

Development of the city plan of ancient Sinope: Infrastructure as ideology

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[Sinope] has received advantages from nature which have been improved by art. It is built upon the neck of a peninsula; on each side of the isthmus are harbours, stations for vessels, and fisheries worthy of admiration for the capture of the pelamydes. ...

The peninsula projects in a circular form; the shores are surrounded by a chain of rocks, and in some parts there are cavities, like rocky pits, which are called Chœnicides. These are filled when the sea is high. For the above reason, the place is not easily approached; ... The lands in the higher parts and above the city have a good soil, and are adorned with fields dressed as gardens, and this is the case in a still greater degree in the suburbs. The city itself is well secured with walls, and magnificently ornamented with a gymnasium, forum, and porticos...

(Strabo 12. 3. 11; Falconer 1903 trans.)

Strabo's famous description of ancient Sinope in the late 1st century BC has long served as the most vivid image of the ancient town, although it provides no useful information regarding the city's plan and organisation. The combined evidence of the grid-like plan of the mediaeval town, the Milesian colonial heritage of the city, and an inconclusive textual tradition has led scholars to consider the Sinope plan as an example of a Hippodamian city. This paper proposes that, rather than a simple case of an established type, the city plan of Sinope was dynamic and responsive to changing ideas about the nature and extent of the community, the relationship of the urban-rural-port community, and the ideological underpinnings of community governance. The model presented here is based on more extensive synthesis in Sinop Kale Excavations 2015–19.¹ Nevertheless, our present state of knowledge is based on a fragmentary record and will require further investigation to refine and document these initial findings.

The archaeology of city plans, once a staple of the study of ancient architecture studies, has recently undergone a renaissance in ancient urban research.² The topic, long mired in an

¹ Doonan in press.

² Bell 2021; Smith 2007; Hanson 2017; Way 2022.

unproductive obsession with typologies and formalist description, has been reinvigorated by the understanding that city plans play an active role in the structuring of identity and social life of communities.³ The study of grid plans in Greek cities has long been dominated by the idealising and normalising approach established by Höpfner and Schwandner in Haus Und Stadt im Klassischen Griechenland.⁴ Expanding the traditional thinking about the city plan, this paper presents an overview of a synthesis incorporating finds by the Sinop Museum over the past two decades, results from the Sinop Kale Excavations, and the Sinop Regional Archaeological Survey. This additional information is applied to restudying the Akurgal-Budde excavations of the 1950s to provide a truly archaeological basis for rethinking the plan of the ancient city of Sinope. Furthermore, the concept of a city plan proposed here incorporates the urban centre (astu) into a broader landscape frame encompassing transitional para-urban spaces, the harbours (limani), suburban (chora), and rural (eschatia) components (Fig. 1).

Overview: Main Features of Sinope's Urban Topography

Urban core (astu)

The urban core of ancient Sinope (and indeed its modern counterpart) has had a tendency to wander over the millennia. The best evidence we have for settlement before the colonial foundation has been what appears to be an Early Bronze–Iron Age (ca. 2300–700 BC) transient fishing station documented at Sinop kale just outside the Hellenistic city wall.⁵ On the other hand, the earliest evidence for Greek settlement in Sinope clusters mainly around the high ground between the north and south harbours. This pattern is consistent with the early Ionian settlement pattern identified by Kertschner.⁶ Arguments ex silentio are notoriously unreliable, but the most likely scenario based on present evidence is that whatever early urban core there might have been might have been focused on these areas. Scattered houses, likely given over to agricultural production, spread to the west in the area of the mediaeval city. An Archaic phase of the city wall has been recently defined by the Sinop Kale Excavations team, and it appears that the wall protected landward access to both the astu and chora. The Hellenistic-Roman urban core then appears to have expanded to encompass the lower flanks of Boztepe, while in the Middle

³ Cahill 2000; Bielfeldt 2016; Nevett et al. 2017.

⁴ Höpfner and Schwandner 1986. For discussion see Ault 2017.

⁵ Doonan et al. 2019.

⁶ Kertschner 2019.

