

TRADE, STRATEGY AND COMMUNICATION ON THE ROMAN
NORTH-EAST FRONTIER

ROMA'NIN KUZEY DOĞU SINIRINDA TİCARET, STRATEJİ VE ULAŞIM

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Abstract: The reorganisation of Pontos that Pompey carried out after defeating Mithradates VI Eupator has traditionally been seen as an example of enlightened Roman policy towards the provincials, which included the introduction of civic self-government and the promotion of commercial life. These goals Pompey attempted to achieve by establishing five urban communities along an existing east-west artery known as the “Pontic road”. A closer examination of the textual evidence and the actual remains of the “Pontic Road”, however, indicate that the road had not been a trade route of any significance before the Roman conquest and that the motives behind Pompey’s dispositions were of a strategic, rather than of a commercial nature.

Keywords: Pontos • Roman Policy • Pompey • Routes • Urbanization

Öz: Mithradates VI Eupator’un yenilgiye uğratılmasının ardından Pompeius tarafından Pontos’un yeniden düzenlenmesi, eyaletlerdeki kent otonomluğuna müdahale ve ticari yaşamın tesisi hususundaki Roma Politikasını aydınlatması bakımından örnek teşkil etmektedir. Pompeius, “Pontos yolu” olarak bilinen ve doğu-batı istikametinde hâlihazırda bulunan anayol üzerine beş kent kurarak söz konusu amaçları hayata geçirmeye çalışmıştır. Daha detaylı bakıldığında yazılı kaynaklar ve “Pontos yolu”nun kalıntıları söz konusu yolun Roma işgalinden önce ticari bir güzergâh olmadığını ve Pompeius’un düzenlemelerinin de ticari olmaktan ziyade stratejik olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pontos • Roma Politikası • Pompeius • Rotalar • Kentleşme

1. Introduction: From Mithradates VI to Pompey

In 66 B.C., the Roman general Gn. Pompeius was given supreme command of all Roman forces in the east, where the legions under the command of L. Licinius Lucullus had for some time been engaged in a campaign against Mithradates VI of Pontos. Many Romans, so Plutarch informs us, had been uneasy with the proposed change of command, which would not only deprive Lucullus of the credit for the ultimate victory for which he and his soldiers had worked hard; it would also place in the hands of one man, Pompey, a concentration of powers almost comparable to those of a dictator¹.

In the event, Pompey lived up to both the positive and the negative expectations of his contemporaries. On the negative side, Lucullus was relieved of his command, his dispositions were reversed, and he himself was forced to wait three years before celebrating a triumph paltry compared to that of Pompey². On the positive side, Pompey succeeded in cornering Mithradates near Zara in the upper Halys valley, then pursued him into the valley of the Lykos where Mithradates encamped on a hill near Dasteira. After a siege lasting forty-five days, the starving army of the Pontic king

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¹ Plut. *Pomp.* XXX. 3-5.

² Plut. *Luc.* XXXVI. 4.

broke out and fled eastwards, but Pompey immediately caught up with the forces of Mithradates, which were all but annihilated. The king himself managed to escape with a small force and eventually made his way to the Crimea, where he met his death a few years later.

Unable to apprehend Mithradates, Pompey turned his attention to Armenia³, where, in the summer of 66, he accepted the submission of king Tigranes, who was recognized as king and ally of the Roman people on condition of paying an indemnity to the Romans and renouncing his claims to Syria, Galatia, Phoenicia and Cilicia⁴. Although it was already autumn, Pompey continued with his army into the Caucasus. He wintered in the territory of the Albanians, on whom he inflicted several defeats in battle, and came within a few days' march of the Caspian Sea before turning back towards Armenia and Pontos.

Having taken the lesson of their earlier conflicts with Mithradates, where the Pontic kingdom had raised itself from defeat to challenge the hegemony of Rome in Asia Minor, the Romans had no illusions about a peaceful settlement. The objectives of the Third Mithradatic War were the dissolution of the Mithradatic kingdom and its reorganization under Roman control. Indeed, at a time when Lucullus was still in supreme command, the Senate sent a ten-man "organizing committee"⁵ which, however, on its arrival (in the summer of 67 B.C.) had found nothing to organize.

With Mithradates out of the way, the task of organizing the new territories was now taken up by Pompey, who spent the winter of 65-64 B.C. in Amisos (Samsun). The temple-states of Komana, Zela and Ameria retained their semi-independent status. The remaining, greater part of Mithradates' kingdom was incorporated as a Roman province. The new provincial territories included the valleys of the Lykos and Iris rivers as well as the Phazemonitis, the Paphlagonian seaboard and the valley of the Amnias river. Together, they formed a land-bridge between Pontos in the east and Bithynia in the west. The inland rump of Paphlagonia became a client kingdom on terms similar to those of Armenia, divided between two native dynasts, Attalos and Pylaimenes⁶.

