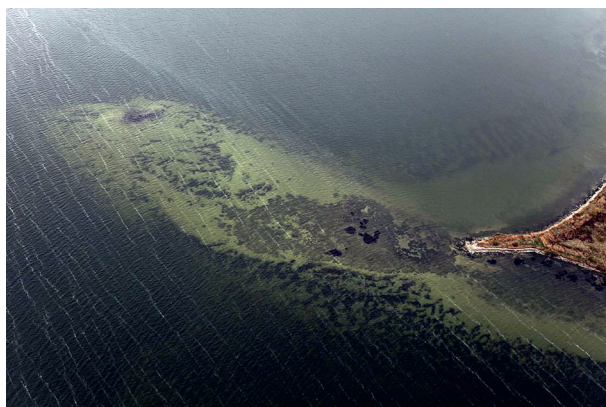


Figure 8.2: Massive breakwater at the southern end of the Firuzköy peninsula (Bathonea Excavation Archive).



Figure 8.3a: Bank reinforcement (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

to the 1st century AD,<sup>1</sup> on which a local administrator is mentioned to be ‘from Bathonea’. In the context of this stele, Seure accepts the idea that ‘Bathonea’ is the name of a settlement, adding that ‘this name can be associated with the name of the river “Bathynias”’ (Seure 1912: 558-559, fig 11).

The name ‘Bathonea’ was mentioned again on a sarcophagus, known as the ‘Shipyard Sarcophagus’, displayed in the garden of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. An inscription reads: ‘Damas, son of Rufus from Bathonea died 33 years old’ (Mansel 1957: 395-427).

Consequently, S. Eyice and Z. Taşlıklioğlu, and recently O. Weglarz, proposed Bathonea to be a settlement – a ‘phyle’ connected to Byzantium in Hellenistic times (Eyice 1977-1978: 59-60; Eyice 1978: 2-10; Taşlıklioğlu 1959: 555; Weglarz 2017: 403-412). A.M. Mansel, who also supports the idea of Bathonea as a phyle linked to Byzantium, even suggests identifying it as a smaller settlement, possibly a ‘hekatostys’ (Mansel 1957: 395-427), basing his arguments on the inscription from the above-mentioned ‘Shipyard Sarcophagus’. Mansel does not link Bathonea to Khalkedon, one of the nearest Greek colonies, because the names of all the phylae and hekatostys of Khalkedon were known, and Bathonea is not mentioned among them. Another alternative could be the polis of Selymbra, but this had lost its importance during the Imperial Roman period and was reduced to a village. The only remaining possibility for Mansel was Byzantium, arguing that: ‘We know Byzantium had phylae and hekatostys but we don’t know their names’ (Mansel 1957: 401). Shortly after Mansel, Taşlıklioğlu published on the stele inscriptions collected from around Lake Küçükçekmece. He also considers Bathonea to be one of the three phylae of Byzantium, along with Krateinera



Figure 8.3b: Terrace or retaining walls (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

and Philoktorea (Taşlıklioğlu 1959: 555), arguing that on all the sarcophagi collected from the hinterland of Byzantium the names of the phylae of Krateina and Philoktorea were mentioned, but not the name of any Dorian polis. Thus it can be assumed that the name Bathonea mentioned in the inscriptions of the stelae, including the ‘Shipyard Sarcophagus’ recovered in the territory of Byzantium, refer to the name of the third phyle of Byzantium (Taşlıklioğlu 1957: 554). Conversely, Tekin and Russell argue that Bathonea refers not to a settlement, but rather to a hekatostys (Russell 2017: 15-16, ref. 31; Tekin 2014; 2010; 2009a; 2009b).

As for the area in Late Antiquity, in the Byzantine sources ‘Bathynias’ is merely mentioned as a stopover point. Accordingly, the 5th- and 6th-century AD historians Agathias from Myrina and Procopius of Caesarea in fact only refer to Rhegion with relevance for travellers (Procopius, *De Aedificiis*, IV. 3. 8-18).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Seure’s conclusion is based on the different spellings, i.e. Bathonea and Bathynias.

