

# SOLOI SOLI POMPEIOPOLIS

Soli Pompeiopolis, situated in Mezitli-Viranşehir 11 km west of Mersin, is one of the nearest ancient sites to the city center.



The excavations that are being conducted since 1999 reveal that the city was one of the most important harbours in the eastern Mediterranean region since the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The Colonnaded Street (cardo maximus) located on the north-south axis and monumental architectural remains in its environs : the theater on the slope of the mound, the harbour, the bath, the monumental tomb of Aratos, the remains of the fortification walls visible in the east of the harbour and other remains represent the monumental Roman period. According to a commemorative coin printed during the Antoninus Pius rule to celebrate the 209<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the refounding of the city, Soli-Pompeopolis was founded in 66/65 BC by Pompeius the Great (Pompeius Magnus 106-148 BC). Strabo, 14.5.8 (671); Plutarch, (Pompeius, 28); Dio (36, 37); Pomponius Mela (13, 71) wrote that Pompeius the Great settled some of the pirates who were forgiven and veterans in the city and renamed it after his name Pompeiopolis.

The former name of the city was Soli. Diegenos Laertius (Solon 1, 51) asserts that the name of the city was originated from Solon who was once served as ruler of Soli. Solon (630-560 BC) both gave his name to the city and settled the Athenians in there. The word "solecism", a grammar term which means a syntactical error and a non standard usage of language, in western languages was derived from Soli. The inhabitants of Soli who were settled by Solon were notoriously using a corrupted form of the Athenian dialect, full of solecisms. The name Soli was first used by Hesiod. According to Hesiod, after the Trojan War, Amphilocus, the seer, son of Amphiaraus, was killed by Apollo and buried at Soli. One of the golden ages for Soli was during the Hellenistic period (330-30 BC). Alexander the Great surrendered the city without any resistance before his victory against the Persians at Issos. He offered sacrifices to Asclepius for the recovery of his illness at Tarsus. He also conducted his army in procession, celebrated a torch race and held athletic contests and musical performances (Anabasis 2.5.7). Alexander imposed upon the inhabitants a fine of 200 talents of silver, because they were more inclined to favour the Persians than himself and granted them the authority over their land. Stoic philosopher Chrysippus whose father immigrated to Soli from Tarsus, comic poet-playwright Philemon and Aratus, author of Phaenomena written in verses may be cited among the famous citizens of Soli in the Hellenistic period (Strabo 14.5.8).

The Armenian King Tigranes attacked and plundered the town and forced people to resettle in his newly founded capital city Tigranocerta in the 70s BC to take part in construction works. In 68 BC, they were allowed to return to their homeland. The year 67 BC was a turning point and a new beginning in the history of the city. The Roman general Pompeius came to the region in 67 BC to cease the disorder. It was during Pompeius' reform program that the Romans took control of Cilicia (Cilicia Campestris/Pedias) region. The



Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's visit to Soli Pompeiopolis May 21 1938

city was re-founded by Pompeius and it was renamed Pompeiopolis as a Roman city in 66/65 BC Pompeius settled veterans and ex-pirates and bestowed the status of "free city" (civitas libera) to Pompeiopolis.

Soli Pompeiopolis was frequently visited by British and French travelers in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The plans and gravures drawn by these travelers were found in the memoirs, journals and publications related to the history and archaeology of the city. Charles Robert Cockerell (1810-17), F. Beaufort (1811), John MacDonald Kinneir (1813-14), W. M. Leake (1824),

J. A. Cramer (1832), L. De Laborde (1838), V. Langlois (1852-53), W. Barker (1853), W. Barlett (1834-35, 1842-45 ve 1853), Charles Texier (1862), P. Trémaux (1863), E. J. Davis (1875), V. Cuinet (1890), G. Alishan (1899) may be cited among the noteworthy travelers.

One of the most precise plans of Pompeiopolis was drawn by British Admiral F. Beaufort. In this plan, the theater situated in the north-east of the harbour, Soli Höyük adjoining the theater, the Colonnaded Street, walls and towers around the city are clearly visible.

Another well-known figure, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and the first president of the Turkish Republic visited Soli Pompeiopolis together with the Governor of Mersin, Ruknettin Nasuhioğlu and the Mayor, Mithat Toroğlu on May 21 1938. It was his last visit to an archaeological site before his death.

Soli Pompeiopolis is famous in the field of archaeology for the hoard consisting of weapons and seals from the Middle Bronze Age which are claimed to be found in the site and these are now exhibited in the Berlin Staatlichen Museen.

## Archaeological Excavations

Excavations are being conducted under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Remzi Yağcı since 1999, by Mersin University (1999-2003) and by Dokuz Eylül University (2004-present) authorized and sponsored by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Excavations are being carried out in two different areas:

## Soli Höyük

According to Strabo, Soli Pompeiopolis is located on the border between Plain Cilicia (Cilicia Pedias/Campestris) and Rough Cilicia (Cilicia Trachea/Aspera) which are two geographically distinct regions (14. 5. 8). The excavations that are being conducted since 1999 reveal that the city was one of the most important harbours in the eastern Mediterranean region since the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC. The theater of Soli-Pompeiopolis which was re-founded in 66/65 BC adjoins to the northwest slope of the mound.