2. The Pompeian Organization of Pontos: Ends and Means

The campaigns of Pompey are comparatively well described by ancient writers: Strabo, Plutarch, Appian and Dio Cassius amongst others. The subsequent organisation of the conquered territories has not received nearly the same attention in the ancient sources, and it is fair to say that our current image of the Pompeian provincial organization is based on 5% ancient evidence and 95% historiography. This needs to be borne in mind in any serious attempt to reconstruct Roman policy on the north-eastern frontier.

According to Strabo, Pompey divided "*the remainder* [i.e. the part not assigned to dynasts] *into eleven city territories (πολιτεῖαι) and attached it to Bithynia, combining both into one province*"⁷. Scattered throughout the text of book 12 of his *Geography*, Strabo gives the names of seven cities

³ Cass. Dio XXXVI. 50.

⁴ Plut. *Pomp.* XXXIII. 4.

⁵ Cass. Dio XXXVI. 46. 1.

⁶ Magie 1950, 372.

⁷ Strab. XII. 1. 3. Compare, however, XII. 3. 6: "*the Pontic province, which is joined to Bithynia*". For the view that Pompey attached the conquered territories to the existing province of Bithynia, see Wellesley 1953, 294; Wesch-Klein 200; Esch 2011, 49; Dan 2013, 29-31. For the opposing view that *Pontus* was the name of the eastern part of the republican double province *Pontus et Bithynia*, see Mitchell 2002, 48-49.

which had been founded or refounded by Pompey: Nikopolis⁸, near the site of his final victory over Mithradates; Diospolis, formerly Kabeira⁹ (later renamed Neokaisareia); Magnopolis, formerly Eupatoria¹⁰; Neapolis¹¹ (later renamed Neoklaudiopolis); Pompeiopolis¹²; the temple-state of Zela¹³; and Megalopolis (later renamed Sebasteia)¹⁴. The identity of the remaining four cities needed to make up a total of eleven remains a matter for scholarly debate¹⁵.

Most twentieth-century historians have seen the creation of seven new “Pontic” cities as an expression of the same organizational genius that Pompey had displayed on earlier occasions (e.g., his division of the Mediterranean into theatres of action during his campaign against the pirates): a single, comprehensive scheme for the Roman administration of the newly conquered territories. To quote some examples:

“Doch sie [die Quellen] lassen erkennen, dass er vom Anfang an die Gesamtheit der Fragen in Betracht zog, die durch den Krieg gegen Mithradates und Tigranes im Osten aufgerollt wurden, und dafür eine ausgesprochene imperiale Lösung, das heißt eine organisatorisch klare Eingliederung der eroberten Gebiete in das römische Reich, anstrebte ... In der Nähe des Ortes der Entscheidungsschlacht gegen Mithradates gründete er in Kleinarmenien die ‘Siegstadt’ Nikopolis ... ein kleines Vorspiel zu der großartigen politisch-organisatorischen Tätigkeit, die er in den nächsten Wochen in Amisos (Samsun) entfaltete, wo in einem Zeitmaß und einheitlichen Schwung, deren die römische Republik bisher noch nie fähig gewesen war, die gesamten Verhältnisse der beiden ihm unterstehenden kleinasiatischen Provinzen geordnet wurden”¹⁶.

“The speed and efficiency with which the task was accomplished cannot but call forth real admiration. Aided, perhaps, by competent advisers who were acquainted with local conditions, Pompey proceeded to make arrangements for the future which showed that his ability as an organizer was in no way inferior to his skill as a general”¹⁷.

“Selten wurde zur Zeit der Römischen Republik die politische und administrative Ordnung eines neu unterworfenen Großraums so systematisch konzipiert, wie dies hier von Pompeius erfolgte ... Als Instrument seiner Aktivitäten standen Pompeius dabei einmal Städtegründungen, dann die Formierung größerer regionaler Einheiten um zentrale Städte zur Verfügung ...”¹⁸.

“Andererseits bewies er bei der Neuordnung der römischen Klientelreiche und – noch viel mehr – der für Rom erworbenen, also in der Zukunft direkt beherrschten Regionen großes

⁸ Strab. XII. 3. 28; cf. Cass. Dio XXXVI. 50; App. *Mithr.* 105.

⁹ Strab. XII. 3. 31.

¹⁰ Strab. XII. 3. 30; App. *Mithr.* 115.

¹¹ Strab. XII. 3. 38.

¹² Strab. XII. 3. 40.

¹³ Strab. XII. 3. 37.

¹⁴ Strab. XII. 3. 37.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Olshausen 1980, 906-907 with n. 11; Mitchell 1993, 41; Arslan 2007, 487-493.

¹⁶ Gelzer 1949, 103; 105.

¹⁷ Magie 1950, 368.

