

THE PLACE AND IMPORTANCE OF MAGNOPOLIS IN THE MITHRIDATIC WARS

MITHRIDATES SAVAŞLARI'NDA MAGNOPOLIS'İN YERİ VE ÖNEMİ

Mustafa ARSLAN*

Esra BULUT**

Abstract

The city later known as Magnopolis was captured by Mithridates VI Eupator (133-63 BC) and then named Eupatoria to honour him. However, according to Appian, the citizens of the city later accepted Roman rule and for this reason was ruined by the very same founder. Strabo claims that the founding of the city was still unfinished, when Mithridates VI Eupator destroyed it. In any case, Pompeius started redeveloping the city and completed its foundation. At the same time, Pompeius changed the city's name to Magnopolis after himself, referring to the title "Magnus" which Sulla had conferred on him. Also, Pompeius included the settlements around the city in its borders, so that as a result of this policy the population of the city increased considerably. In addition to all these events, the location of the city was so important that it contributed to its rise during those times. Additionally, due to its strategic position and its location on the trade route between Bithynia and Armenia, the city witnessed formerly unparalleled development in terms of economic growth and population expansion. This paper reports on a study of Magnopolis, referring to its important geopolitical-geostrategic position and the trade routes of the region.

Key Words: Rome, Eupatoria, Magnopolis, Trade Routes

Özet

Magnopolis kenti, başlangıçta Mithridates VI Eupator tarafından ele geçirildiğinde onun ismine ithafen Eupatoria olarak adlandırılmıştır. Ancak daha sonra Appianus'a göre halkın Roma yönetimini istemesi yüzünden kent yıkılmış, Strabon'a göre ise inşası yarım bırakılmıştır. Hangi sebeple olursa olsun harap durumda olan kent için Pompeius imar çalışmaları yapmış ve kentin inşasını tamamlamıştır. Aynı zamanda Pompeius, Sulla tarafından kendisine verilen Magnus unvanına ithafen kentin adını Magnopolis olarak değiştirmiştir. Ayrıca o, bu kentin çevresinde bulunduğu arazileri de kent sınırlarına dahil etmiş bunun sonucunda kentin nüfusunda da büyük bir artış meydana gelmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra kent yer aldığı coğrafya bakımından önem arz etmektedir. Nitekim Lykos ve İris gibi iki önemli nehrin

* Asst. Prof. Dr. Selcuk University Beyşehir Ali Akkanat Faculty of Tourism
muarslan@selcuk.edu.tr

** Dr. esrabulut50@hotmail.com

birleşme noktasında bulunması sayesinde tarımsal faaliyetler bakımından kayda değer bir yapıya sahip olmuştur. Aynı zamanda bulunduğu konum itibari ile oldukça stratejik bir öneme sahip olan kentin Bithynia ve Armenia arasındaki ticari yolların üzerinde yer alması başta kent ekonomisi ve nüfusun artışı gibi pek çok önemli gelişmeyi de beraberinde getirmiştir.

Bu çalışmada bulunduğu jeopolitik ve jeostratejik konum nedeni ile yadsınamaz bir öneme sahip olan Magnopolis kenti ve bulunduğu yol güzergâhları çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Roma, Eupatoria, Magnopolis, Ticaret Yolları.

Introduction

The first event which brought Asia Minor under permanent Roman hegemony was the bequeathing of the Pergamum Kingdom to the Roman Republic in 133 B.C. After extended years of war, when Mithridates VI Eupator, who opposed the Roman annexation in Asia Minor, had been defeated, his land was included in the Roman territory. Soon after the defeat of Mithridates VI Eupator, the Romans reorganised the newly occupied lands on a provincial level. Due to the efforts of Pompeius, the region from Euxinus (stretching along the Black Sea from Heracleia to Pharnakeia) southwards to the mountain range that formed the Cappadocia-Pontus border, was united with Bithynia. The government of this united province was entrusted to a governor.¹ Ancient Magnopolis was included in this new dispensation.

