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PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENTS ON THE LATE ANTIQUE FORTRESS RISING ON YEŞİLADA (MÜSGEBİ) IN BOZBURUN DISTRICT

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Abstract

This paper examines a Late Antique fortress constructed on Yeşilada (Müsgebi), Bozburun (Muğla, Marmaris) District, over the insular sector of the ancient Karian Khersonesos/Rhodian Peraia. The islet, where the foundations of the fortification rise 20 meters above the sea level, lies 0,20 nautical miles opposite to the coast of Bozburun center. The enclosure, whose ramparts have been preserved to a remarkable extent, raises important questions concerning the defensive strategies employed by the inhabitants of the peninsula. These fortifications should be examined not only in relation to the territorial organization of the region but also in the context of its maritime frontiers. The fortified landscape, extending over an area of approximately 450 km² from the promontory of Loryma to the boundaries of modern Marmaris, provides significant insights into the military, political, and socio-cultural dynamics of the period. The objective of the study is to understand and explain the pattern and authenticity of the fortification at Yeşilada, which was documented in the field surveys that were carried out throughout the Bozburun Peninsula. Given the adequate repertoire of a smartly designed network of many defence structures of the Peninsula, this moderate size robust fortification demonstrates, in certain respects, hallmarks when assessed through a comparative approach based on the region-wide seen conventional strongholds. In the light of the remote sensing and field studies, Yeşilada is a typical well-preserved example of the oldest known marine fortresses in the Bozburun Peninsula. Even though it does not stand out as a unique entity, its general architectural features and pottery findings best symbolize the transformation of the Peninsula into a new sphere of influence, through the adoption of the Late Roman/ Early Byzantine styles.

Keywords: Bozburun, Yeşilada, Müsgebi, Fortress, Late Antique Period

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Bozburun Mahallesi Sınırlarındaki Yeşilada (Müsgebi) Üzerinde Yükselen Geç Antik Dönem Kalesi'ne İlişkin Ön Değerlendirmeler

Öz

Bu makale, Bozburun (Muğla, Marmaris) Mahallesi, Yeşilada'da (Müsgebi), antik Karia Khersonesos/Rhodos Peraia'sının adalar sektörü üzerinde inşa edilmiş bir Geç Antik Çağ kalesini konu almaktadır. Bozburun merkez sahilinin 0,20 deniz mili karşısında yer alan ada üzerindeki surun temelleri deniz seviyesinden 20 metre yükselmektedir. Büyük oranda bozulmadan günümüze kadar ulaşan surlar, Loryma'nın ucundan modern Marmaris'in sınırlarına kadar yaklaşık 450 km²'lik bir alanı kapsayan tüm peyzajın karasal ve kıyı kesimlerinde Yarımadalıların savunma stratejileri hakkında yeni sorular sunmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı, bölge genelinde gerçekleştirilen saha araştırmalarında belgelenen Yeşilada'nın düzenini ve özgün yönlerini anlamak ve açıklamaktır. Yarımada'nın akıllıca tasarlanmış pek çok savunma yapısı ağı hakkındaki yeterli bilgiler göz önüne alındığında, bu orta ölçekli sağlam tahkimat, bölge genelinde görülen konvansiyonel kalelere dayalı karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşımla değerlendirildiğinde, belirli açılardan ayırt edici özellikler göstermektedir. Uzaktan algılama ve arazi çalışmaları ışığında, Yeşilada, Bozburun Yarımadası'nda bilinen en eski deniz kalelerinin iyi korunmuş tipik bir örneğidir. Her ne kadar benzersiz bir varlık olarak öne çıkmasa da genel mimari özellikleri ve çanak çömlek bulgularıyla tipik Geç Roma/ Erken Bizans Dönemi üsluplarının benimsenmesi yoluyla Yarımada'nın yeni bir nüfuz alanına dönüşümünü en iyi şekilde sembolize etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bozburun, Yeşilada, Müsgebi, Kale, Geç Antik Çağ

Introduction

Bozburun Peninsula is one of the countrysides/ sub-regions of Karia, namely the Karian Khersonesos, in South West Türkiye. It is mostly defined by the Classical and Hellenistic Period in the literature (Fraser & Bean, 1954). The Karian culture spread across Anatolia from the Halikarnassos Peninsula to Kaunos across the southern part of the Meander, from the end of the 2nd millennium BC. Therefore, the Karians are also recognized as the original inhabitants of the Bozburun Peninsula (Herodotus.1.171.). The entire Peninsula, which appeared in the Athenian Tribute Lists (Καρικὸς φόρος) among the autonomous poleis of Karia, under the ethnicon XER, and liable for ca.3 talents, was frequented by partially Hellenized inhabitants, especially from the early 3rd BC century onwards, who adhered to their local codes in a socio-economic context. Polybius also records a slave population, which marked the region as much as any other (Polyb.30.24).

