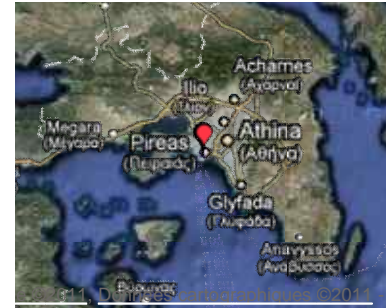


## Piraeus - Kantharos

Kantharos is the larger of the three natural gulfs of Piraeus peninsula (the other two being Zea and Mounichia) in the South Athenian coast and it was used by Athenians as their main trading port. The formation and operation of Kantharos gulf as a harbour played an important role in the peak of the city that led to the Athenian hegemony.

Visible remains of the ancient establishments are minimal, although testimonies for their existence found in ancient literature as well as evidence brought up by recent research provide a clear image of the harbour installations and the surroundings in antiquity.



Figures 

### Main features

Region	Saronic Gulf
Use	Commercial - Military
Prosperity period (centuries)	5th B.C. - 4th B.C.
Existence of contemporary port	Yes
Findings on site	No, harbourworks until 19th c. but now covered under modern constructions

### General description

"Megas Limin" or "Kantharos", a name derived most probably from the basin's shape that resembled the homonymous vessel, is located in the Northwest of the Piraeus peninsula. It was the "εμπόριον" (= the merchant harbour) of Piraeus although the existence of ship sheds near the port's entrance, at the Southeast, indicates a partial use for military purposes.

North of the ship sheds area was the main dock, separated by a "διάζευγμα" (=pier). The indicative stones ("όρος") that have been found determine the area of the "νορθημεία" (=the mooring sites) for the merchant and passenger vessels on both sides of the pier. In the northeastern cove a pier has been traced, probably related with the "μακρά στοά" (long arcade) that was located there. Four more stoaes were located in the eastern part of the port's basin, among which the most important is mentioned as "deigma" (sample's exhibition).

The northwestern bay was a shallow swampy area, considered as the "κωφός λιμνήν" mentioned in the written sources. At the entrance of this area what is mentioned, as "δια μέσου χώμα" (=earth in between) must be sought. The fortified promontory of Hiaetionia was closing the northwestern side of the basin (Imag. 1, 2).

### Technical features

Construction period (centuries)	5th B.C. - 4th B.C.
Port configuration	Natural Harbour, Inner Harbour
Port basin size	m <sup>2</sup>
Main wind direction	SW
Port land area	km <sup>2</sup>
Port entrance	At the SE, 50m. wide, safed probably with a chain (Papachatzis 1974, 98), among two rectangular towers of the city wall (Spon 1676, 234).
Change of sea surface elevation	1.5 m

Sedimentation	No
Outer port structures	Moles
Inner port structures	Quays, Piers
Land facilities	Shipheds, Temples, Store Buildings, Stoes, Defence Structures, Lighthouses
Construction method	Ashlars of sand stone. Several quarryies have been located in Hiaetionia promontory and Piraeus penisnsula.
Neotectonic history	
Shore line displacement	

### Function and operations

Fishermen and farmers inhabited the Piraeus peninsula until the dawn of the 5th century B.C. In the meantime Phaliro gulf was used as Athens harbour. Piraeus was extensively domiciled and the ports were constructed and walled after Themistokles urge, when he was elected as the "archon eponymous" in 493-492 B.C. Until the middle of the 5th century B.C. the entire Piraeus peninsula was fortified and connected to Athens with the so called "μακρά τείχη" (=long walls). At the same time the city of Piraeus kept growing.

The importance of Piraeus ports is directly related to the development of the Athenian state, so Kantharos became the prominent trading port of the Mediterranean during the 5th century B.C. The crucial character of Kantharos for Athens is depicted by the integrated program for urban development (hypodamian system), the fortification works for which Athens spent tremendous wealth (Isocrates mentions 1000 ingots for ship sheds building) and the governors and economical officers appointed to the port to sustain its impeccable function that are mentioned in the written sources.

The ports of Piraeus among which Kantharos is included paid host to the Athenian war fleet, which allowed the development of the Athenian democracy and hegemony. Simultaneously, trade fleets accompanied by war vessels ensured a constant supply of imports like grain and row materials and the export of the Athenian products like pottery, oil, honey, etc.

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