<sup>2</sup> During Late Antiquity, the small village of Rhegion was founded in the southeast corner of Lake Küçükçekmece. The first appearance

Theophanes Constiuatus likewise only gives information about Rhegion, while reporting on the stone bridge constructed by Justinian I over the Bathynias; Ogan (1940: 439) thus accepts that the area of Küçükçekmece was called after the name of the River Bathynias in the past. It is possible that Rhegion became a more important site thanks to its favourable position as station on the coastal route of the Via Egnatia. When the relatively small city-state of Byzantion was changed into an imperial capital, the bulk of maritime traffic that reached the entrance of Lake Küçükçekmece was surely heading eastwards, to the new capital, instead of turning to the north. Hence, the position of Rhegion near the entrance of the lake became more important than the Firuzköy Peninsula, 4 km further north. It is possible that, with the increasing importance of Rhegion in later periods, all the area was called by this name.

Finally, in the Tabula Rogeriana of AD 1154 the region is called ‘Batira’ (Şeşen 2000: 493-495). It is obvious that toponyms are subject to change, particularly when pronounced by those having different native tongues. Accordingly, it seems plausible that north of Lake Küçükçekmece, close to the River Bathynias (modern Sazlıdere) there was a location known as *Bathys-Ryax/Batira* existing during medieval times (Yılmaz 2017: 300-302).

R. Janin (1950: 406) thinks that the important church dedicated to St Theodore Theron, which is mentioned in the works of the famous Byzantine historian Anna Comnena (AD 1083-1153) (Comnena VIII. 3), should be at a site called Bathys-Ryax near Constantinople, the meaning of which is ‘deep river’. A representation of this saint, referred to as Bathys-Ryax, can be seen on an enamel in the collection of the Hermitage Museum (Walter 2003: 44), which strengthens Janin’s argument. In our excavations we uncovered a large church, a martyrion (Fig. 8.4), and a cistern of considerable size with its water sources (probably regarded holy in their time). Hundreds of unguentaria (Fig. 8.5), likely to be filled with holy water or some holy perfumes, were also recovered. All these finds support Janin’s suggestion. Additionally, the moulds found suggest the production of ornamental metal objects. St Theodore Theron was a soldier saint, who, like St George, acquired legendary



Figure 8.4: The Martyrium with *opus sectile* (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

status by slaying a dragon (or a gigantic serpent). In iconography he was often depicted mounted on a horse and killing the beast in front of a cave (Trifonova 2010: 53-64). A ring found at the site in 2012 may depict St Theodore Theron as a mounted figure. The myths of giant serpents and dragons commonly occur in the neighbourhood of actual caves, since, according to legends, these creatures mostly live in caves. The Yarımburgaz Cave, which is only 3.5 km north of our excavation area, could well be the source of such a myth associated with St Theodore Theron. It should also be noted that in the Early/Middle Byzantine period this site was used as a cave church or monastery. Accordingly, we think that the basilical structure discovered in Area 8 of the excavation site might be the church of St Theodore Theron, while the nearby octagonal building may be a martyrion dedicated to him. To substantiate such claims, however, the excavations of these structures have to be completed, and our present explanations can only be early assessments.

As discussed above, based on our research of the oldest known name of the settlement, ‘Bathonea’ seems to be the most likely, which was later incorporated into Rhegion. Quite frequently the name of a river gradually encompasses a geographical location and then a settlement. We have many modern examples, i.e. Haramidere, Büyükdere, Nakkaşdere, and Kavaklıdere in modern Turkey (with the suffix ‘dere’ meaning ‘river’ in Turkish). It is therefore possible that the place known as ‘Bathonea’, or with a better known name ‘Bathynias River’, changed its name after becoming incorporated within the Late Roman Empire, in the same way that Byzantion was changed to ‘Antonina’ after it had been annexed during the winter of AD 195/196 by Septimius Severus. Of course, there was a further change of name when Constantine I labelled it ‘Nea Roma’ and Constantinople. The 18th-century traveller Richard Pococke relates that: ‘Five Miles from Constantinopol

of Rhegion in written sources dates to the 4th century AD, when it is noted as ‘Regio’ in the Tabula Peutingeria (Jireček 1877: 51; Taşlıkılıoğlu 1959: 555). In later periods we see that Rhegion was mentioned under slightly different spellings, i.e. *Regium/Rêgion/Rêgio/Rêgi/Rego/Ryga/Ponti Piccoli/Mikro Tsekmetze/Küçükçekmece* (Külzer 2010: 440; 2008: 615). The fact that the authors of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD never mention any of these names suggests that Rhegion was not in existence before the 4th century. A. Ogan, who excavated Rhegion in 1938 and 1940-41, explains this as follows: ‘In their description of Thrace, ancient writers, like Ptolemy and Pliny mentioned the Küçükçekmece River as Batinias’ (Ogan 1939; Ogan-Mansel 1942).