Ages the main urban focus retracted within the Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman circuit walls. The western extent of the ancient and medieval city was defined by the ancient city wall (kale) and the fortified inner castle (içkale).⁷

Harbours (limani)

Sinope is well-known for having harbours on the north and the south coasts of the city and this was considered one of the great advantages of the site (Strabo 12. 3. 11 quoted above). The existence of an ancient mole near the içkale up until the 1950s can be seen in the plan published in the Illustrated London News (January 1854), here reproduced as Fig. 2. This mole was thought to be associated with the monumental Hellenistic fortifications⁸ based on its construction techniques. Nevertheless, the pre-Byzantine coastline of the city is much obscured by subsequent filling episodes. It is clear that much of the modern seaside park (i.e. Bariş Manço Park) and the recently closed boatyard (tersane) are 20th-century fills, but the **recent excavation of dock structures approximately 130 m inland from the present coast suggests that the Archaic–Hellenistic harbour extended well inland from its modern counterpart** (for approximate shoreline see Fig. 1).⁹ Given Strabo’s specific mention of the steep coastline, it may be hypothesised that the flat fills beneath the southern slopes at a modern elevation of ca. 15 m above sea level are likely to be later fills in what was an ancient embayment in roughly the configuration indicated on Fig. 2. The mole here extends from the large south-eastern Ottoman tower, but it may well represent the full extent of the main Hellenistic harbour (see below).

The hypothetical ancient coastline would have run from the içkale roughly along Tuzcular caddesi across the fills between the south-eastern extension of the Byzantine city walls across the traffic circle known as Uğur Mumcu square may have defined the Archaic- and Classical-period coast of the city. This would explain why the earliest Greek finds in the city are found on the slopes directly overlooking this area. This may have formed the early harbour that was later fortified in Hellenistic times (see below).

⁷ Doonan et al. 2017; 2021.

⁸ Bryer and Winfield 1985, 76.

⁹ Kaba and Vural 2018.

The North Harbour appears to have been used particularly when weather conditions required shelter from the easterly winds that pick up in autumn and winter. These are the seasons when the most important fish migrations (Bonito and anchovies) provide an abundant harvest despite more dangerous conditions. The rough extent of the north harbour is difficult to assess, since this area has now been filled in for use as the main weekly bazaar. Nevertheless, it is clear that the north harbour was smaller than the main south harbour and less developed in terms of infrastructure. It is intriguing to speculate that the current use of this area as the weekly marketplace may follow a longstanding use as a fishing wharf and market going back thousands of years. **Before the north harbour was filled in to create the marketplace this area and other small landings along the north fortifications were used for beaching small craft.** A late antique street excavated by the Sinop Museum and a large Ottoman period church (both unpublished) show that this area was significant in antiquity and the middle ages.

Agricultural Catchment (chora)

The growth of Sinope as a city was clearly linked to the evolution of its agricultural catchment (chora). The literary tradition suggests that early Sinope functioned as an emporion, a port of trade with relatively limited agricultural territory.¹⁰ The earliest chora was probably limited to the lower slopes covered in later times by urban settlement. The west slopes of the Boztepe headland and possibly areas later covered by urban Sinop may have served as a chora in Archaic and Classical times, although the economy was largely oriented towards maritime activities, particularly fishing and trade. This chora would have fit in with the normal range of classical poleis.¹¹ The distribution of villa sites documented by the survey together with subsequent discoveries by the Sinop Museum appears roughly consistent with an estimated 10 ha per villa estate.¹² Fragmentary evidence for some kind of Hellenistic monumental installation (large limestone blocks, model altar, votives) in the vicinity of Balatlar kilise, later used as a Roman bath and Byzantine church.¹³ No evidence has been documented for an extensive chora on Boztepe or the Sinop promontory in the Archaic period.¹⁴

¹⁰ Leaf 1916; Hind 1995–96.

¹¹ For comparanda see Hansen and Nielsen 2004; Rinnse 2020.

¹² Doonan et al 2015; Doonan in press; Kaba and Ersöy 2021.

¹³ Alper 2014; Köroğlu 2017; Doonan in press.

¹⁴ Doonan 2004; Doonan et al. 2015.

On the Sinop promontory the most likely Greek-related settlement from the Archaic and early Classical periods is the small port of Akliman (ancient Harmene), about eight km west of the main city. There is no clear evidence from the Sinop Regional Archaeological Survey to suggest a continuous chora on the Sinop promontory before Roman administration.¹⁵ The 4th century BC marked a pronounced shift in settlement and apparent integration of the Sinop promontory and the Boztepe headland into the social and economic system of Sinope.¹⁶ Numerous coastal sites show evidence of imported Greek ceramics, and the Boztepe headland shows the spread of agricultural villas along the west- and south-facing slopes.¹⁷ At the same time amphora production facilities on the south coast at Zeytinlik and Nisiköy have been documented by the Sinop Museum excavations in the 1990s.¹⁸

