

**İSTANBUL KÜÇÜKÇEKMECE
GÖL HAVZASI KAZILARI
EXCAVATIONS OF KÜÇÜKÇEKMECE LAKE BASIN
(BATHONEA)**

BU KİTAP
MARPORT KÜLTÜR HİZMETİDİR





T.C.
KÜLTÜR VE TURİZM BAKANLIĞI



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ARKEOLOJİ VE SANAT YAYINLARI

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Yayımlayan
Nezih BAŞGELEN

Editör
Şengül G. AYDINGÜN

Yardımcı Editörler
Błażej STANISLAWSKI, Şeniz ATİK, Haldun AYDINGÜN, Dürdane KAYA, Ayberk ENEZ

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Tel.: 0212 249 92 26

www.arkeolojisanat.com / info@arkeolojisanat.com





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**CONCERNING THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE SITE EXCAVATED ON THE
KÜÇÜKÇEKMECE LAKE (TURKEY) - A STUDY OF GREEK AND LATIN
WRITTEN SOURCES ABOUT THE ANCIENT SETTLEMENT OF MELANTIAS**

Olga WEGLARZ*

The year 2015 marked the official beginning of the interdisciplinary research project “Istanbul/Constantinople-Küçükçekmece-the Destination Port of the Way from the Varangians to the Greeks, a Centre of “Byzantinization” of the Rus’ Community”. The project is carried out by the Centre for Late Antique and Early Medieval Studies at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Wrocław, in collaboration with the Departments of Archaeology of Kocaeli and Selçuk Universities. The main aim of this project is to localize the destination port for the Rus on the route from the Varangians to the Greeks, to reconstruct the cultural environment in which newcomers from Eastern Europe lived, and to determine the impact of this environment on their culture (Stanisławski et al. 2015: 2).

This project is based on the hypothesis that the settlement complex situated on the Küçükçekmece Lake was the destination port of the Rus’ route from the Varangians to the Greeks (Stanisławski et al. 2015: 8). Küçükçekmece is a lake in Turkey, located by the Marmara Sea, about 20 km west of the Bosphorus. The site being excavated is situated on the peninsula on the northwestern shore of the lake. One of the tasks of the project is to examine Greek and Latin written sources to identify this ancient settlement, as it has not yet been conclusively associated with a specific ancient city, village or suburb. However, there are several propositions for the identification of this site such as Bathonea, Rhegion and Melantias (Stanisławski et al. 2015: 41).

The Roman and Greek literary and epigraphic sources do not provide any information about the possible location and identification of Bathonea (Węglarz (msfp)). Rhegion, on the other hand, is an ancient city situated on the east shore of the lake. The Swiss archaeologist E. Mamboury excavated a site on the east shore of the lake in the first half of the twentieth century, and identified it with Rhegion on the basis of literary sources (Eyice 1977-1978: 63). The site, however, no longer exists. The name of Rhegion appears in texts only after the foundation of Constantinople in 324 AD. It appears for the first time as *mansio Regio* in “Itinerarium Burdigalense” written by an anonymous pilgrim from Burdigala, who describes his journey to the Holy Land in 333-334 AD (Itinerarium 1-26). The possible connection between Rhegion and the site currently excavated will be considered in the following stage of the project.

* Instytut Studiów Klasycznych, Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych, University of Wrocław,
o.weglarz@gmail.com

The main aim of this paper is to consider Greek and Roman literary references to Melantias. Analyzing the information about this settlement would help to resolve an important question for the above mentioned project: Can Melantias be associated with the site currently excavated by the Küçükçekmece Lake? In order to try to answer this question several Roman and Byzantine written sources about the history of the Roman Empire and some geographical works will be considered.

There are just a few references to Melantias. From these it can be inferred that this settlement was located in Thrace. There is a hypothesis that the name of Melantias was probably derived from the black ground between the coast and the limestone plateau.¹ The location of Melantias has not yet been determined. However, there are several Greek and Roman written sources that can provide us with some information about the surroundings of Melantias, the role of this settlement and important events that happened there or nearby.