¹⁸ Christ 2004, 79.

*politisches Organisationsgeschick*¹⁹.

When viewed against the evidence of the ancient sources, however, three problems catch the eye. First, the need for self-sustaining administrative units was hardly the only motive behind Pompey's city foundations. No less important may have been his desire to equal and if possible, surpass the achievements of Alexander the Great. Pompey's assumption of the epithet *Magnus* as his *cognomen* is in itself an expression of this ambition; another is his expedition to the Caucasus, bringing him into parts where not even the great Alexander had ventured²⁰. Whatever the *imitatio Alexandri* may have meant to Pompey personally – and a rational twenty-first-century-observer should not underestimate its importance in a world where leaders genuinely believed themselves to be divinely inspired – it was part and parcel of Pompey's public image²¹.

Another problem with the theory of Pompey's city foundations as part of a unified policy is their date. According to Cassius Dio²², Pompey founded Nikopolis with soldiers who were wounded or had reached the end of their service (τοῖς τραυματίαις καὶ τοῖς ἀφηλικεστέροις τῶν στρατιωτῶν) after a detachment of his men had failed to catch Mithradates, but before settling the Armenian question. Appian²³ places it immediately after Pompey's intervention in Armenia, but also after Pompey's expedition to the Caucasus; clearly the two are not drawing upon a common source.

It is notoriously difficult to extract a coherent chronology of the Mithradatic wars from the ancient narratives. The statement of Dio that the wounded and superannuated men of Pompey's army were settled in Nikopolis does, however, lend credence to his sequence of events: Pompey would not have wanted to take wounded men along on his march into Armenia, let alone on an expedition into the unexplored regions of the Caucasus. It appears, then, that the foundation of Nikopolis preceded the wholesale reorganization of the Pontic lands by at least a year – not, as Gelzer would have it, by a few weeks.

Also, had Pompey intended to “Romanize” Pontos, he made surprisingly few efforts to “de-Per-sianize” it. On the contrary, not only did he confirm the independence of the temple states at Komanana and Zela, Pompey actually increased their territories²⁴. The sanctuary at Ameria was a different matter, too closely connected to the Mithradatic dynasty²⁵ to be left alone, but while it seems to have been included within the territory of Pompey's new city Diospolis, the cult was permitted to continue.

3. Roads, Empire and Trade

The last, and perhaps the most serious weakness in the traditional image of Pompey's grand scheme for the reorganization of Pontos concerns the role played by the region's roads. Scholars have

¹⁹ Esch 2011, 35.

²⁰ Plut. *Pomp.* XXXIV. 5.

²¹ Cf. the description of Pompey's triumph in Plut. *Pomp.* XLV. 2. According to Plutarch, Pompey claimed to have founded 39 cities; according to Appian (*Mithr.* 117), 29 cities. Dreizehnter (1975, 240) rejects most of these foundations as spurious. He accepts, however, that the cities discussed in the present paper were founded by Pompey. On Pompey's cities as part of his *imitatio Alexandri*, see also Esch 2011, 40-41.

²² Cass. Dio XXXVI. 50.

²³ App. *Mithr.* 105.

²⁴ Strab. XII. 3. 34; 37; Sökmen 2006.

²⁵ According to Strabo (XII. 3. 31) the Mithradatic kings took the “royal oath” (βασιλικὸς ὄρκος) in the name of Men Pharnakes.

generally seen the east-west route (“*trunk road*” or “*Pontic road*”) connecting Nikopolis and Pompeiopolis as a major factor in Pompey’s choice of city sites. It was the British scholar H. H. Munro who first popularised the idea of the Pontic “*trunk road*”:

*“Thus from the head waters of the Lycus to those of the Amnias, throughout the entire length of the land, nature has marked out an easy line of communication. This was the grand trunk road of the kingdom of Pontus ... The foregoing review of campaigns has sufficiently indicated the military importance of the main roads and especially of the trunk road through the heart of the country ... When Pompey organised the conquered territory after the final expulsion of Mithridates, he planted no less than five of his cities on the trunk road”*²⁶.

For Munro, the “*trunk road*” was a military route, in contrast to the north-south “*commercial road*” linking Samsun and Zela. D. R. S. Broughton (1938) and David Magie (1950), however, also stressed its importance for trade:

*“The sites of those [cities] in Pontus, eleven in number, were, however, selected with a sure eye for conditions conducive to the development of an active commercial and a true civic life. Pompeiopolis in the Amnias valley, Neapolis-Phazemon, Magnopolis-Eupatoria, which received additional territory, Diospolis-Cabeira and his mixed colony of natives and veterans at Nicopolis in Lesser Armenia all lay on the great trunk road from the Bosphorus to Armenia”*²⁷.

