

Seascape archaeology of the harbour of Constantinople at Küçükçekmece Lake basin – land and underwater surveys, communication and economical networks, mobility

The aim of the project is to investigate the largest port of Constantinople, which operated between the 6th and 14th centuries. It is located in the basin of Lake Küçükçekmece on the Sea of Marmara, behind the walls of the City in the European part of modern Turkey. This port was previously completely unknown to the scientific world. Its size is evidenced by the fact that it surpasses all previously known ports of Constantinople put together. It was probably intended to serve the ships of foreign communities, which were not allowed to berth in the ports located directly within the walls of the Byzantine capital.

The study will follow the guidelines of so-called 'seascape archaeology', a field of study that deals with the relationship between man/culture and the sea. The first task is to document the harbour ruins on land and under water, including an excavation survey of the central harbour section. Part of the research will be carried out using underwater archaeology methods. Then, we will focus on investigating the functioning of the port through the prism of its communication network (on the basis of petrographic and typological analyses of stone anchors), trade (on the basis of findings of amphorae and imported artefacts) and the mobility of people (on the basis of strontium and oxygen isotopic analyses of human remains from burials unearthed within the port area).

The project also has conservation value. Following the decision of the Turkish Government, the 'Istanbul Canal' will be built. It will connect the Marmara and Black Seas. Our site, due to its location in the area of the planned investment, will be closed down in a few years. This is therefore the only and last chance to study this extraordinary heritage of our civilisation.