Figure 8.5: Conglomerate of unguentaria (Bathonea Excavation Archive).



Figure 8.6a: Southern tip of the Firuzköy Peninsula (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

there is a small town called [The Little Bridge], from a bridge there near the sea, over the outlet of a lake; as well as I could learn, the lake receives a small river into it, which probably is the Bathenius of Potelmy' (Pococke 1745: 139).

The 19th-century historian K.Y. Jirecek (1887: 51) provides more information on the name, recording that: '[The] marshland covering the lake's shores is full of birds, especially storks. This lake is separated from the sea by a marshy and narrow line of sand full of reeds. The waters of the sea and lake were united by a narrow channel named Myrmex in ancient times. During heavy southern winds the waters of the sea would flow into the lake and during the northern winds the waters of the lake would flow into the sea. The geographers of the 1st and 2nd centuries knew this area as the Bathynias River. In later times, many villas were built on the eastern shore. Additionally, an imperial palace and a harbor Rhegion, were constructed...' (Jirecek).

## Excavations

### *The Great Harbour Area*

At the southern tip of the Firuzköy Peninsula a manmade extension stretches southwards, c. 400 m into the lagoon. Resembling an artificial breakwater, it seems to have been built as part of the harbour infrastructure (Figs 8.2, 8.6a). Remains of coastal walls, 1.5 m thick, can be seen running along the edges of the extension. These are built of two rows of regularly cut limestone ashlar blocks and curb stones filled with rubble and ortar (Fig. 8.6b). At the very southern tip, as well as on a rocky outcrop inside the lake, structural remains are documented; these reveal the square plans of buildings whose foundations are still discernible under the water. Unfortunately, the function of these structures is still unknown. Taking into consideration

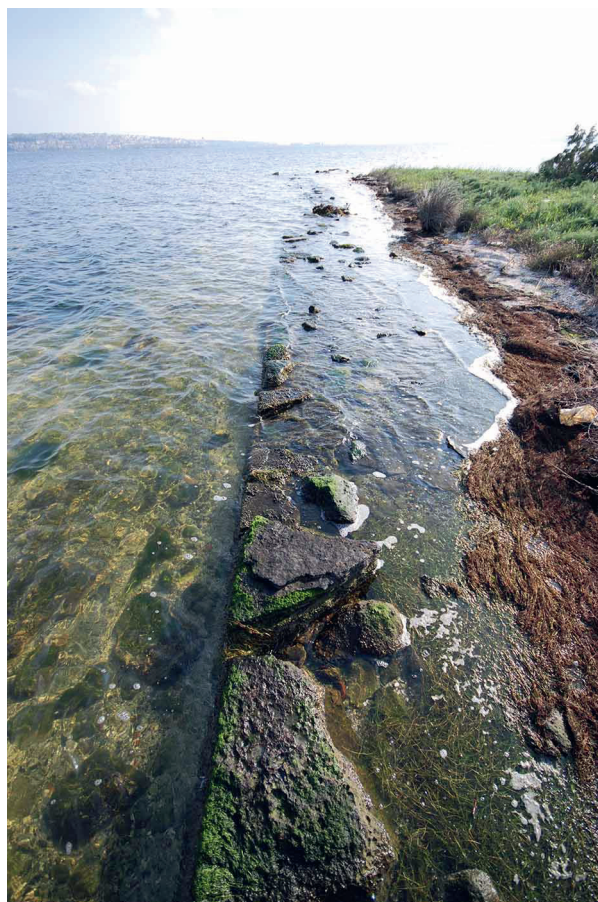


Figure 8.6b: Coastal walls running along the edges of the extension (Bathonea Excavation Archive).