Tymnos (Steph.Byz.Τύμνος) is equated with modern Bozburun District in the Karian origin Peninsula. It was an integral part of the Rhodian Peraia during the Hellenistic period and was one of the demes that served the economic model shaped by agrarian activities through maritime traffic under the control of Rhodes. Moreover, the Peraians had strong socio-political ties with Rhodes. One can safely state that they could be missioned as administrators or court members at the Island. Apart from the groups that directly served the Karian and Rhodian ambitions of the time, there are opinions regarding the presence of mercenaries in Tymnos (Bru, 2020, pp. 150-169). However, in the light of a recently found inscription, this situation also points to foreigners' possible cult or religious association activity in the vicinity (Oğuz-Kırca et al., 2024, p. 6). Whatever the careers or qualifications of the actors operating in the periphery were, it is clear that Tymnos was a cosmopolitan settlement as per the requirements of the time.

The vast majority of the fortifications in the Bozburun Peninsula which form a robust defence network have hilltop character. The fort(let) fortress discussed in this paper is one of the well-preserved stationary watch points, as a marine base (a good many are known from Atlantic coasts) with quite tampered surface area, in littoral Tymnos. It is situated close by modern land (Fig. 1), on top of Yeşilada islet, also known as Müsgebi (Demirciler et al., 2024, pp.487-488; Ruggieri, 1989, pp. 349-350) and/or redirected as Patellina? (Ruggieri, 1989, p. 349). The fortification at Yeşilada, which is considered to have been actively used since the Late Antiquity, can be easily seen from the center of Bozburun. So why was it not built elsewhere? In the light of what has been found so far, especially regarding territorial fortresses in the region, and contrary to their possible missions of surveillance and control of economic lands, could Yeşilada have served a different purpose? This study has been launched in order to raise questions on such a problematic. Within this scope, the main purpose is to understand and explain the pattern and peculiarities of Yeşilada, which was documented in the field surveys carried out throughout the region. When an adequate repertoire of a masterfully designed network of defence structures of the

Peninsula is reconsidered, this relatively moderate-scale but robust fortress demonstrates, in certain respects, stylemarks that it developed according to the period, when assessed through a comparative approach based on the region-wide seen conventional fortresses.

The Essential Characteristics of Yeşilada Fortress: Preliminary Data and Observations

Yeşil Ada Fortress was last used during the Early Byzantine and Ottoman periods (Hild, 2019, p. 82; Oğuz-Kırca, 2014, pp. 278-281). About the earlier works or occupation of the island, the knowledge is still rather obscure.

The fortress has an elliptical form with a perimeter length of 470 m (Fig. 2-3). The area ascends towards the north. After a steep climb, the modern flagpole is erected at the point where the “upper castle” begins. The height of the ramparts measures between 2 and 3 m throughout the fortification where the average thickness of the walls reach 2,5 m.

The ramparts were constructed in opus mixtum technique. Parts of the walls were taken away to be used as building materials in the surrounding area. The ramparts are composed of an inner and outer wall constructed with a middle zone filled with chipped material (*aggrega*). Two larger bastions are located in the north and south (Fig. 3). Regarding masonry, the fortress offers parallels to its counterparts identified, particularly in the boundaries of the Peraian demes (Oğuz-Kırca, 2015, pp. 127-137; Oğuz-Kırca, 2016, pp. 133-135). The rampart system evokes the planning rules of Roman garrisons, and also provides indications of how the Romans arranged their fortifications (Campbell, 2006, p. 33; Coşkun, 2017, p. 93), exceptionally here without being bound with the topographical (regarding a wider area in a macro-context) features. Yeşilada fortress differs fundamentally from typical earlier Karian character fortresses of the region in terms of masonry, mortarless technique and positioning. Many fortified areas or buildings dating to the Late Antiquity in the Peninsula have in common the mortared masonry technique, built with small stones and enriched with tile fillings. Based on the scale of fortified

structures, the Yeşilada example is especially consistent with Korsan Kale in the east of Söğüt/ north of Taşlıca; and the watchtower on Kaletepe, northeast of the center of Bozburun, in which case the main difference of all of these fortresses (Yeşilada, Korsan Kale and watchpost in central Bozbrun) is related to Late Antique Period. In addition, this type of late period enclosures are located very close to the harbors.