*“The organizing skill of the conqueror of Pontus caused him to select places of outstanding strategic significance for his new foundations. Thus of the seven, five – namely Nicopolis, Diospolis, Magnopolis, Neapolis and Pompeiopolis – lay on the great trade-route which traversed Asia Minor from Bithynia to Armenia, while Zela and Megalopolis were situated on the road which led from the Euxine coast through Amaseia to the valley of the upper Halys and over the mountains to the Euphrates at Tomisa. Thus the trade both from east to west and from north to south was carried through these communities”*²⁸.

Broughton and Magie, in common with many other twentieth-century historians, saw the Roman Empire as a proto-modern state providing defense, a rule of law, and a communications infrastructure: a framework within which private middle-class enterprise might develop and prosper. The same conception underlies the monumental and highly influential work of M. I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*.²⁹ According to this view, economic development and ‘Romanisation’ march hand in hand; thus to Broughton, “commercial” and “civic” life go together, while Magie sees trade as a part of “strategy”. This “modernistic” view of the Roman economy has now largely been abandoned, at least as far as the Republican period is concerned³⁰. In the analysis of Winfield (1977) and Mitchell (1993), Pompey’s choice of locations for his cities was not primarily inspired by economic policy, but by the physical geography of the country, which

²⁶ Munro 1901, 54; 60. Munro’s vision of the “*trunk road*” was clearly inspired by the “Grand Trunk Road” of British India: Bekker-Nielsen 2013, 15.

²⁷ Broughton 1938, 532-533.

²⁸ Magie 1950, 370.

²⁹ Rostovtzeff 1941.

³⁰ On Pompey’s arrangements in Cilicia as an expression of a socio-economic policy, see the critique by Dreizehnter 1975, 242-244.

forced the roads to follow the river valleys:

“If you were crossing Asia Minor from the Bosphorus you would roughly follow the course of the modern Ankara road at least as far as Gerede, the ancient Crateia Flaviopolis. From here a northern road ran up into the valley of the Gök Su, the Amnias, and thence across the Kızılırmak, the ancient Halys, near Vezirköprü. Continuing eastwards you cross the plains of Merzifon ... This northern road thus ran through the heart of the Mithradatic kingdom of Pontus ... it must have been a well used track along which marched the victorious legions of Pompey”³¹.

“Most of the inland cities lay on the main routes of Pontic territory, which had become familiar to the Romans ... The valleys here run mainly from west to east, not north to south, and the lines of communication follow them. Advancing from the west, Pompeiopolis, Neapolis, Magnopolis, Diospolis, and Nicopolis all lay along the northern route which was the main artery of Pontus ...”³².

We can summarize the “classical” interpretation of the relationship between the Pompeian cities and the Pontic road system in three points:

- 1) Pompey had the trade and commerce of the region at heart when locating his cities;
- 2) He placed his cities on a pre-existing road;
- 3) This road followed the main trade route from the Bosphorus into north-eastern Anatolia.

As already discussed, most present-day scholars would not view Pompey’s dispositions as instruments of a policy of economic development. The second claim, that the road was in existence before the cities were founded, may be valid for some sections but not for others; this will be discussed in more detail in section 4, below.

The third assumption is that the route Pompeiopolis-Neapolis-Magnopolis-Diospolis-Nikopolis constituted “*the main artery of Pontus*” and formed part of a “*Pontic road*”, of a “*great trade-route which traversed Asia Minor from Bithynia to Armenia*”³³ which was the logical choice of route when travelling from Bithynia to the Euphrates, and which had been in use before the arrival of the Romans.

However, Xenophon, our earliest first-hand source for the geography of pre-Roman northern Anatolia, knows nothing of such a route, which would have enabled the Ten Thousand to march through Paphlagonia; instead, they chose to go by sea³⁴. That the route is not mentioned by Strabo is a less serious objection: Strabo does not take much interest in the roads of Asia Minor generally, certainly not in those of Pontos. Its absence from the *Itinerarium Antonini* may be similarly explained. It is more surprising that although Roman emperors frequently travelled across Anatolia in the second and third centuries A.D., we find no evidence whatever for their use of the “*Pontic road*”³⁵.

³¹ Winfield 1977, 158-159. In actual fact the “*Pontic Road*” does not cross the plain of Merzifon, which lies south – not east – of Vezirköprü.

³² Mitchell 1993, 32; compare *ibid.* map 3 (facing p. 40) showing the “*Pontic Road*” from Prusias ad Hypium via Pompeiopolis to Nikopolis.

³³ Mitchell 1993, 125.

³⁴ Xen. *Anab.* V. 6. 9.

³⁵ See Halfmann 1986, 198 for a possible Hadrianic visit to Neokaisareia (Diospolis) in A.D. 123.