Based on present evidence it appears that the chora of Late-Classical/ Hellenistic Sinope (4th–2nd century BC) encompassed the south-facing slopes of Boztepe (ca. 10 km²) and traders based in the city established exchange relationships with settlements on the promontory.¹⁹ The Roman and Late Roman agricultural territory attached to the Roman colony appears to have been much more extensive and integrated on the Sinop promontory.²⁰ The expansion of the road system during the 1st, 2nd and 4th centuries AD played an important role in the integration of the territory.²¹ Roman agriculture appears to have been based on small freeholding farms on the promontory up until the 6th century AD, when a series of luxury villas and monastic complexes were established on the coast and appear to have controlled agricultural territories of the interior.²²

Previous Research on the Urban Plan of Ancient Sinope

The earliest published research on the monuments of Sinope that have some bearing on the organization of the ancient city were the reports of William Hamilton and Hommaire de Hell in

¹⁵ Doonan 2004; Doonan et al. 2015.

¹⁶ Rempel and Doonan 2020

¹⁷ Doonan 2004; Doonan et al. 2015.

¹⁸ Garlan and Tatlican 1998.

¹⁹ Rempel and Doonan 2020.

²⁰ Doonan et al. 2021.

²¹ Doonan 2024.

²² Doonan 2021.

the early-mid 19th century.²³ David Moore Robinson's dissertation was the first attempt to present a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge related to the archaeology of Sinope.²⁴ Rich materials in the area of the archaic cemeteries just west of the Hellenistic city wall were turned up during the construction of the Sinop match factory in the 1920's²⁵ and in the early 1950's the Turkish-German team led by Ekrem Akurgal and Ludwig Budde conducted wide-ranging excavations across the city.²⁶

Akurgal-Budde Excavations (1951–53)

The most comprehensive research into urban Sinope was carried out by the Turkish-German team led by Ekrem Akurgal and Ludwig Budde from 1951 to 1953 (Fig. 3). Their excavations ranged across the town just before a massive programme of urban development in the later 1950s through to the 1970s restored the port devastated by the Russian attack of 1853 and the fire of 1916. Several members of the Sinop Kale Excavations team led by Ulrike Krotscheck studied and secured publication permission for Budde's archives in 2018. These investigations have yielded invaluable unpublished evidence for the Akurgal–Budde excavations. A full publication of the archived materials is in process.²⁷

Several trenches in the southern part of the city may help to establish the pre-Roman shoreline in the main harbour area. Trenches M and N are not easy to pinpoint, but Trench L was adjacent to the Ottoman bath (Pervane hamami) near the main harbour. Trench M was said to be located nearby and Trench N was in the 'south-eastern part of the city'.²⁸ Trench M was said to have revealed Byzantine, Roman and Hellenistic houses, suggesting that this was a popular location over many centuries. Beneath the Hellenistic layers a deep (7.8 m) layer of sand showed that this was an open sandy beach prior to the Hellenistic phase. Trench L revealed a Roman house that opened to the south (that is faced onto the harbour) and that groundwater seeped up into the bottom of the Roman layers, frustrating further investigation. Trench N featured a Hellenistic wall composed of long limestone ashlar. An unpublished photograph in the Budde archive

²³ Hamilton 1842; Hommaire de Hell 1860.

²⁴ Robinson 1905.

²⁵ Boysal 1959; Deniz and İmamoğlu, 2016.

²⁶ Akurgal 1956a, 1956b; Budde 1956a, 1956b; Budde 1963.

²⁷ Krotscheck, Rempel and Sherratt in press.

²⁸ Budde 1956b, 39–40.

reveals that this wall strongly resembles a wall of a ship shed in the same area recently excavated by the Sinop Museum.²⁹ Taking these three trenches as a group, it makes sense to see the pre-Roman shoreline as roughly following the line of the modern Tuzcular caddesi (indicated by shading on Figure 1).

To date Bryer and Winfield³⁰ (my Fig. 4) have attempted the most comprehensive evidence-based survey of the ancient plan of Sinope. Their analysis was part of a topographic survey of Byzantine monuments in the Pontic region carried out in the 1970s. At the time they visited Sinop they would have had more access to the evidence related to the north and south harbours, but they had very little access to the içkale (the historical Sinop Prison).³¹ Despite the extraordinary erudition and richness of their volume, their findings are coloured by their core interest in the mediaeval city.