## Late Bronze Age

Çukurova region was located within the borders of Kizzuwatna in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC, during the Hittite Imperial period. The case-mate fortification walls that surrounded the mound which was located on the border between Kizzuwatna and Tarhuntassa regions in the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC reveal the extensive defense system.



Juglet, Hittite Imperial Period

The Muwazi bulla dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC, a hieroglyphic seal impression on a pottery handle belonging to the city lord Targasna dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC and a seal impression which belonged to a soldier, Parnapi, found within a cremation urn type grave dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC may be seen as evidence of a hierarchical society at Soli in the Late Bronze Age

Monochrome ware with potmarks, string-impressed wares, cross-hatched decorated pottery, wavy line pottery, Cypriot White Slip milk bowls, Red-Lustrous Wheel made ware (pilgrim flasks and arm-shaped vessels) are among the most characteristic ware of the period. The presence of a mould made of sandstone consisting of an axe and a sickle is a clear indicator of the metal craftsmanship in the city. There are different suggestions on the ancient name of the city. The name of Soli in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC might have been Ura or Ellipra.



Fikellura Krater Fragment, Archaic Period



Parnapi Seal Impression, 13<sup>th</sup> century BC

## The Iron Age

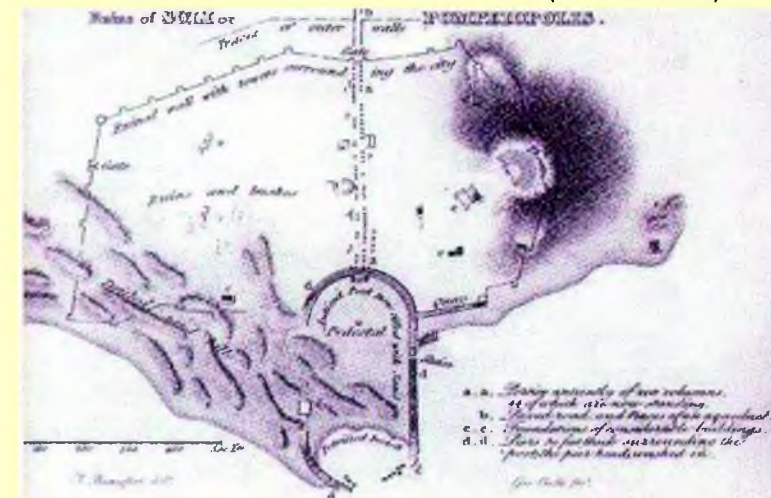
The Iron Age at Soli Höyük is represented by a rich ceramic repertoire in parallel with Tarsus. Most of them are dated to the Middle to Late Iron Age. Body fragments of concentric circles with or without metopes and those with horizontal bands, monochrome (purple, black, brown) or bichrome ware (black on red) are examples of the Iron Age repertoire and most of them are locally produced or related to Cyprus.

## The Archaic Period

The architectural terra cotta excavated in the western and eastern slopes of the mound are the main group that represents the Archaic period. Architectural plaque fragments with depictions of sphinx and male figures, roof tiles with lotus-palmette decoration, fragments of antefixes with volute-palmette decoration, sima fragments with meander reliefs and waterspouts are unique finds in Cilicia. Their presence at the acropolis of Soli seems to strengthen the arguments on the East Greek colonization (apoikia) and its borders. Bird bowls from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, oinochoe sherds in Wild Goat Style, wavy lines from the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Ionian bowls, East Greek lebetes and Corinthian pottery sherds are other clear indicators of the close relations of Soli, a Rhodos- Lindos colony, with the Greek world in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.



Terra Cotta Plaque, Archaic Period



F. Beaufort 1817, Karamania 249



View of Pompeiopolis from the Theater (Approx. 1862-1868)  
P. Tremaux, National Gallery of Canada (No: 33344.14)

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## The Classical Period

The classical period is represented by fewer examples. A red-figure pottery sherd with a nude female together with an Eros figure holding a box and flax and other sherds with Dionysus-Menad decoration may be cited among the finds from the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.



Coin of Soli, 5<sup>th</sup> century BC

## The Hellenistic Period

Most of the pottery from the Hellenistic Period come from the thick ash filled layer under the Roman theater: glazed and roulette-palmette impressed pottery, moulded bowls (Megarian bowls), West Slope pottery, terra cotta lamps, stamped amphora handles from Rhodos, Knidos, Thasos and Cyprus, unguentarium, pyramidal or disc shaped weights, Tanagra type terra cotta figurine heads are among the most remarkable Hellenistic examples. The presence of a mould of a seated goddess (Kybele?) provides evidence of the production of this kind of figurines at Soli.