The fact of the matter is that the so-called “*Pontic road*” through Pompeiopolis does not represent the shortest route between the Bosphorus and the Euphrates: it is a hundred kilometres longer than the route through Hacıhamza, Osmancık and Merzifon. The latter route is followed by today’s E80 highway; this was also the route taken by the Ottoman couriers of the Early Modern period when going from Constantinople to Niksar³⁶.

Although the “*Pontic Road*” was not the shortest route, from the viewpoint of Pompey it nonetheless had two important advantages over its southern counterpart. First, it gave access over the Dranaz pass to Sinope, the former capital of the Mithradatids³⁷. Though no longer a royal residence, Sinope remained an important trading port and naval base. Furthermore: if the exiled Mithradates VI were to attempt a seaborne invasion of his former kingdom, he could be expected to make his landfall at Sinope, which was the port closest to the Crimea and counted many Mithradatic loyalists among its citizens³⁸.

Secondly, the “*Pontic road*” ran entirely over Roman territory, whereas the southern route passed through the lands of the Paphlagonian client-kings. In the case of Spain, the Romans had experienced the difficulties of maintaining lines of communication through allied territory (a problem that was eventually solved by the incorporation of southern Gaul as a Roman province); and Pompey was well versed in the military history of Spain. The decision to include coastal Paphlagonia in the new province in itself shows that creating a contiguous territory was among the objectives in the reorganization of the conquered Pontic lands.

Given the scarcity of the written evidence, a detailed analysis of the role of the “*Pontic road*” in the reorganization of Pontus will, however, have to base itself upon archaeological and topographical data: the remains of the road itself, its milestones and its relation to the surrounding landscape. It is to these categories of sources that we must now turn.

4. The “*Pontic Road*” in the Landscape

4.1 From Nikopolis to the Kılıcarslan Pass

The “*Pontic Road*” represents a continuation of the road leading from Erzincan in the Euphrates valley westward into the drainage basin of the Lykos (Kelkit) river. The first city on the road, Nikopolis, is located *ca.* 90 km to the west of the divide between the two river systems, *ca.* 1,4 km south of and *ca.* 130 m above the line of the present highway (Fig. 1). To the northwest, the city



Fig. 1. The “*Pontic road*” at Nikopolis

³⁶ The Anatolian courier service or *ulak* operated along three routes or “arms” stretching out from Constantinople: the “right arm” went to Konya and Aleppo, the “middle arm” via Bolu, Merzifon and Tokat to Diyarbakır. The “left arm” (sol kol) led via Niksar to Erzurum and Kars: Halaçoğlu 1981, 123.

³⁷ A Domitianic milestone now in Sinop Archaeological Museum (inv.no. 11-1-7) was brought to the museum from the garden of a school in Boyabat. Mitchell 1993, 127 n. 69 was unsure to which road this milestone should be assigned, but its legend *viam [Si]nopens(em) stravit* clearly refers to the road across the Dranaz pass, which branched off from the “*Pontic Road*” *ca.* 6 km north of Boyabat: thus French 2013, 68 (no. 22).

³⁸ According to Appian (*Mithr.* 120) Pharnakes, the son of Mithradates VI, found refuge in Sinope after his defeat at the hands of Caesar.



Fig. 2. Remains of the Bridge Carrying the "Pontic Road" across the Iris

overlooks the plain of Suşehri, which is bisected by the Lykos river. Across the plain, the ancient road may have taken a course differing from that of the modern highway. From the point where the road enters the river gorge at Akça-ağıl, however, the only route to the west is along the bank of the Lykos, which the road follows for the next 90 km, corresponding to three days' march for a Roman army. The steep and rocky hillsides offer few opportunities for settlement³⁹, or for an army to forage; one can well understand Mithradates' hope that his Roman pursu-

ers would abandon the chase rather than follow him up this inhospitable valley.

About 30 km west of Reşadiye, the landscape changes as the valley of the Lykos widens to become the Phanaroia, the large inland plain which has been well described as 'the garden of Pontos'. Near the mouth of the valley, the road crossed from the left to the right bank of the river and took a course along the northern edge of the plain. It passed 1-1,5 km south of the site of Roman Diospolis (Neokaisareia). Here, it intersected the road connecting Diospolis with the upper valley of the Iris and the temple-state of Komana. Diospolis itself lay a little distance to the north of the road, taking advantage of the protection offered by the city's citadel.

The Diospolis-Komana road followed more or less the same course as the present highway from Niksar to Tokat; to the right and left of the highway, remains of older dirt roads and tracks which may preserve the line of the ancient road are visible in several places. From Diospolis, another route ran north across the Pontic range to Oinoë (Ünye) on the coast; in Pompey's time, this may have been no more than a track for pack-animals.