Figure 8.7: Central jetty in the small harbour area (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

that Lake Küçükçekmece was once an open bay on the Sea of Marmara (Arıç 1955),<sup>3</sup> the remains can possibly be identified as the foundations of a lighthouse or lid beacon. This, however, has still to be verified through corings.

### The Small Harbour Area

In a small bay on the eastern coast of the Firuzköy Peninsula, which we call ‘Small Harbour’, there is a large, stone-paved jetty. The pavement of regularly cut stones was found up to 1 m beneath the surface of the present sea level.<sup>4</sup> The jetty is flanked by coastal walls in the southern and northern parts of the area; these are all made of limestone ashlar blocks and spolia joined without mortar. Arrayed in two parallel lines, they form bank reinforcements which define the harbour bay (Ginalis 2022: 145). The centrally located jetty is connected to a road, 3.85 m in width, that runs in an east-west direction inland (Fig 8.7). The two edges of this road were made of curb stones, while the middle part was filled and stabilised by smaller stones. Starting at the jetty, the road runs in a straight line for c. 100 m and makes a 90° left turn to reach a pool made of rectangular limestone blocks of monumental size. The pool is accessible at its western side by means of a few steps. Bricks (dimensions: 35 cm x 30 cm x 4.5-5 cm) were used with lime and mortar in its construction. Next to the pool is an Ottoman bath,<sup>5</sup> which seems to be connected to the pool structure.

The stone- and marble-paved road passing by the pool and the Ottoman bath enters a large square (40 m x 40 m). It is suggested that it may primarily have been used as a fish market (*makellon/macellum*). According to

Dagron (2002: 459), the head of the fishermen’s guild would inform the local authority (the Eparch) at dawn of the size of the daily catch. In order to sell the fish at the local agora, the fishermen may have had to place a certain percentage of their daily catch in the pool. Some migrating fish, e.g. bonito and tuna, prefer lagoon environments due to their salty and lukewarm waters being full of nutrients. Other species, e.g. grey mullet, sword fish, eels, etc, also enjoy such conditions. In antiquity, *garum* – the ubiquitous condiment prepared from the hard roe of grey mullet – could well have been produced at Küçükçekmece (Deveciyan 2006: 218). In any event, in 2008 an unguentarium fragment was discovered on which the word *EPARKOU* can clearly be read. This would support the assumption of the presence of a local authority at the site.

Some 115 m to the southwest of the small harbour area, a large block of limestone with marks of sparrow-tail clamps was found lying on the surface; a few meters away a similar stone block could be seen in a previously dug pit. These random finds eventually led to the discovery of an apsidal building, identified as a three-aisled basilica (Fig. 8.8). Unfortunately, the dimensions of this structure have yet to be determined: the dome has collapsed and its walls have been demolished down to their foundations. The finds in this area so far have included two buried skeletons and a coin from the reign of Justinian I. Another skeleton was found lying on the marble floor of the main nave; a piece of a glass bottle was unearthed next to it, which again dates to the 6th century AD. The cumulative evidence points to an earthquake event, leading to the complete collapse of the building. This is supported by written accounts (Moravcsik 1967: 63; Theophanes Continuatus V.94). Later, during the 10th and 11th centuries, the narthex of the building was apparently used as a cemetery. From the different nature of the stone blocks used for the foundation, it is clear that spolia were used for the apse of the basilica. The blocks bear the marks of sparrow-tail clamps, which most likely originate from some thus far unknown predecessor structure of the Hellenistic period. During the excavation, coins, oil lamps, glass objects, Roman votive or grave stelae from the 1st/2nd centuries AD, and Classical black-glazed ceramics were recovered outside the apse. These finds demonstrate that the area was in use before the 5th and 6th centuries AD – likely as early as the Classical to Hellenistic era.

As a result, it seems that the harbour installation was connected to some coastal site. Whether this can be identified as a settlement or some sort of infrastructure for agricultural or industrial exploitation in relation to some larger centre, such as Reghion, further down on the Sea of Marmara, remains to be investigated.

<sup>3</sup> The constant siltation process by the rivers eventually created a sandbank which cut the lake off from the sea, forming a lagoon.