Yeşilada Fortress is an enclosure with a quite visible interior design where one can still keep track of various in-situ architectural structures despite their disturbed contexts. The entrance point to the enclosure (namely the “main” gate with a width of 1,80 m) is nicely designed due south (Fig. 3; Fig. 4). Apart from this entry, there appear four other gate locations which are all implanted on the ramparts. The first gate (G1 in Fig. 3; Fig. 5), lying in the southwestern ramparts, proves a width of 80 cm. Along the western and northern walls are the spaces, probably built as military barracks. Apart from a rectangular plan structure (“Structure in Fig. 3; Fig. 6) which is directly 40 m northwest of the main entrance, one can barely come across clear architectural plan relating to the residential quarters. Some faint traces of a cluster of remains with collapsed entrances lie in the area where the W, NW and NE walls run. The structure marked on Fig. 6, covers an area of ca. 8,8 x 15,8 m². The walls, having a thickness of 1m rarely form a coursed pattern with polygonal stones filled with broken bricks and pottery.

The other two gates (G2 and G3 in Fig. 3; Fig. 7) are accessed from inside a group of rooms/ spaces in this section. The doors take a slightly trapezoidal form. The opening of the second gate varies between 60-80 cm from the lento/ lintel. Its height is 1,5 m and lateral depth is approximately 60 cm. The third gate reveals similar dimensions. This is also the sector where the height of the walls is clearly traceable. The fourth gate (G4 in Fig. 3; Fig. 8) lies to the immediate north of a covered cistern, which was recorded near the northern walls. Having a width of 1,20 m, this must be the rear gate which is often witnessed as a complementary part of the Roman fortification systems (Campbell, 2006).

At the heart of the fortress lies the main structure (“Principia ?” in Fig. 3; Fig. 9) which was previously identified as a chapel- an apsidal building consisting of three small naves with a central dome supported by four columns. Although very few has remained today, it was described as a structure (11x9 m²) with columns measuring 1.10 m on each side and with a central apse (3.65 wide and 2.10 deep) possessing a central window. (Ruggieri, 1989, pp. 349-350). Another view takes it as a Lascarid building which was originally constructed with Cyclopean masonry (Foss, 1998, p.170). Here is the core area that attracts attention with a series of spaces resembling a principia (a typical component of the Roman castra) (Lander, 1984, p. 59) function/equivalent complex, which is a large east-west oriented group of buildings designed on a higher elevation in the center. Some other structures, functions of which have not yet been identified can be seen close by this complex. The entrance (width 190 cm, height minimum 2 m, depth 65 cm) must have been roofed by a vault. The vaulted opening directly opposite the entrance measures 80 cm in width, has a minimum height of 160 cm from the ground and measures 75 cm in depth. In the center there lies a limestone/ pressing platform? with barely discernible channels, which has been recorded as having the widest channel (11-12 cm), found to date, over the region.¹ The press bed (Fig. 10) measures around 80 cm in diameter. Immediately below it, another wide non-in situ channel (of which a 60-70 cm section is visible) possibly heading to a dolium, was documented. The width of this channel is 17 cm.

Among the noteworthy artifacts, a marble element (Fig. 11), probably a mortar or grindstone, was documented. As frequently encountered in Tymnos and its periphery, combed-ware and body pieces thereof constitute the common findings in Yeşilada. Byzantine ceramics (Fig. 12) show continuity. Knurled (often carinated) sherds are also widely seen, which are known from Kiseli Ada, located on the opposite side, in the sandy depression called Adaboğazı (Adaboğazı).

¹ This is perhaps the fragmentary material which was once described as an octagonal Doric slab forming the altar of the chapel (Ruggieri, 1989, p.349), but it is doubtful.

Due to steep topography, the space between the outer boundaries of the ramparts and coastline is limited. No remarkable building group or settlement debris can be traced in this area.

Assessments and Conclusion

Yeşilada, matching a moderate-size fortress, demonstrates how the Late Antique military administrators chose and schemed their marine fortresses in the ancient Peninsula. The stone, as the main material for the construction of the ramparts and in-site structures, was carved at the islet where the fortress was built. Therefore, the fortress itself was a quarry, which was a common practice of the Roman military men. The ramparts, albeit demolished in parts, preserve their originality. Although some elements remain unexplained (also in the lack of an inscription), the overall integrity of the site is preserved.