The oldest of these sources is *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti*, which is a register of the stations and distances along various Roman roads and contains data from the second and third centuries AD. (Codrington 1903: 15). It is possibly based on official documents from the times of Julius Caesar and Augustus (Chisholm 1910: 148). A. Keulzer writes in his work on the road system in eastern Thrace about two main roads: the one from Belgrade to the Bosphorus, the *Via Militaris*, and the *Via Egnatia* (Keulzer 2011: 179). The *Via Egnatia* was the most important connection between the West and the East in this region; and contained two courses. The older one left the coast of the Marmara Sea after passing Heraclea and turned towards the north-east to lead to Byzantium through the hinterland. The newer course was probably built in the times of Constantine the Great and followed the coast line through Selymbria, Athyra and Rhegion to Constantinople (Keulzer 2011: 197). The above-mentioned *Itinerarium* lists Melantias several times (Parthey and Pinder 1848: 138, 323, 230, 332). This settlement appears in texts as Melantiada and is the last station on the *Via Egnatia* before Byzantium. In every case Melantiada is registered before Cenophrurium, whose location is also unknown. The *Itinerarium* indicates that the distance between Byzantium and Melantias was 18 miles (in one case 19 miles), and that between Melantias and Cenophrurium was 28 miles. As the Roman mile is established to be about 1480 m, thus, 18 miles would equal to 26,6 km and 19 miles to 28,12 km. This information indicates that Melantias should be situated in the interior part of Thrace, on the *Via Egnatia*, in the area between Athyra (modern Büyükçekmece) and Rhegion (modern Küçükçekmece). The fact that the information in the *Itinerarium Antonini* was based on previous data may lead to an assumption that Melantias could have existed in the first century AD.

The next text, in which information about Melantias can be found, is *Res gestae*, a work by Ammianus Marcellinus from the fourth century. Ammianus Marcellinus describes the attack of the Goths on Thrace and the counteractions of emperor Valens. He writes that in the year 378 Valens came to face the Goths in Thrace. The emperor spent little time in Constantinople before continuing west to set up a military operation in this region. Later he went to Melantias, as we read in the text:

“Ipse ad Melanthyada villam Caesarianam profectus, militem stipendio fovebat et alimentis, et blanda crebritate sermonum.” (Amm. Marc. Gest. 31.11.1).

“Valens himself moved to the imperial estate of Melantias, and tried to put the troops in good humour by pay, rations, and much flattering talk.” (Amm. Marc. Emp. 431).

Ammianus Marcellinus here gives the information that Valens was preparing his army while staying in Melantias. That means that there was a military camp either in or near Melantias. It is an interesting piece of information considering the fact that the nearest garrison to the capital was in Hebdomon, about 7 miles from the city³, whereas Melantias was about 18 miles away. Melantias was probably a better

¹ Oberhummer 1931: s.v. *Melantias*.

² Pryce et al. 1996: 942-943 s.v. *Measures*.

³ Mango 1991: 907 s.v. *Hebdomon*.

place to prepare an army in a situation when the Goths were near Adrianople, as it was located on the main road to this city, and thus, was in a favorable location, from which the army could set out. N. Lensky points out that Hebdomon was on the course of the *Via Egnatia* which led to Macedonia rather than to Thrace (Lensky 2004: 112). Ammianus Marcellinus then tells that Valens marched from Melantias to attack the Goths:

“ [...] e Melanthiade signa commovit, aequiperare facinore quodam egregio adolescentem properans filium fratris, cuius virtutibus urebatur.” (Amm. Marc. Gest. 31.12.1).

“So he marched from Melantias, eager to put himself on a level with nephew, whose exploits irked him, by some glorious deed of his own.” (Amm. Marc. Emp. 432).

