



Summary :

A city at the eastern tip of the bay of Finike, to the east of Myra; it was a member of the Lycian League. During the Early Byzantine period the city became a bishopric. Nowadays there are still maintained parts of its defensive wall as well as the location of a small theatre.

Geographical Location

Lycia, close to modern Kumluca

Historical Region

Lycia

Administrative Dependence

Province of Lycia

1. Sources and History

The ancient Lycian city of Gagai was located on the eastern extremity of the gulf of Finike, to the east of Myra. The location is today identified as Aktaş, very close to the village of Yenice and almost 11 km northeast of Kumluca.¹ The city was situated near the coast and it was built on a hill about 600 m high. The earliest mention of the city in antiquity comes from Pseudo-Skylax, in the 4th century B.C., who refers to it as "Gagaia". It is also mentioned by [Pliny](#),² who places it between Korydalla and [Rhodiapolis](#). Later mentions are those in the [Stadiasmus](#),³ the one by Stephanus Byzantius and that of Hierocles.⁴

The etymology of the name is related to two fables.⁵ According to the former, Rhodian settlers reached the coast and shouted to the natives "Ga, Ga", asking for land in the Dorian dialect, which the natives did accord to them. According to the second version, the Rhodian general Nemios was trapped with his ship in a tempest, after having defeated Lycian and [Cilician pirates](#). The sailors cried terrified "Ga, Ga", and when they finally reached the land, Nemios decided to found a city at that spot. The common ground between the two fables is that they attribute the foundation of the city to the Rhodians. Ancient sources, however, speak also of a mineral, namely "gagates",⁶ which, according to descriptions, was similar to brown coal (lignite). Travelers during the 19th century,⁷ however, do not mention such a mineral, whereas even today the only visible stone is white limestone, as attested also by the Turkish name Aktaş (Ak taş=white stone). It is possible that the bad quality of the local stone was responsible for the frequent use of [rubble masonry](#) as well as for the absence both of Lycian tombs (the construction of which demands a high quality sculpture) and of inscriptions.⁸

2. Archaeology

Nowadays the archaeological remains are located on the hill and are discerned in two zones. The upper level comprises a defense wall made of rubble masonry. On the northern side of the wall there is a gate about 1.5 m wide. On the summit of the hill there is a fort about 16 m long and 8 m wide. It is built with [ashlar masonry](#). Another building, to the northeast of the fort, built with the same method, constitutes a puzzle for archaeologists, as it comprises a cavity with three or four rows of seats, like a [synthronon](#) of an early Christian [basilica](#). The lower level of fortifications is situated almost halfway downhill and is probably of a later date. It protects the settlement only from the sea, whereas on the other side it ends at a sheer rock, further fortified with a wall wherever needed.

According to [Spratt](#),⁹ remains of buildings were scattered on the coastal plain at the bottom of the hill, dated to the Roman and Byzantine periods. They comprised parts of fortification walls and of an aqueduct, as well as of basilicas. These remains are not visible today. The only thing that still survives is the location of a small theatre, which, according to the testimonies of the inhabitants, was in good condition until 1960, which means that its architectural members were used by them as building material.



3. Religion

The lack of epigraphic material does not enlighten us on the gods worshipped at Gagai. The god [Apollo](#)¹⁰ is depicted on coins of the imperial period, which probably means that he was the patron god of the city.¹¹ On other coins, dated to the reign of Gordian III, Nemesis is depicted, but we can assume that this was due to an influence by Rhodiapolis at the time of the financial benefactions of Opramoas.¹²

During the Early Byzantine period the city was the seat of a bishop and, according to [Eusebius](#), it was comprised among the noteworthy cities of Lycia. However, we do not have enough evidence for the history of the city in the early Byzantine period.

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1. Bean, G., *Lycian Turkey: An archaeological Guide* (London 1978), p. 148 mentions Yenice as the closest village, at a distance of only 1.5 kms from the remains. Apparently Aktaş is a more recent Turkish name of the same village.
 2. Plin., *NH* 5.28.100.
 3. *Anonymi Stadiasmus maris magni* 235.
 4. Hierocl. *Synekd.* 683.3.
 5. *Etym.Magn.* 219, s.v. "Gagai".
 6. It is attested mainly in medical texts for its healing properties. See Galen, *Medic.* 75.12.203-4, Pseudo-Galen 29.14.402.6, 482.1, 19.725.15. *Orphic* 12.17.1. Dioscorides Pedanios 4.61.2 et al.
 7. Spratt, T.A.B. – Forbes, E., *Travels in Lycia, Milyas and the Cibyratis I/II* (London 1847) and Fellows, C., *Travels and researches in Asia Minor more particularly in the province of Lycia* (London 1852, repr. Darmstadt 1975), p. 366-367.
 8. This was at least Fellows' view, who placed however wrongly Gagai near the village Haciveliler.
 9. Spratt, T.A.B. – Forbes, E., *Travels in Lycia, Milyas and the Cibyratis I/II* (London 1847).
 10. Troxell, H.A., *The coinage of the Lycian League* (Copenhagen 1982), pl. 6, no. 39.1.
 11. Frei, P., "Die Götterkulte Lykiens in der Kaiserzeit", *ANRW II* 18.3 (Bonn-New York 1990), p. 1764.
 12. Frei, P., "Die Götterkulte Lykiens in der Kaiserzeit", *ANRW II* 18.3 (Bonn-New York 1990), p. 1815.

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	New York 1990, 1729-1864
	Troxell H.A. , <i>The coinage of the Lycian League</i> , American Numismatic Society, New York 1982
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Glossary :

	basilica
In ancient Roman architecture a large oblong type building used as hall of justice and public meeting place. The roman basilica served as a model for early Christian churches.	
	isodomic masonry (opus quadratum)
A type of masonry in which blocks of equal length and thickness are laid in courses, with each vertical joint centered on the block below.	
	rubble masonry
A building technique that employs rough, unhewn stones of various size, set in mortar in irregular courses.	
	stadiasmos, the
Type of geographical text that gave information on distances among cities or ports in antiquity. The father of this work is considered to be Timosthenes of Rhodes.	
	synthronon
Rows of built benches, arranged in a semicircular tier like a theatre, in the apse of a church. On these benches the clergy sat during Divine Liturgy. The bishop sat on the cathedra at the top of the synthronon.	

Sources

Anonymi Stadiasmus maris magni 235.

Plinius, *Natural History* 5.28.100.

Galen, *Medic.* 75.12.203.4.

Diosk. *Ped.* 4.61.2.

Hierocles, *Synekd.* 683.3.

Orphic 12.17.1.

Pseudo-Galen 29.14.402.6, 482.1, 19.725.15