The sea level was not the same two millennia ago (Flemming et al., 1973, pp. 48-53). The peninsula has suffered its share of earthquakes in the historical process and the settlement pattern has been affected over time. Rhodes and its surroundings were exposed to significant destruction, mainly by the earthquakes (Roussos, 2017, p. 45), the records of which start from 227 BC and continue with medieval chronicles (Ambraseys, 2009; Malalas.11.275, 16.406; Pausanias.2.7.1; 8.43.4; Polyb.5.88.1-4;). The last major movements of particular interest to this study appear to have occurred between 474-478 and in 515/516 and 554. Due to various natural processes mentioned above, the original elevation of Yeşilada Fortress from the former sea level should be considered higher. And what would this have changed?

During the Late Roman/Early Byzantine Periods, the Provincia Insularum (Province of the Islands), which included the Cyclades, North Aegean islands and the Dodecanese, was administered from Rhodes.² Nevertheless, the Peninsula was

² Rhodes continued to act the transporter and stopover point for wheat but lost her central role for the larger geography by its own. One of the features of the Island in the Early Byzantine Period, around 532-537 AD is known to have supplied building material (especially bricks for dome construction) for the Hagia Sophia. Among other items which

subjected to the Province of Asia (Roussos, 2017, pp. 30-31). These two administrative areas formed the Diocese of Asia. The fact that Rhodes was no longer in charge must have played a significant role in the choice of settlements or fortresses. Yeşilada Fortress/ mini garrison is also a typical case, shedding light on how the Romans, after taking over the sovereignty of land from the Rhodians (a discussion about the mercenaries can now be disregarded due to chronological delays in our problematic) established their military headquarters and settlements following the Pax Romana down to the Byzantine supremacy.

The whole space appears to be of military purpose. This is a criterion for comparison with territorial or hilltop fortresses of a purely military character in Southwest Anatolia. It should be recalled that in the previous studies, administrative and military types of fortresses were introduced for the Peninsula (Oğuz-Kırca, 2015, pp. 131-137). In addition to acropoleis with administrative functions, a special category of Peninsular fortresses has been documented as those that can also take the form of military-civilian settlements/ fortress settlements. The hilltop military and administrative fortresses of the region are characterized by the 4th-3rd centuries BC, in terms of construction techniques, availability of press stones, ceramic finds, etc. Again, in the light of the architectural patterns, considering that at least one phase overlaps, the common interval in which the fortresses were active has been determined as the Archaic or latest Classical Period to Late Antiquity (Demirciler et al., 2023, pp. 460-463). The main commonality of Yeşilada with the overwhelming majority of the territorial fortresses in the region is its apparent military purpose and

travelled from Rhodes to Constantinople were the lamps, double sided icons, etc. Alongside imports, a migration movement from Constantinople to Rhodes occurred during the 5th-6th centuries AD. Therefore, the cosmopolite structure of Rhodes continued into the later periods, especially following the fall of Constantinople in the 15th century AD when the artists also preferred to migrate. But for the second time in history, Rhodes regained her power and glory based on trade with the seizure of the Order of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem when the port took its modern form (Katsioti, 2015, pp. 180-182, 185, 187). Based on such knowledge, there is a possibility that human circulation concerned and affected the Peninsula, including the Tymnian khora.

architectural style. It can be stated that Yeşilada differs in terms of site selection, layout, interior plan and organization, as well as temporal discrepancy, and that it forms another typology in the intersection set of the topographical-temporal-functional contexts, which may need argument in a separate paper.

Architectural structures and surface material reflect the technical developments of their period as well as nicely slipped ceramic decorations. The masonry system is also associated with the technical fashion applied on the apsidal/religious structures widely documented on the Peraian islands and territorial sector, mirroring to an extent the ideas and beliefs of the Christian era. Yeşilada exhibits traces left by the Peninsulars since at least the 4th century AD but a safer interval calls attention to the 5th-6th centuries. The closest intact example in terms of masonry and architectural patterns is the Korsan Kale in Söğüt (Oğuz-Kırca, 2015, p.134), with the exception of those at Orhaniye and Selimiye (Ruggieri, 1989, pp.83-91). Regardless of its dual function of surveillance of both military and economic areas, Korsan Kale must have been one of the valuable spots in use until the middle of Late Antiquity (Demirciler et al., 2024, p. 485).