Their analysis of the city plan was based primarily on the modern street plan which retains traces of a grid both within the Byzantine walled city and along the low slopes of Boz tepe. They attempted to anchor the chronology of the city wall based on stone masonry techniques broken into Pre-Mithridatic, Mithridatic, Roman and later phases. Although a strong chronological sequence for the building and development of the wall could provide important clues to the development of the city plan, there is very little reliable evidence for the ancient wall outside of the Hellenistic curtain documented by the Sinop Kale excavations.

The basic framework for the Bryer and Winfield grid plan is centred on Sakarya caddesi which has served as the city's east-west main street (decumanus) since the early 3rd century BC and possibly earlier. Bryer and Winfield traced a parallel east-west street 60 m to the north (Batur caddesi), and a third ca. 100 m to the south (Tuzcular caddesi). Several North-South roads cross these creating what they considered a 100 x 60 m grid. They argued that the acropolis of the city was in the area just east of the Sinop Kale Excavation area in the old bus station. They proposed that the religious centre of the city was in the area of the small temple in the Museum garden, which would have seemed an extra-urban sanctuary to the mediaeval walled city. Based on

²⁹ Doonan in press b.

³⁰ Bryer and Winfield 1985 I, 75–76; plan 4.

³¹ Also see the reconsideration of the evidence for the ancient walls by Crow 2014.

masonry types they dated most of the wall and towers (Fig. 2 nos. 29, 30, 37-43) around the ickale to the early monumental Hellenistic phase of the wall. This was a particularly problematic area for study before the closing of the prison in the 1990s. They hypothesised that the tangle of streets east of the Kale in an area ca. 170 x 110 m may have been the location of the market (agora). A submerged mole (now covered by modern fills) protected the main south harbour and the wall towers facing the south harbour (Fig. 2 nos. 1-6, 29-36) were assigned to either the Mithridatic or Early Roman period based on the simple isodomic masonry (blocks lack the drafted margins seen on the 3rd-century BC wall).

Towards an Archaeological Synthesis

Bryer and Winfield's basic sketch of Sinope's city plan has been accepted in its general outlines in subsequent studies of the city, owing largely to the scarcity of new information available for analysis.³² A major flaw of most analyses arises from the mistaken assumption that the grid plan is the most important element of the city plan which was essentially static. The framework proposed here models the growth a development of the city plan that shaped and responded dynamically to social and economic changes in the city itself, its chora and the Black Sea region more broadly. The comments below are based on a detailed synthesis of evidence for three main ancient phases of urban development (Archaic–Classical, Late Classical–Hellenistic, Roman).³³

The arrangement of space within a community organises the relationships between its human inhabitants, and so a city plan is a living architectural text into which social relationships are inscribed. Consider the contrast between the Athenian prytany and a Roman odeon, or between an open-air market of an early Greek agora and a structured Hellenistic stoa. Some architecture encourages non-hierarchical face to face interaction, while other architecture constrains interaction to privilege favoured actors.³⁴ The ancient Greeks and Romans thought a lot about how to structure their communities, from Plato's Laws or Republic to Vitruvius' Ten Books. Plato's Magnesia in the Laws was designed far from the sea in order to avoid the moral corruption and easy wealth afforded by maritime access. It was left un-walled in order to

³² Doonan, 2004, Dereli 2014, Barat 2014.

³³ Doonan in press b.

³⁴ Bell and Zacka 2021; Müller 2021.

discourage laziness among the male defenders of the city.³⁵ In fact, in many ways Magnesia was the ‘anti-Sinope’.³⁶

Plato, writing in the 4th century BC, was responding to a time of profound social tension in the Greek world when power and wealth were corrupting the bonds of philia between citizens that ideally held a community together. We can see no better parable for these times than the story of Sinope’s most famous philosopher, Diogenes son of Hikesias. Diogenes was driven from his home city for debasing the currency and developed his anti-materialist Cynical philosophy that contributed to Stoicism, the most influential school of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman world. His initial crime was an act that suggests a disregard for the importance of worldly wealth.³⁷

It is against this backdrop that we see the emergence of Sinope as a great city and an important regional power. Seen from the perspective of archaeology, this was the local production of wine and/ or olives afforded the elite class of Sinope the wealth to build opulent houses and villas decorated with mosaics and wall paintings. The wealth of Sinope attracted the attention of Datames, the Persian Satrap of Cappadocia, who took the city by subterfuge (Polyaenus Stratagemata 7. 21). The struggles against Datames underscored Sinope’s vulnerability in terms of manpower and of defensive infrastructure. An important treaty from this time opens with “The Sinopeans and Satyros and the sons of Klearchos made an oath” to support one another in case of attack.³⁸ The agency of the people (demos) of Sinope is an important consideration as the city expanded. Two generations later the city constructed, at considerable expense, the magnificent wall that is the main subject of the Sinop Kale excavations.³⁹

Why these digressions in a chapter on city planning? Because the needs and ideology of the community drive the process of building and maintaining infrastructure. Ober and Weingast have recently argued that city walls were an expression of democracy in Hellenistic world.⁴⁰ Cities

³⁵ Betegh 2021.