The Name Magnopolis and Location of the City

Ancient Magnopolis was particularly important due to its geographical location. There are different views about the location of the city which was apparently founded at the junction of the Iris and Lycus.² M. Arslan has pointed out that the city was located in current Taşova, 45 km northeast of Amaseia.³ On the other hand, according to Erciyas, ancient Magnopolis could have been on the site of what is now Erbaa.⁴ The territory of Magnopolis extended to the border city of Diospolis in the east, and to Amaseia in the

¹ M.Oktan, "Roma Cumhuriyet Dönemi'nde Pontos'da Yapılan Düzenlemeler", *Anadolu* 2008, 34,p. 47-75.

² Strabo, *Geographika, The Geography of Strabo (XII, XIII, XIV)*, (Tran. H. L. Jones).London: Harvard University Press, 1961, XII:3.30; J.G.C. Anderson, *Studia Pontica, A Journey of Exploration In Pontus*, I, Oxford, 1903, p.86; D. Burcu Erciyas, *Wealth, Aristocracy and Royal Propaganda Under the Hellenistic Kingdom of the Mithradatids in the Central Black Sea Region of Turkey*, *Colloquia Pontica*, 12, Brill, 2006, p. 45.

³ Murat Arslan, *Mithradates VI Eupator: Roma'nın Büyük Düşmanı*. İstanbul, Odin yay. 2007, p. 28.

⁴ Erciyas, *ibid*, p. 46.

south (See Map-1).⁵ Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, born 23 AD, died Aug. 24. 79), stated that the city was in Cappadocia and did not give additional situational information.⁶ Apart from Pliny, other ancient sources, such as Strabo and Appian, gave detailed information on the city's name and location. Strabo's remarks on the city are: "*The two rivers meet at about the middle of the valley; and at their junction is situated a city which the first man who subjugated it called Eupatoria after his own name, but Pompeius found it only half- finished and added to it territory and settlers, and called it Magnopolis. Now this city is situated in the middle of the plain*"⁷

In addition to Strabo, Appian mentioned that the city was rebuilt by Pompeius, was named after him and so became Magnopolis.⁸ According to the regional reorganisation the name of the city was converted to Magnopolis because of Pompeius's cognomen "*Magnus*".⁹

Magnopolis during the Mithridatic Wars

Magnopolis, having been built first by Mithridates VI Eupator¹⁰ and thus named "Eupatoria", functioned as a "*rural retreat place and fortification*" of the King.¹¹ The founding of the city was strategically important for the king, but it was not significant enough to be one of the cities which issued coins in the region.¹² Later, when Pompeius the Great gained control of the region he made some new arrangements.

The most relevant information concerning the city is obtained from texts

⁵ W. G. Fletcher, "The Pontic Cities of Pompey the Great", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 70, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939, p. 17-29.

⁶ Pliny The Elder, *Naturalis Historia, The Natural History, III-VII* (Trans. H. Rackham). London, Harvard Universty Press, 1855, VI: 3.

⁷ Strabo, *ibid*, XII:3.30.

⁸ Appian, *The Foreign Wars (Mithridatic Wars-Syrian Wars)* (Trans. Horace White), New York, The Macmillan Company, 1899, 115.

⁹ Oktan, *ibid*, 2008, pp, 63. This cognomen was given to Pompey by the army for his great achievements in an expedition in Africa. The cognomen "*Magnus*", which means "*The Great*", was approved by Sulla. Later the cognomen lost its special impact so that it became ordinary to the people and lost its attractiveness. (Plutarch, *Yaşamlar, Pompeius*, (Trans. B. Perrin). London: William Heinemann, 13:4; Appian, *ibid*, 118; Cassius Dio Cocceianus, *Roman History* (Trans. E. Cary), London, William Heinemann. 1914, XXXVII: 20; R. Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 86.

¹⁰ Appian, *ibid*, 115; For commandments see, T. Mommsen, *History of Rome*. (Trans. Dickson W. P.), New York, 1870, p.181.

¹¹ Fletcher, *ibid*, 1939, p. 18; Arslan, *ibid*, 2007, p.28; Mommsen, *ibid*, 1870, p.181.