## The Roman Period

The latest remains and finds of Soli Höyük are a defense tower which destroyed most of the levels in the mound, a broken block with inscriptions of the names of the mayors of Pompeiopolis, terra sigillata pottery, and the theater of the city which adjoins the mound. A villa dated to the Byzantine period is located on the southern slope of the mound.



Soli Höyük

## The Colonnaded Street

The Pompeiopolis Colonnaded Street was 350 m long constituting the main axe of the city, only 33 columns are still preserved. Visible architectural elements on the street (columns bases, column drums, capitals, friezes and cornices) are shattered around due to an earthquake.



Head of Asclepius, Roman Period

There are similar colonnaded streets in Diocaiserea, Hieropolis, Kastabala and Anazarbus in Cilicia and in Apemeia and Palmyra in Syria. Inscriptions on the consoles used to be dedicated to Roman emperors and members of the imperial family and to high officials in the eastern Roman tradition. These consoles were either monolithic or they were embedded to the column drum through a niche.



Dionysus- Pan- Panther Statue Group, Roman Period

The statue of the goddess Nemesis excavated in 2003 is the first and only console statue that has been unearthed so far. Group statues of Dionysus, Pan and a panther and another one consisting of Asclepius, Telesphorus and Hygieia, and the statue of the soldier-emperor Balbinus (238), a similar of which was found in Piraeus and the statue of Nemesis carved in the local style have been unearthed during excavation works since 2000 and they are all exhibited in Mersin Archaeological Museum. Another statue of a high official from Cilicia found in Pompeiopolis which is exhibited in Adana Archaeological Museum bears stylistic similarities with the statue of Trajanus Decius (249-251). All these statues are dated to the Severian period and later.

Soli Pompeiopolis offers a wide repertoire of inscriptions. The earliest inscription is dated to Augustan period. There are also inscriptions on the consoles that are dedicated to Hadrianus and Commodus. Other console inscriptions are dedicated to M. Aurelius Artemidoros, the priest, Armenius Peregrinus, the Consul (probably in 244) and other three beneficiaries, one of whom was a woman. These inscriptions are dated to a period from the Augustan period to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

The column capitals at Soli-Pompeiopolis are in Corinthian order. Some of the capitals are decorated with floral designs whereas others are decorated with human or mythological figures. It is possible to see the figures from the Greek-Roman Pantheon on these capitals: Zeus, Athena, Aphrodite, Artemis, Pan, Satyr, the Dioskouroi... These capitals are usually dated to the Severian period (193-235) and to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Emperor Hadrianus who visited Pompeiopolis in 130 AD, started renovation work in Pompeiopolis as it was the case in other cities.



Western Colonnade of Pompeiopolis



Corinthian Capital with a Mythological Figure

The opus sectile floor and a small church whose apse was built between two columns and a golden parure may be cited among the most remarkable finds from the early Byzantine period and are dated to the period before the 525 earthquake.



Apollo Statuette, Roman Period

## The Harbour

The final version of the harbour of Pompeiopolis was built in the Hadrian period. This version can be seen on a Roman imperial coin of Antoninus Pius that was printed in the 209<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the re-founding of the city (66/65 BC). There is a divine figure on this coin which most probably represents a local deity related to river, Portunus or Oceanus, or all three of them. A closer inspection of the coin reveals the two storey harbour. A lighthouse is visible at the end of the western mole and a deity statue which holds a torch is situated on the eastern mole. On the roof of the harbour jar-like objects are perched at regular intervals and a torch is seen between the first two. These torches are thought to be used to illuminate the harbour.



Roman Imperial Coin of Antoninus Pius 143/144 (Nau Arch. 2010, 395)

SOLOI  
SOLI POMPEIOPOLIS

MEZİTLİ / MERSİN / TÜRKİYE



Pompeiopolis Harbour, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (C. Brandon) NAUTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY, 39.2, 392.2

The moles are 320 m long and 180 m wide. The construction work of the Pompeiopolis harbour lasted from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the middle decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The presence of the volcanic ash (pozzolona), a construction material found near the site of Puteoli in the Bay of Naples widely used in the Mediterranean harbours in the Roman period is determined by ROMACONS (Roman Maritime Concrete Study). This material is composed of sands rich in aluminosilicates which reacted with lime in the presence of water to produce a series of hydrated calcium aluminates and silicates that caused the mortar to set into a solid mass with the aggregate even in the absence of atmospheric carbon dioxide, a situation characteristic of underwater structures.

Soli Pompeiopolis is one of the biggest harbours in the Eastern Mediterranean where harbours played an essential role for trading crops and olive oil, for providing military security as well as for the acquisition of timber and mineral reserves.



We express our gratitude to Uğur Yıldırım, the Mayor of Mezitli Municipality

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