Having passed Diospolis, the "Pontic road" continued westward, steering a middle course between the right bank of the Lykos and the foothills of the Pontic range. Some distance west of Niksar, the road to Amaseia (Amasya) branched off, striking due westward, while the Pontic road continued west-northwest to cross the Iris and the Lykos at their confluence, *ca.* 2,5 km north of Magnopolis⁴⁰. Today, the remains of two stone bridges of later date can be seen at the confluence (Fig. 2) but as both rivers are slow-flowing and shallow for most of the year, it is possible that in Pompey's time, the rivers were simply forded, one at a time⁴¹.

At the village of Umutlu *ca.* 4 km west of the confluence, the modern road makes a detour along the left bank of the Iris river in the direction of Taşova, whereas the ancient road continued straight ahead on a course parallel to, but south of, the modern asphalt road through Uluköy, Alpaslan, Arpaderesi and Sepetli (Fig. 3). Below Destek village, the modern road (D-030) meets the ancient road-line. That the ancient route was not entirely abandoned but remained in use into the modern period, even though it did not serve any of the villages along its course, is probably due to its role as a post-road for the Ottoman *ulak*.

³⁹ Cf. Erciyas 2006, 215 fig. 3: no Early Bronze Age settlements in the Lykos valley upstream of Niksar.

⁴⁰ Olshausen – Biller 1984, 36-44.

⁴¹ Ancient remains in the village of Çevresu have now with a high degree of probability been identified as the remains of Eupatoria/Magnopolis: Sørensen 2016, 159-161.

At the western end of the Phanaroia, the road began the ascent along the valley of the Destek çayı to the Kılıcarslan pass which marked the border between the Phanaroia and the Phazemonitis. There are no ancient remains visible on the ascent to the pass, and it is possible that the ancient road followed a route on the opposite slope of the valley to that of the modern highway.

4.2 From the Kılıcarslan Pass to the Halys

Unlike the long, gradual ascent from the Phanaroia, the descent on the western side of the Kılıcarslan pass is short and the road soon reaches the eastern end of lake Stiphane (Ladik Gölü). The Ottoman *sol kol* followed the southern shore of the lake towards Ladik, whereas the ancient road took a course north of the lake. The road-line is visible in several places in Mazlumoğlu and Kıranboğaz villages (Fig. 4). It passed south-west of Ahmetsaray village to intersect the road from Amaseia to Amisos (Munro's "commercial road") which followed a course similar to that of the modern E95.

Having crossed the Amaseia-Amisos road at an elevation of ca. 770 m above sea level, the "Pontic Road" now descended through Başpelit (Fig. 5), Ilıca and Kocaoğlu to Kayabaşı (540 m a.s.l.). From here, it made a steep switchback descent into a ravine to cross a small stream, the Istavroz çayı, at 420 m a.s.l. The stream is spanned by a stone bridge (Fig. 6) known as the Kurt köprüsü, "wolf bridge". Its semi-ogival main arches attest to a post-Roman date, but the bridge incorporates inscriptions and other *spolia* of the Roman period which may derive either from a neighbouring settle-



Fig. 3. The "Pontic Road" near Destek



Fig. 4. The "Pontic Road" near Mazlumoğlu



Fig. 5. The "Pontic Road"
Descending through Başpelit Village



Fig. 6. The Kurt Köprüsü in 2010.
The Bridge has since been Heavily Restored
(Photo Courtesy of Bünyamin Kıvrak)



Fig. 7. The "Pontic Road" East of Aydoğdu



Fig. 8. The "Pontic Road" West of Aydoğdu



Fig. 9. Fragment of a Milestone from the "Pontic Road" (138-161 A.D.), Now in a Farmyard in Arıca Village



Fig. 10. The "Pontic Road" near İncesu

ment⁴² or from a Roman stone bridge at this same location. From the crossing, the road climbed to the plateau on the western side, then continued through the villages of Aydoğdu (Fig. 7-8) and Çekmeden to reach Neapolis (Vezirköprü), where it met a north-south road connecting Oymağaç and Tepeören⁴³. Assuming that Neapolis had an orthogonal street plan, the "Pontic Road" must have traversed the city running east-northeast to west-southwest.

Exiting from Neapolis, the road resumed its previous orientation and passed north of Arıca village (Fig. 9), then through İncesu (Fig. 10) and Aşağı Narlı to reach the bank of the Halys (Kızılrırmak). The remains of a Roman single-arch stone bridge across the river were still visible in the nineteenth century⁴⁴. Further upstream at Kemerbahçe, the remains of a second bridge could be seen as late as 1980⁴⁵.

4.3 From the Halys Crossing to Pompeiopolis

Having crossed the Halys, the ancient road continued on the left bank of the river, as did its modern successor until the construction of the Altinkaya barajı, which has raised the water table and inundated the road, the villages nearest the bank and the ruins of the ancient bridges. A new highway has been constructed at a higher level on the opposite (i.e., right) bank of the river. Today, agriculture and habitation are sparse along the 50 km of road between Aşağı Narlı and Durğan but before the

⁴² Building remains – including columns – and several inscriptions have been found in the vicinity; some of these are now on display outside the village school in Tekkekıranı, ca. 2 km north of the Kurt köprüsü.