¹² Erciyas, *ibid*, 2006, p.46.

on the Mithridatic Wars and the mission of the city during these wars. Three wars took place between King Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus and Rome in the period 120 to 63 BC.¹³ The causes of the wars were Mithridates VI Eupator's invasion of Roman provinces in the west of Asia Minor and the massacre of Roman citizens in these provinces in 88 BC.¹⁴

The command of the campaign against Mithridates VI Eupator's expansion in Asia was conferred on Sulla by the Senatus, the Roman senate. Sulla was successful in leading the Roman forces. He was victorious against Mithridates VI Eupator, until finally in 85 BC Mithridates accepted defeat and started to withdraw from the regions he had invaded. He agreed to pay war compensation, surrendered a part of his naval fleet to Rome, and was willing to enter into a treaty with Sulla.¹⁵

Despite the treaty, Mithridates VI Eupator did not abandon the idea of building an empire of his own in the Asia Minor provinces. This brought on the outbreak of the second phase of the wars. This time Mithridates VI Eupator attacked Comana in Cappadocia. His invasion was resisted by Lucius Licinius Murena whom Sulla had left in charge to restore the order in Asia.¹⁶ Finally, the Roman army was defeated with severe losses, and Murena fled to Phrygia in 81 BC.¹⁷

The Third Mithridatic War broke out after King Nicomedes of Bithynia who had bequeathed his lands to Rome, died in 74 BC. Mithridates VI Eupator turned this situation into an opportunity to attack Bithynia with a view to invasion. Lucius Licinius Lucullus was appointed as the general and Marcus Aurelius Cota as the commander of the fleet. After various battles, specifically the battles at Chalcedon (=Kadıköy), Cyzicus (=Erdek) and Lemnos Island (=Limni), Mithridates VI Eupator was eventually defeated and fled to Pontus. However, Lucullus pursued the retreating king, following him to Pontus.¹⁸

In Pontus, further battles took place between Lucullus's troops and the Pontus army, but the latter could not succeed against the Roman soldiers. After their defeat and before fleeing to Armenia, King Mithridates VI Eupator ordered the execution of the female members of the crown family. Lucullus

¹³ Oğuz Tekin, *EskiYunan ve Roma Tarihine Giriş*, İletişim Yay, İstanbul, 2008, p. 214.

¹⁴ Appian, *ibid*, 22-23; See also, Tekin, *ibid*, 2008, p. 214.

¹⁵ Appian, *ibid*, 22-23; See also, Mehmet Özsait, "Anadolu'da Hellenistik Dönem," *Anadolu Uygarlıkları Ansiklopedisi*, 1982, 2, p. 380-414.

¹⁶ Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 64.

¹⁷ Murat Arslan, "Sulla'nın Küçük Asya Politikası", *Arkeoloji ve Sanat*, 2000, 22/94, p. 32-43; Özsait, *ibid*, 1982, p. 363; Tekin, *ibid*, 2008, p. 215.

¹⁸ Tekin, *ibid*, 2008, p. 215.

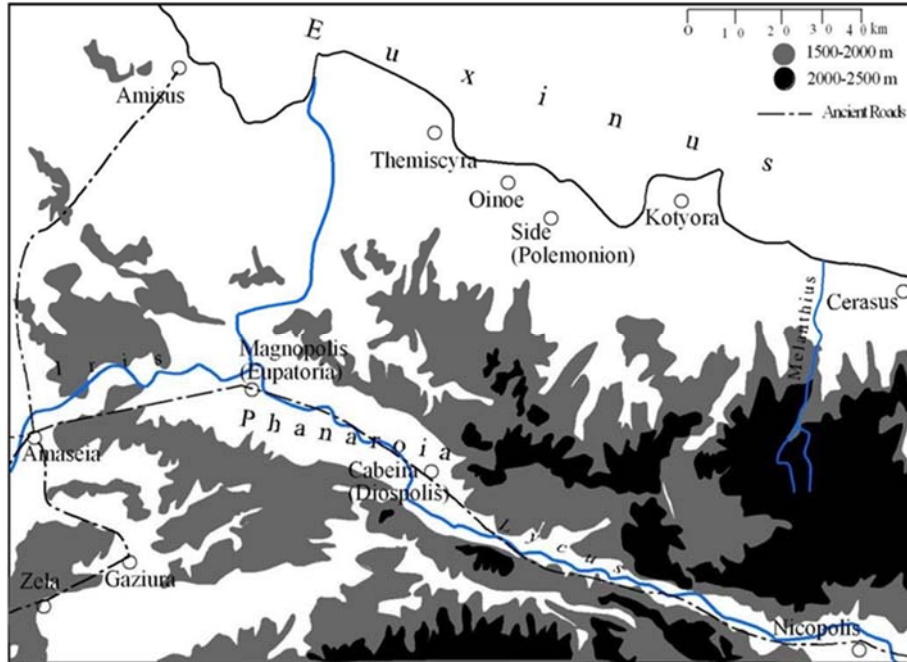
appointed Pompeius to pursue the king. At the same time, Lucullus captured Cabeira which was later named Diospolis/Neocaesareia (=Niksar).¹⁹ He then tried to persuade the citizens of Amisoss into an alliance with the Roman army, but his attempts to forge an alliance with them were unsuccessful. He decided to attack and besiege Eupatoria (see Map: 1) and proceeded to surround the city (72-71 B.C).²⁰ Vivid details of the siege and capture of Eupatoria are narrated by Memnon as cited below:

“After he had suffered this manifest disaster, Mithridates ordered that the princesses of the royal house should be killed, and decided to escape from Cabeira, where he was staying, without the knowledge of his subjects. But he was pursued by some Gauls, who did not realise who he was, and he would have been captured, if they had not come across a mule which was carrying Mithridates' gold and silver, and they stopped to plunder this treasure. Mithridates himself reached Armenia, (II.) though Lucullus sent Marcus Pompeius in pursuit of him. Then Lucullus advanced to Cabeira with his entire army, and surrounded the city; he gained control of the walls after the barbarians agreed to surrender under a truce. (III.) From there he went to Amisus, and tried to persuade the inhabitants to come to terms with the Romans, but as they did not listen to him, he moved away and began to besiege Eupatoria. There he pretended to conduct [the siege] negligently, in order that he might lull the enemy into the same attitude of negligence, and then achieve his object by mounting a sudden attack. The result was as he expected, and he captured the city by this stratagem. Lucullus suddenly ordered his soldiers to bring up ladders, when the defenders were paying little attention because they expected nothing of the sort, and he sent the soldiers up the ladders to the top of the walls. In this way Eupatoria was captured, and it was immediately destroyed. (IV.) Shortly afterwards Amisus was captured in a similar fashion - the enemy mounted its walls with ladders. Many of the citizens of Amisus were slaughtered immediately, but then Lucullus put an end to the killing. He restored the city and its territory to the remaining citizens, and treated them considerately.”²¹

¹⁹ Mommsen, *ibid*, 1870, p. 180; Anderson, *ibid*, 1903, p. 86; Van Dam, 2003: 86.

²⁰ Memnon, *Herakleia Pontike Tarihi (Περί Ηρακλείας)*, (Trans. M. Arslan), Odin yay. İstanbul, 2007, XLV; See also, Özsait, *ibid*, 1982, p. 364.

²¹ Memnon, *ibid*, XLV: II, III, IV.



Map- 1: Eupatoria/Magnopolis and nearby Pontic Cities.

The retreating King, however, turned back to Pontus again in 68 BC and defeated the Roman troops in the region, thus winning a great victory.²² In this way the King regained dominance over an important portion of Pontus. During that period, the mission of Lucullus against the pirates in southern Asia, which was won by the contributions of Pompeius, ended. This great achievement provided under Pompeius's leadership, brought him fame as the commander who secured the battles against Mithridates VI Eupator. Pompeius had attacked Mithridates VI Eupator drawing on the authority he had gained earlier, but the King ruined all villages and cities en route during his flight, thus threatening the Roman troops with hunger.²³ Still, Mithridates blamed the citizens of Eupatoria for the friendly reception they gave the Romans during the presence of Roman troops in the city. He considered the acts of the citizens to be those of traitors and he destroyed the city due to their betrayal.²⁴ Appian narrated the situation as follows: "*He (Pompeius) founded cities also, in Lesser Armenia Nicopolis, named for his victory; in Pontus Eupatoria, which Mithridates Eupator had built and named after himself, but destroyed because*

²² Özsait, *ibid*, 1982, p. 365.

²³ Özsait, *ibid*, 1982, p. 365; Tekin, *ibid*, 2008, p. 215.