<sup>4</sup> For detailed information on this jetty, see Ginalis 2022.

<sup>5</sup> For the Ottoman buildings, see Dellal 2022.

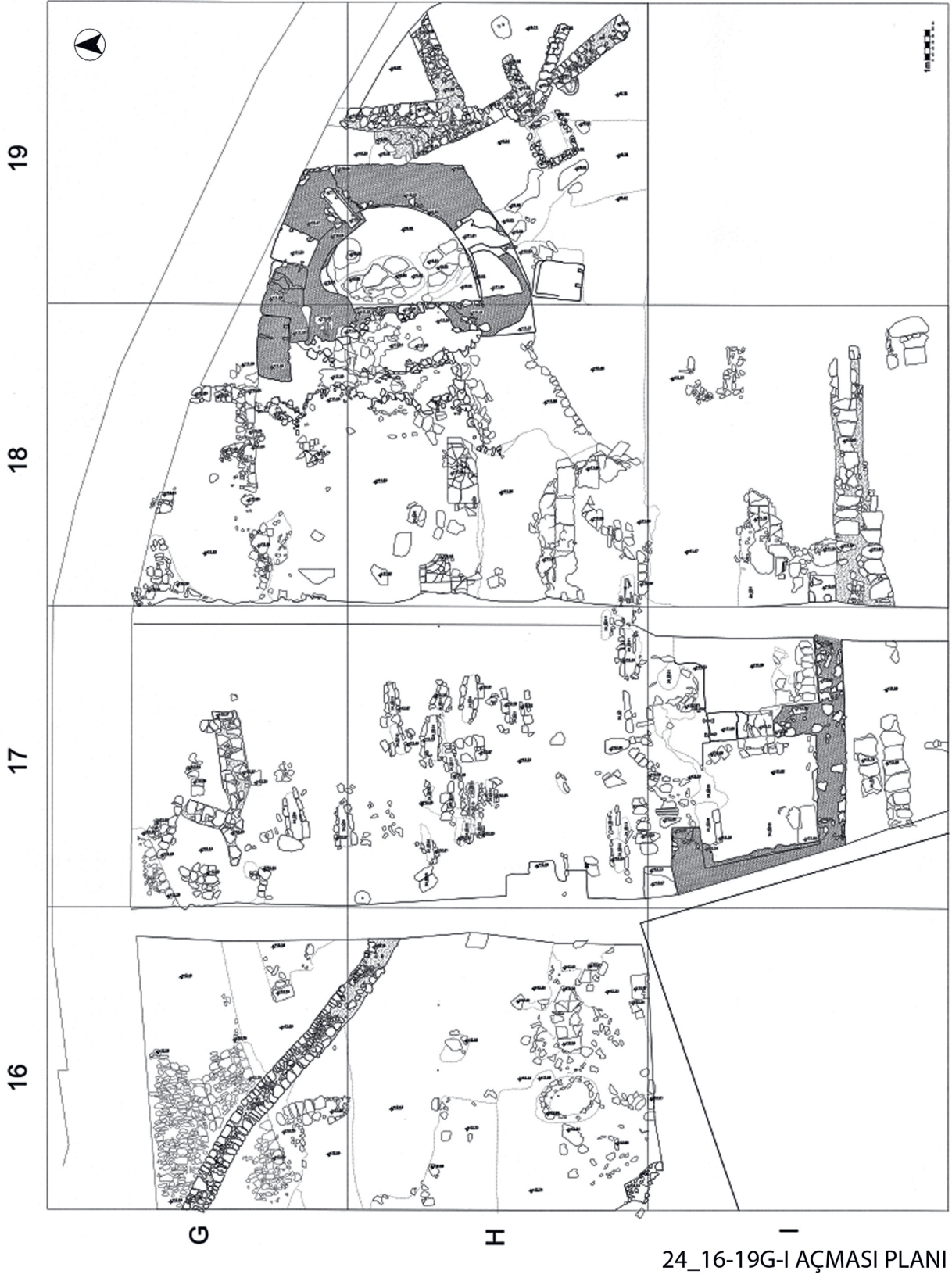


Figure 8.8: Plan of three-aisled basilica (Bathonea Excavation Archive).

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