The work of Ammianus Marcellinus adds to our knowledge about Melantias by giving information concerning a military camp in the area of this settlement, and confirms the assumption that Melantias was on the *Via Egnatia* leading through the central part of Thrace.

There is also information about Melantias in the *Chronicon* of Marcellinus Comes from around the sixth century. This settlement appears when Marcellinus describes the attack of Theodoric, king of the Goths, on the lands by the Marmara Sea in the year 487:

“Theodoricus rex Gothorum Zenonis Augusti numquam beneficiis satiatum cum magna suorum manu usque ad regiam civitatem et Melentiadam oppidum infestus accessit plurimaque loca igne cremata ad Nouensem Moesiae civitatem, unde aduenerat, remeavit.”⁴

“Theodoric, king of the Goths, was never satisfied by the favors of Zeno Augustus and made a hostile advance with a large force of his own as far as the royal city and the town of Melantias. When most places had been engulfed by fire he went back to Novae, the city in Moesia whence he had come.” (Croke 1995: 29).

Marcellinus writes that Theodoric reached the so-called *regia civitatis*, identified with Rhegion, and went to Melantias, referred to as Melantiana in the text. This information may indicate that Melantias was situated near Rhegion, but another hypothesis is also possible. Rhegion was placed on the secondary course of the *Via Egnatia* as the last station on the way from Selymbria to Constantinople, while Melantias was the last station on the old course of the *Via Egnatia*, from Cenophrurium to Constantinople. If Theodoric was attacking the lands on the Propontis, the best route for his army was the main road. So he could have moved along both courses of the *Via Egnatia* and his army could have reached the last stations of both roads, namely Melantias and Rhegion.

The next source is *Historiae*, written by Agathias. This historian from the sixth century mentions Melantias when he describes the Cutrigur Huns' attack on Thrace in the year 558:

“ταῦτά τοι ἢ τε ἄλλη Θράκη καὶ τὰ πρὸς αὐτῇ τῇ βασιλίδι πόλει χωρία ἔρημά τε ἦν καὶ ἀφύλακτα, ἐς ὅσον καὶ τοῖς βαρβάροις βατὰ εἶναι καὶ εὐεπίδρομα· ἐς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκεῖνοι ἤρθησαν ἀλαζονείας, ὡς καὶ ἀμφὶ Μελαντιάδα τὴν κόμην στρατοπεδεύσασθαι οὐ πολλῶ τῆς πόλεως διεστηκυῖαν, ὅτι μὴ τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ἑκατὸν πού σταδίους, παραρρεῖ δὲ αὐτὴν Ἀθύρας ποταμός, ὃς δὴ ὀλίγον τι προελθὼν καὶ ἐπὶ ἄνεμον καικίαν ἡρέμα ἐκκλίνας ἐς τὴν Προποντίδα τὸν ῥοῦν ἀπερεύγεται.” (Agath. Hist. 5.14.5)

“It was for this reason that the whole of Thrace including even the towns in the vicinity of the Imperial City were deserted and unprotected, as they were easy prey for the barbarians, whose insolence reached such a pitch that they actually encamped near the village of Melantias not more than one hundred and forty stades from the capital. Melantias is on the river Athyras which flows past the village and continues on its course for a short distance winding gently in a north easterly direction until it empties itself into the Propontis.” (Agath. The Hist. 140-150).

4 Marcell. Chron. s.a. 487.

The historian writes that Melantias was about 140 stades away from Constantinople. Even though the exact length of a *stadion* has not been established, it is known to equal 600 Greek feet. The standard foot's length in Byzantium seems to have been 0,3123 m⁵ but in practice the length fluctuated between 0,308 m and 0,320 m.⁶ So, one *stadion* could fluctuate between 184,8 m and 192 m. and thus, 140 stades would be between 25,874 km and 26,880 km, which is close to 18 Roman miles. This information would allow us to place Melantias again in the area proposed above, namely between the present Büyükçekmece and Küçükçekmece Lakes.