²⁴ Mommsen, *ibid*, 1870, p. 181; Fletcher, *ibid*, 1939, p.18.

*it had received the Romans. Pompeius rebuilt it and named it Magnopolis.*²⁵

Pompeius the Great eventually defeated Mithridates VI Eupator in the vicinity of the Lycus River, after which the king fled to Crimea. Later, Pompey included the western part of Pontus as a province and united it with Bithynia. He named this newly founded province Pontus-Bithynia in 64 BC.²⁶

Due to these events, by the end of the wars between Rome and Pontus, what remained of Magnopolis, was a ruined city destroyed during all these battles. In addition to these destructions, the founding of the city was severely set back.²⁷ Strabo gives no information on whether the re-building of the city was completed by Pompeius or not.²⁸ Appian, however, does give some clues that suggest he refounded and started to reconstruct the city.²⁹

As mentioned before, the structural alterations during Pompeius's period, had an effect on the population of the cities in the region, and development of the cities such as Pompeipolis (=Taşköprü), Neapolis (=Andrapa, in Vezirköprü), Diospolis (=Cabeira-Neocaesarea), Nicopolis (=Yeşilyayla, Pürk),³⁰ was done considering commercial interests and activities.³¹ In addition to these alterations Magnopolis was founded by uniting divided populations of the territories around the cities.³² Naturally, the locations of these new cities were determined according to their strategic.³³ Magnopolis, similar to the other cities mentioned above, was located at an important point on the commercial highway between Bithynia and Armenia.³⁴ Mitchell's description of the geographic location of the city gives a good impression of

²⁵ Appian, *ibid*, 115.

²⁶ Özsait, *ibid*, 1982, p. 365; Tekin, *ibid*, 2008, p. 215.

²⁷ Fletcher, *ibid*, 1939, p. 18.

²⁸ Strabo, *ibid*, XII: 3.30.

²⁹ Appian, *ibid*, 115.

³⁰ Anderson, *ibid*, 1903, p. 86; R. MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus*, Yale University Press/New Haven & London, 2000, 4.

³¹ T.R.S. Broughton, "Roman Asia". (Ed. T. Frank), *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* 1938, Vol. IV, Baltimore, p. 499-919; Erciyas, *ibid*, 2006, p.46.

³² Fletcher, *ibid*, 1939, p. 18; K. Wellesley, "The Extent Of The Territory Added To Bithynia By Pompey", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie, Neue Folge*, 1953, 96. Bd., 4, J.D. Sauerländers Verlag, p. 293-318; U. Klein, "Pompeipolis in Paphlagonien und in Kilikien", *Schweizer Münzblätter = Gazette numismatique suisse = Gazzetta numismatica svizzera* 1973-77, 23/27, p. 47-55, (Footnote no: 6); R.E.A. Palmer, *Studies of the Northern Campus Martius in Ancient Rome*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 1990, Vol. 80, No. 2, p. 1-64.

³³ Anderson, *ibid*, 1903, p.86; Broughton, *ibid*, 1938, p. 532-533; D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century After Christ, I-II*, Princeton University Press, Princeton-New Jersey, 1950, 370.

³⁴ Broughton, *ibid*, 1938, p. 532-533; Magie, *ibid*, 1950, p. 370; Oktan, *ibid*, 2008, p.60-61.

the lie of the land and the distribution of these cities:

*“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.”*³⁵

Although Magnopolis was founded by the famous Roman commander and also named after him, it seems that the city was not specially credited by Pompeius, its second founder. As in other cities founded by Pompeius, there are no building remains dedicated to him in Magnopolis. In addition, archaeological findings of buildings which would signal that they were specially imposing could not be found in any parts of the Pompeius cities. While constructing the buildings in the cities in Pontus, Pompeius decided not to imitate the local style; rather, he adopted the idea of building the Pontus cities in the Greco-Roman style.³⁶ His intention was to extend the Greco-Roman culture into the region. In spite of these clear cultural aims, we have no information to confirm that Roman colonies were established or that there was population movement from the Roman provinces into the region.³⁷ Strabo mentions that Pompeius added new lands to Pompeiopolis and so increased its population.³⁸ Some historians agree that the increase in population came from new settlers formerly separated from the urban area, but living in the vicinity of the city.³⁹ However, Fletcher believes that Strabo had not meant the urban population of the city grew due to uniting the existing inhabitants with a removed rural population. Considering the situation from this point of view, we need to question Pompeius’s aim of trying to extend the Greco-Roman culture across Pontus.⁴⁰

