

THE ANCIENT HARBOUR OF PHALASARNA, WEST CRETE*

Phalasarna was a Classical and Hellenistic harbour town, which seems to have reached its peak in the late c. 4th B.C.. It is situated in far West Crete, and its location is strategic as it guards the trade routes from West Europe to Africa. In ancient times, the harbour of Phalasarna must have provided shelter, anchorage, and supplies to many passing ships, as it was the only safe and artificial harbour on the windy coast of West Crete.

Its *kleistos limin* was praised by many of the ancient geographers (Scylax, Stadiasmus, Dionysius Kalliphon), but the harbour seems to have been destroyed in the first centuries A.D. and never reinhabited. The Venetians list Phalasarna as a lost city. The harbour was tentatively identified in the 1860's by Captain Spratt, but not until last summer, when excavations uncovered harbour fortifications and ancient harbour debris, was the controversy over the location of the harbour completely settled.

We have uncovered one of the four fortification towers that surround part of the port. It is one of the best preserved ancient harbour towers yet found. It is built upon carefully carved bedrock, in an isodomic style, and without mortar.

The most heavily fortified harbour measures 75 x 100m, surrounded by towers, connecting walls, and quays. A narrow artificial channel connects it to the sea. Behind the most heavily fortified harbour seems to be a second one. Eleven nearly identical stones equally spaced at intervals of four meters are situated along the perimeter of this second port. A strong hypothesis is that these stones are the remains of 30m long ship-sheds. All of these features apparently belong to a military harbour. The location of the commercial harbour may be found with future excavation.

Elpida Hadjidaki

Department of Classical Antiquities
Chania, Crete, Greece

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