But Agathias also writes that Melantias is on the river Athyras. This river is identified with the modern Karasudere, which flows into the Büyükçekmece Lake, about 35 km southwest of Constantinople. In antiquity, the city of Athyra was situated at the mouth of this river. Agathias writes that Melantias should be located on the river Athyras; but the distance of 140 stades given by him does not correspond to the location of the river today.

Agathias also provides one more piece of information about Melantias:

“τούτου δὲ τοῦ πάθους τοῖς βαρβάροις ξυνεχθέντος αὐτίκα οἱ γε ἄραντες ἐκ Μελαντιάδος ὄχοντο ἐς τὰ ὀπίσω πεφοβημένοι.” (Agath. Hist. 5.20.3)

“Immediately after this disaster, however, the barbarians broke up camp and retreated in terror from Melantias.” (Agath. The Hist. 156)

He writes that the Huns encamped there. This information and the reference to the settlement as being on the river Athyras can confirm the hypothesis that Melantias was a military camp, because of its easy access to freshwater, which was necessary for the army.

The last written source to be considered in this paper is the *Suda*, a tenth century Byzantine encyclopedia of the ancient Mediterranean world. The information about Melantias was taken from Agathias; but there are some differences. According to the *Suda*, Melantias is:

“κόμη τῆς Θράκης ἢ νῦν παρὰ πολλοῖς λεγομένη Μελιτιάς, β' καὶ ρ' σταδίου διεστῶσα τοῦ Βυζαντίου. παραρρεῖ δὲ αὐτὴν Ἀθύρας ποταμός, ὃς ὀλίγον τι προελθὼν καὶ ἐπὶ ἄνεμον Καικίαν ὀλίγον τι ἠρέμα ἐκκλίνας ἐς Προποντίδα τὸν ῥοῦν ἀπερεύγεται ὅθεν καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἀκτῇ ἐπίνειον τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ φέρεται προσηγορίαν.”⁷

“A Thracian village, which many call Melitias, 102 stades distant from Byzantium. Beside it flows the Athyras River, which, after proceeding a little further and bending slightly in the direction of the Kaikia wind, empties into the Propontis; hence, the harbor-town at the end bears its name too.”⁸

In *Suda* another form of the name of Melantias is listed as Melitias. The biggest difference from the text of Agathias is the distance between Melantias and the capital. It is given as 102 stades, which would be calculated as between 18,849 km and 19,584 km. This indicates that Melantias, according to the *Suda*, should be situated above the Küçükçekmece Lake. But this location does not correspond to some other information from this text, because it is also stated that Melantias is situated on the river Athyras. This would be possible only if the course of the river Athyras in the Byzantine period was different from that of today. However, this would indicate a shift of about 15-20 km, which is quite impossible. Maybe the distance given is incorrect.

To summarize the information from literary sources: Melantias was the last station on the main road that is identified with the old course of the *Via Egnatia*, on the way from Cenophrurium to Constantinople.

5 Schilbach 1991a: 1325-1326 s.v. *Measures*.

6 Schilbach 1991b: 1708 s.v. *Pous*.

7 *Suda*: s.v. *Μελαντιάς*.

8 Whitehead, D. (Trans.), *Melantias, Suda* (Online) http://www.stoa.org/sol-bin/search.pl?db=REAL&search_method=QUERY&login=guest&enlogin=guest&user_list=LIST&page_num=1&searchstr=mu.463&field=adlerhw_gr&num_per_page=1 (10.03.2016, 18.30).

The distance from the capital to Melantias is either about 140 stades, which is about 18 miles or 26-27 km, or 102 stades, which is about 19-20 km. The site was on the river Athyras and was a favorable place for a military camp. The emperor Valens gave instructions to his army there; and the Huns encamped there during their attack. In the fourth century Melantias was an imperial estate, where the emperor Valens stayed. This settlement was attacked by the Goths at the end of the fifth century and by the Huns in the sixth century. Our research in the databases of the epigraphic sources from the region of Thrace shows that Melantias does not appear in any other inscriptions.