⁴³ Bekker-Nielsen – Czichon 2015, 296-299.

⁴⁴ Bekker-Nielsen 2013, 15-16.

⁴⁵ Eckart Olshausen, personal communication.

construction of the dam, the valley floor was farmed⁴⁶ on both sides of the river, which for most of the year was easily fordable.

About 6 km east of Durağan, the Halys makes a sharp bend at its confluence with the Amnias (Gök Irmak). The town of Durağan takes its name from its caravanserai (Durak han), the only Selcuk caravanserai along the “*Pontic Road*”. Given the nature of the terrain, the road will have followed the Amnias valley, taking a course between the left bank of the Amnias and the modern highway D-030. Some stretches of tracks and minor farm roads running below and parallel to the modern highway may in fact preserve the remains of an ancient road-line; these would be well worth a closer investigation⁴⁷.

Today, the main highway crosses the Amnias and enters the built-up area of Boyabat from the east, but during most of the twentieth century, it kept to the left bank, bypassing Boyabat on the east and crossing the river at Bağlıca north-east of the city. From here, the highway follows the high ground to the west of the river valley for about 20km before descending into the valley once more. The course of the ancient road has not been studied in detail, but it appears likely that it kept to the left bank of the river at least as far as the meander upstream from Okçumehmetli. Between the villages of Osmanköy and Bektaş, it made a junction with the road leading northeast across the Dranz pass to Sinope. West of Çakırçay, the Amnias winds through a series of narrow gorges which are unsuitable for a road, and in all probability the ancient road, like its modern successor, ran over the high ground to the north of the river for most of the remaining distance to Pompeiopolis, where it passed immediately below and to the south of the city site. It will have continued towards Kastamonu on a course similar to that of the modern highway D-030.

4.4 Course and Construction

Between Nikopolis and Niksar, and again between the crossing of the Halys and Pompeiopolis, the “*Pontic road*” follows the river valleys. Over the intervening section of *ca.* 170 km between Diospolis (Neokaisareia) and the descent to the Halys north of Neapolis, it keeps a consistent direction of 62 degrees west of north, making slight adjustments of direction at the confluence of the Iris and Lykos rivers; at the Kılıcarslan pass; and north of the Ladik Gölü. It never diverges more than 5 km from the direct line: an impressive feat of ancient surveying, which bears comparison with the consular roads of Roman Italy.

No remains of ancient paving are now visible, and indeed the road may well have been surfaced with gravel for most of its length. In a number of places, the surface has been eroded, exposing the deep road-bed of stones ranging from fist size upwards (e.g., Fig. 8; 10). Stone-built bridges are visible or have been reported at the confluence of the Iris and Lykos, at the crossing of the İstavroz çayı and at the crossing of the Halys, but these may be later additions. All the watercourses that lay across the route, including the Halys river itself, could have been crossed on foot or by ferry. Since

⁴⁶ In the summer of 2014, a newly constructed hydroelectric reservoir further upstream was in the process of being filled, and the amount of water flowing into this section of the Halys was correspondingly smaller. On satellite images from July 2014, available on Google Earth, pre-inundation field boundaries and the remains of houses are visible.

⁴⁷ The section of the “*Pontic road*” between its crossing of the Halys and Ilıca village (Havza district, Samsun province) was surveyed in 2013 as part of the Vezirköprü-Havza Archaeological Survey (Bekker-Nielsen – Winther-Jacobsen 2013).

the road did not pass directly through any of the cities except Neapolis and possibly Magnopolis, neither of which were walled, no city gates have been preserved.

There is no evidence that the road was marked by milestones throughout its length. The earliest milestones which may be associated with the "Pontic road" date from the late first century A.D., and long stretches of the road⁴⁸ have produced no milestone finds at all.

5. After Pompey

By the "Pontic road", the distance from the Armenian border near Nikopolis to the shore of the Bosphorus at Chalcedon is *ca.* 1000 km, with Pompeiopolis at the mid-point. That Pompey placed the city bearing his name in the middle of the province which he had just created may not have been coincidental: probably he saw the city as the capstone to his reorganization of the Mithradatic territories⁴⁹, and he may even have dreamt of making it the capital of the new province.

That was not to be, however. By the mid-thirties B.C., the structure of control created by Pompey had been dismantled by Mark Antony, most of the inland territories had been assigned to client-kings, and the "province", i.e. the area under direct Roman control, reduced to a narrow strip along the Pontic seaboard⁵⁰. Subsequently, the territories of the erstwhile Pontic kingdom were once more integrated into the provincial structure of the *imperium Romanum*, but never as a single province.