³⁶ For other examples, see Orwin 2015.

³⁷ Helmer 2017.

³⁸ French 2005, 1–2.

³⁹ Doonan et al. in press.

⁴⁰ Ober and Weingast 2021.

that prized some level of autonomy were willing to expend significant resources to a space and an infrastructure in which citizen agency controlled the community's destiny. As Sinope transitioned from a rather insular Archaic and Classical emporion to a regional power, the growing wealth of a limited group of families was first expressed through the construction of opulent villas and townhouses and by the expansion of the urban footprint of the community. This may have been the phase when a grid plan emerged, centred on the city centre and the temple. It is important to note that the grid plan of this phase does not appear to have as rigorous or as extensive as in later times. The considerable social control and mobilisation necessary to impose a grid plan on the whole city were not often available to the city under democratic control, and it does not appear that this changed under the Pontic rulers. The political will to reshape the community coercively most likely followed the sack by Lucullus and establishment of Iulia Colonia Felix Sinope as an expression of the new imperial order.

No less expressive than the organisation of the city itself is the integration of the urban centre into a broader productive and material context. As with many ancient towns, the interface between the city core (astu) and the suburban agricultural catchment (chora) was defined by the fortification wall and the main cemeteries just outside the gates. The Greek city tied these two spaces together using a monumental road that was marked by monumental tombs for a distance of at least several km into the countryside.⁴¹ Roads like this are known around the Greek world, notably at Sinope's mother city of Miletus. At Miletus the sacred road tied the urban area to an extensive chora through processions to the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma. Like at Sinope the way is marked by substantial monuments at some distance from the city, investing family prestige along a path used for important ritual processions.⁴² It is attractive to speculate that the monumental road between Sinope and the surrounding countryside was used in a similar fashion.

A city is tied to its surroundings not only through flows of people but also through flows of resources, agricultural products and raw materials. The Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic city of Sinope was tied directly to an agricultural chora on Boztepe, and through trade relations with the mainland.⁴³ The exchange in raw materials and export of commodities like wine and olive oil

⁴¹ Budde 1963; Kaba 2019; Doonan in press.

⁴² Slawisch and Wilkinson 2018.

⁴³ Rempel and Doonan 2020.

was mediated through the port, which was expanded and strengthened in response to the intensified trade and military context of the Hellenistic world. The interface between the Roman city and its hinterland reflected a new imperial ideology. An extraordinary expansion of the agricultural production in the countryside is exemplified by the industrial-agricultural complex in Demirci, 15 km south of the city on the Sinop mainland.⁴⁴ The city wall became a permeable formal urban gateway; the road system on the mainland was expanded and improved; and a new system of conveying water into the city via extensive aqueducts and an urban distribution system was established.⁴⁵ The site just below the tumuli of the Pontic Kings had proclaimed a new power over the lands of Hellenistic Sinope was set with the crowning jewel, a massive bath complex,⁴⁶ which proclaimed the Roman imperial triumph over the chaos of nature.

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⁴⁴ Kassab-Tezgör 2010; Doonan 2004; Doonan, Domzalski and Smokotina 2021.

⁴⁵ Turoglu and Bayraktar 2014.

⁴⁶ Köröglu 2017.

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Figure 1: Google Earth image of Sinope with shading blocking out the estimated ancient shoreline. Major urban features are indicated, and the main ancient streets: north–south (cardo) in yellow and east–west (decumanus) in blue.

Figure 2: Plan of the Russian attack on Sinop harbour (30 November 1853) showing the extent of the ancient mole and the shipyard area (marked 'N') that is likely to have been a secondary ancient harbour. Note the inlet directly north that is likely to have been the north harbour.

Figure 3: Locations of major urban trenches excavated by Akurgal and Budde, 1951–53. Locations estimated based on descriptions in Akurgal 1956a; 1956b; Budde 1956a; 1956b). Securely known trench locations are marked by a red circle; estimated locations are marked by a yellow diamond.

Figure 4: Urban plan of ancient Sinope (after Bryer and Winfield 1985, fig. 1).







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