With the space evoking a principia³ (although having no relation to a “T” form street system that does not exist, either) which are often come across in the *castra* Romana, some basic features resemble those of a Roman project (Campbell, 2006). There is information that basilicas could be adopted from principia in the 5th century, e.g. in Al Miliaria in North Africa⁴, that survived into the Byzantine period (Margreiter, 2025, pp. 85, 87). The principia was often erected at the heart of a

³ Out of two core buildings which were situated at the heart of the Roman castra, a principia matched the headquarters fulfilling the administrative function. It was often erected near the other core building- the Praetorium that was used as the commanders’ residence (Lander, 1984, 59). A principia often possessed an open courtyard in the front and was furnished with offices behind. Formed as a complex of buildings, also depending on the scale of the fortification, a principia usually retained a religious structure/ basilica with a corridor and a commander speaking platform and, a sanctuary in the center of which the legion standards were preserved (Campbell, 2006, 37- 41).

⁴ cf. the three aisled basilica measuring 26.80x16 m² (p.85). For similar fortresses on Thrace and Dacia, see Dinchev, 2007, 479-545.

Roman fortress and that its orientation determined the orientation of an enclosure. The case of Yeşilada fortress, except for the tolerable shifts, matches the minimum requirements of a fortress designed with a robust rampart system with a main central building (Lander, 1984, p. 59. *cf.* Chester). If the building, which appears to have an apsidal plan (similar to the one on top of Kaledağ, just east of Taşlıca, Phoinix, Oğuz-Kırca, 2015, pp. 132-135), had a religious value, another commonality may be sought in a selection of fortified areas of the Peninsula and the list of questions can be enlarged thereupon, for the future campaigns. Can Yesilada be included in the “nest of cults” (Oğuz-Kırca, 2022, p. 70) that are prominently traced in the islands and nearby mainland? Whatever the details of the answer, the potentiality of such structures (Demirciler et al., 2023, pp. 461-462; Oğuz-Kırca, 2022, pp. 67-72) testify to the connection of Tymnos and its periphery to the diffusion of Christianity, which is also identified with martyrs/figures such as St. Kerykos over the Dodecanesian religious network (Katsioti & Mastrochristos, 2018). When the Peninsula was linked to Asia Diocesa, it would not be fanciful to suggest that the groups with a predominantly religious task took the lead or were intertwined with the military system. This situation presumably coincides the period when St. Kerykos’ cult was adopted in the region as well as the Dodecanesian network.

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Figures

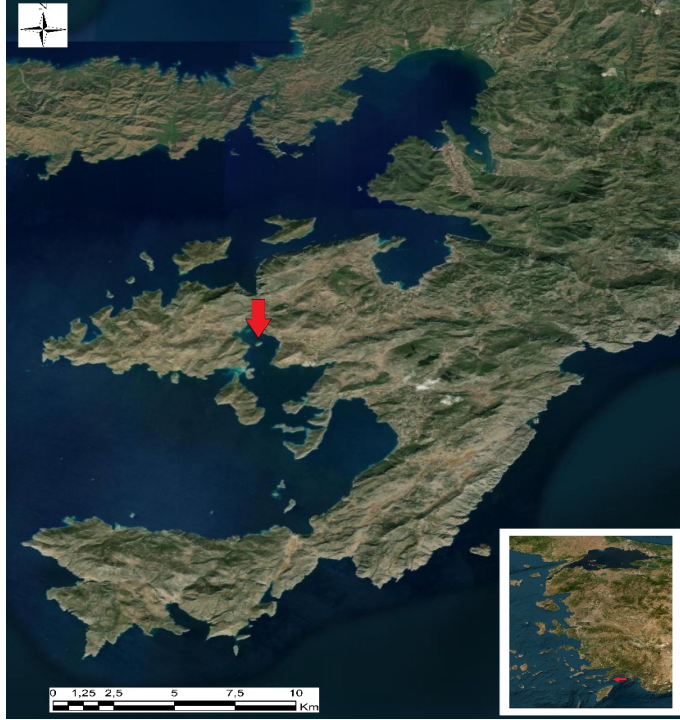


Figure 1: Map Showing the Location of Yeşilada (Müşgebi).