In the twelfth century A.D., Northern Anatolia was briefly re-united under the Dânişmend rulers whose capital was Neokaisareia. According to a collection of heroic tales, the *Dânişmendnâme*, the dynasty's founder Melik extended his sphere of control as far westward as Amaseia, Kastamonu and Gangra⁵¹, but failed to establish a permanent presence in central Anatolia, through which the main east-west route passed. For communication with their Paphlagonian territories and for troop movements, the Dânişmendids were forced to rely on the "Pontic road"; very likely it was they who had the Kurt köprüsü built, or possibly rebuilt.

6. Conclusions

According to the scholarly consensus of the twentieth century, Pompey's plan was to secure effective Roman control over the former Mithradatic kingdom by placing five new cities on a pre-existing road, a great trading route linking east and west across northern Anatolia.

The theory of the "Pontic road" as a great trans-Anatolian trade route rests, however, on weak foundations. By its nature, trade involves complementary economic systems: what one trading partner lacks, the other possesses in abundance and vice versa. Trade along the north-south route from

⁴⁸ No milestones have been reported between Boyabat and the twelfth milestone from Neapolis/Neoklaudiopolis at Aşağı Narlı, *ca.* 75 km from Boyabat. Between Neapolis/Neoklaudiopolis and the thirty-seventh milestone from Niksar near Uluköy (*ca.* 90 km), one stone was found in the territory of Ahmetsaray village, bearing the mileage figure 23 corresponding to the distance from Neapolis/Neoklaudiopolis over the "Pontic road". Another stone of the same period and bearing the same mileage was, however, found at Yenice, suggesting that the distance was measured not over the "Pontic Road" but through Thermai ton Phazemoniton (mod. Havza). It is possible that the Ahmetsaray stone has been transported from its find-spot. A single uninscribed milestone is reported between Hatıplı and Sevindik, a distance of *ca.* 120 km.

⁴⁹ Compare the special treatment given to Cilician Pompeiopolis (Solo): Esch 2011, 44-45.

⁵⁰ Primo 2010, 162.

⁵¹ *Dânişmendname* ch. 9-11 = Melikoff 1960.

Amisos to Zela (the “*commercial road*”) was driven by the demand of the coastal cities for the agricultural and forestry products of the interior, and of the inland dwellers for the wares produced in, or imported through, Amisos. On a larger scale, the complementarity of the Aegean and Eurasian economic systems drove a trans-Anatolian trade, forerunner of the caravan trade along the “silk road” – but this followed the more southerly, more direct route from the Bosphorus to the Iris.

While its eastern section did serve the needs of the trans-Anatolian trade, the “*Pontic road*” itself did not link complementary economic systems: it connected the Phanaroia with the Phazemonitis and the Phazemonitis with the Amnias valley. In other words, it linked arable lowland with arable lowland, inland with inland. It did not connect highland and lowland, nor inland and coast. While not generating significant inter-regional trade, the course of the road was attractive from other viewpoints: that of the army commander (since an army could expect to forage along its line of march), that of the tax-collector⁵², and that of the road supervisor (since the landowners along a road were expected to contribute to its upkeep)⁵³. In short, the rationale behind the “*Pontic Road*” was strategic rather than commercial.

Did the “*Pontic Road*” exist before the advent of Pompeius? Some sections certainly did. The route from Armenia into the Phanaroia surely existed in some form, extending at least as far as Eupatoria (the later Magnopolis). A route leading across the Kilicarslan pass into the Phazemonitis will have been known, though this may have been merely a track, not a formal road. But the road between the Kilicarslan pass and the bank of the Halys bears the clear imprint of the road surveyor: that is, of a centralized authority. It is difficult to place such a project in a Mithradatic context: for one thing, the Mithradatids are not otherwise known as road-builders on a large scale; for another, the road keeps its distance from important Mithradatic strongholds such as Kizarı near Ladik or Sagyion south of Neapolis. These features, on the other hand, would accord well with the hypothesis that the “*Pontic Road*” was laid out by Roman surveyors as part of the Pompeian re-organization and should more properly be called the “*Pompeian Road*”⁵⁴.

⁵² Esch 2011, 61-62.

⁵³ Cf. Olshausen 1991, 453 with plate LIX.

⁵⁴ This paper is based on the author’s research in the Vezirköprü and Havza districts in the autumn of 2013 and in Paris in the spring of 2016, the latter made possible by a grant from the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme. The author would like to express his gratitude to the Turkish Department of Antiquities and to the FMSH for their support; also to the École Normale Supérieure, Prof. Stéphane Verger and Dr. Anca Dan for their hospitality, and to Dr. Jesper Majbom Madsen (Odense) and Dr. Søren Lund Sørensen (Berlin) for their constructive criticisms of an earlier version of this paper.

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