The difficulty in inferring the location of Melantias is caused by the discrepancy between its mentioned distance from the capital and the information that it was situated on the river Athyras.

In written sources, there is also information about one of the gates of Constantinople that was called the Gate of Melantias. Probably, the old course of the *Via Egnatia* entered the city through this gate; and thus, it was named after the last station on this road, namely Melantias. This is the supposition of A. van Millingen, who identifies this gate with the Page Gate on the Theodosian Wall (Van-Millingen 1899: 76). C. Mango agrees with the hypothesis about the derivation of the gate's name from Melantias. However, he proposes that it can be rather identified as the Gate of Prodomos, located on the Constantinian Wall (Mango 1985: 25).

The information from Roman and Byzantine literary sources does not provide an indication of the exact location of Melantias. We have already mentioned the *Itinerarium*, which was a written type of register. But there were also illustrated *Itineraria*. The only surviving relic of Roman maps is a mediaeval copy, called the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. It is assumed that this map is based on an earlier one from around the first century AD with some improvements made in the fourth century AD. Further additions and corrections were made in the fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth centuries (Bagrow 2010: 38). On this map Melantias is situated on a lagoon which can be identified with the present Büyükçekmece Lake.⁹

To conclude, due to contradictory information about the location of Melantias in written sources, it is impossible to infer the exact location of this ancient settlement. However, on the basis of these texts it can be said that Melantias was on the old course of the *Via Egnatia* and situated in the vicinity of the river Athyras. The information we have about the courses of the *Via Egnatia* indicates that the old one led to Byzantium through Cenophruruium and Melantias. And after the foundation of Constantinople, the secondary route was built and passed by Selymbria and Rhegion near the coast, leading to the capital. The site currently being excavated is situated on the north-western peninsula of the Küçükçekmece Lake at a distance of over 10km from the old course of the *Via Egnatia*, and thus, it is not on this main road. On the basis of written sources, it can be inferred that Melantias was a small settlement or a village. It may also be proposed that it was only a military camp and a station on the Roman road. Therefore, it is rather impossible that this small settlement could have any suburb or could stretch for 10 km to the south, up to today's excavation site.

Scholars have made some attempts to locate ancient Melantias and to identify it with a modern site. For instance, there is a proposition to identify Melantias with Meteoi/Meterai?, which could be located in the vicinity of Athyra.¹⁰ Another hypothesis states that Melantias was situated at the confluence of the Melas and Athyras rivers and located in a marshy area (Lensky 2004: 112). However, Melantias is usually placed around the northern ends of the lagoons, which are now occupied by the Büyükçekmece and Küçükçekmece Lakes, on the course of the *Via Egnatia* leading to the Melantias Gate (Mango 2000: 175). Finally, Melantias is also identified with Yarımburgaz (Talbert 2000: 790). None of these hypotheses indicate any location of Melantias on the western shore of the Küçükçekmece Lake, where the currently excavated site is situated.

⁹ *Tabula Peutingeriana* 8B1 Mel[.]ntiana (Talbert 2081). Reference (Online) <http://www.cambridge.org/us/talbert/talbertdatabase/TP-Place2081.html> (04.04.2016, 20.20).

¹⁰ Oberhummer 1931: s.v. *Melantias*.

Based on the analysis of Roman and Greek written sources it can be posited that Melantias should be excluded from considerations about the identification of the excavated site on the north-western peninsula of the Küçükçekmece Lake. In order to confirm this thesis in the following stages of the project, more recent descriptions by European travelers of their journeys to Thrace and Turkey and geographical works will be studied. This research may also contribute some information about the site being excavated, which could help to identify this settlement.

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