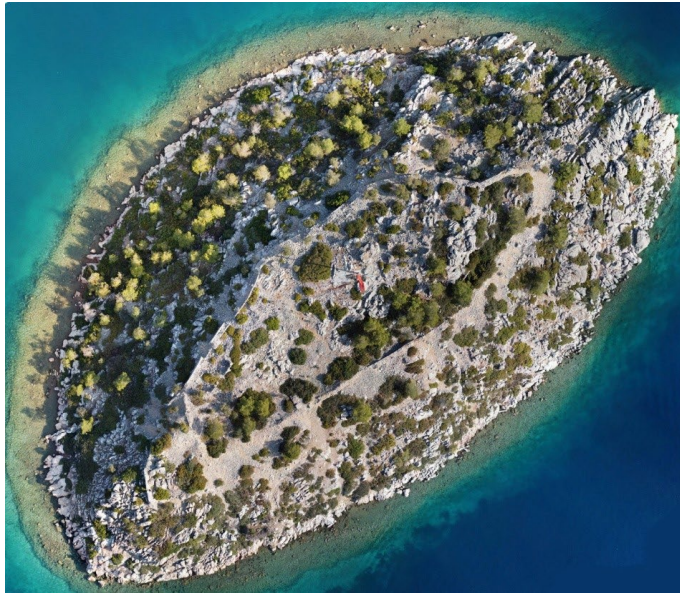


Figure 2: Aerial Image of Yeşilada.

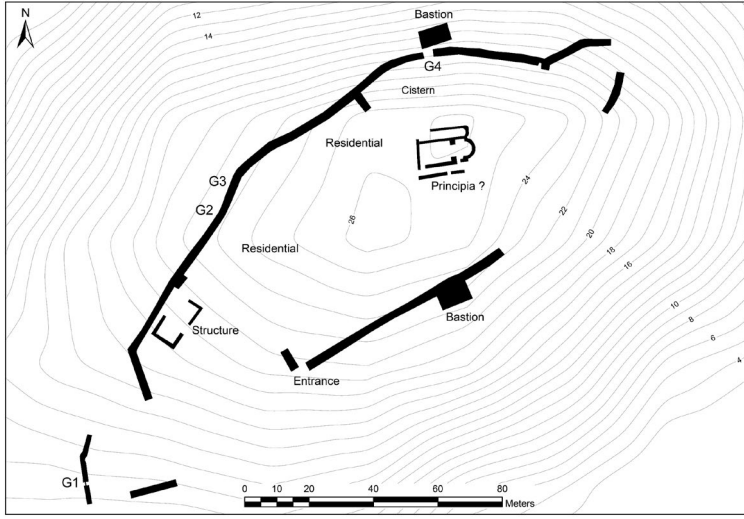


Figure 3: Plan of Yeşilada Fortress.



Figure 4: Main Entrance.



Figure 5: Gate 1.



Figure 6: Rectangular Structure.



Figure 7: Gate 2 and Gate 3.



Figure 8: Gate 4.

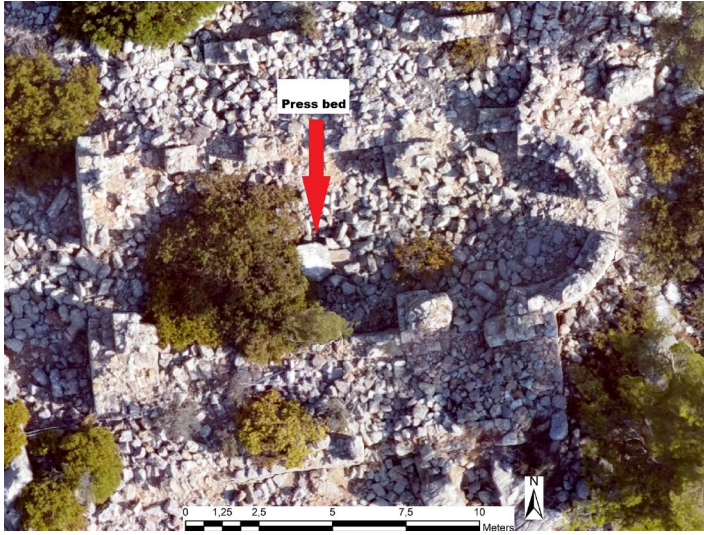


Figure 9: Aerial View of the Possible *Principia* Structure.



Figure 10: The Press Bed.



Figure 11: Marble Mortar / Grindstone Fragment.



Figure 12: Surface Ceramics of Yeşilada.