Besides the lack of evidence that Pompeius had ideals of expansion into Pontus, another point to emphasize regarding the importance of the city, is its location on various intersecting routes. The northern route from east to west through the northern part all the Pontus Region was the main trade and military route of the Mithridates Kingdom. The roads of the region were used for both administrative and military purposes during the Mithridates VI Eupator and

³⁵ S. Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, 1993, Vol. I. Oxford, p. 32

³⁶ Mommsen, *ibid*, 1870, p.181; Anderson, *ibid*, 1903, p. 86.

³⁷ Fletcher, *ibid*, 1939, p.19.

³⁸ Strabo, *ibid*, XII: 3.30.

³⁹ Mommsen, *ibid*, 1870, p.181.

⁴⁰ Fletcher, *ibid*, 1939, p.19.

the Roman periods.⁴¹ The main road starts at Bosphorus in the east and reaches to Merzifon Plain, passing through Flaviopolis-Amnias valley and Halys.⁴² From Merzifon Plain the road passes Magnopolis and reaches Nicopolis via Neocaesareia and Lycus glen, and from Nicopolis it reaches to Theodosiopolis via Satala. The road network was used in Roman and Byzantine periods and possibly also during pre-historic times.⁴³ Magnopolis was also situated on the main course of this network that traversed the region from Bithynia.⁴⁴ A closer investigation of this road around Magnopolis shows that the road goes along the Euphrates, around Erzincan to the west and then follows the Lycus river valley. The first city on this road is Nicopolis. From Nicopolis, the road goes in a north-western direction and all the way to the Phanaroia plain⁴⁵ (the Pontus Garden) located 30 km west of Reşadiye. Here, the road changes its course, passing over from the south bank to the north bank of the river and eventually reaching Diospolis (Neocaesareia). From Diospolis, the line runs to the west and follows the north bank of the Lycus. The road continues in a west-north-westerly direction from the junction of the Lycus and Iris rivers, 2,5 km to the north of Magnopolis.⁴⁶

Conclusion

After it was acquired by Pompeius, the city of Magnopolis was re-built and for a short period experienced its most splendid days. Its location on the Bithynia- Armenia main road contributed to its development and prosperity.

Our sources of information on the city are ancient writers, such as Strabo, Appian, Memnon and Pliny the Elder, who dealt with Mithridatic Wars and Pompeius's expeditions in the region. Unfortunately, we have no information on the later periods of the city. This lack of clarity on much of what transpired

⁴¹ Anderson, *ibid*, 1903, p. 86.

⁴² Bekker-Nielsen, does not agree with Winfield's views and thinks that the Pontic Roads did not go from Merzifon Plain to the east of Vezirköprü, but ran to the south of Vezirköprü. See, T. Bekker-Nielsen, "Trade, Strategy and Communication on The Roman North-East Frontier", *Cedrus*, 2016, IV, p. 36 (Footnote number 31).

⁴³ D. Winfield, "The Northern Routes Across Anatolia", *Anatolian Studies*, 1977, Vol. 27, p. 151-166.

⁴⁴ D.G. Hogart, J.A.R. Munro, "Modern and Ancient roads in Eastern Asia Minor", *Royal Geographical Society Supplementary Papers*, 1893, III, p. 739.

⁴⁵ Strabo gave information about the plain as: "*Sidene and Themiscyra are contiguous to Pharnacia. And above these lies Phanaroia, which has the best portion of Pontus, for it is planted with olive trees, abounds in wine, and has all the other goodly attributes a country can have.*" See, Strabo, *ibid*, XII:3.30. On the other hand, modern scholars think that the plain stretches as far as Niksar and its south regions, thus including Taşova.

⁴⁶ Bekker-Nielsen, *ibid*, 2016, p. 38.

raises some questions related with the later history of Magnopolis.

Ancient Magnopolis, a prominent city of the Pontus region, gained its importance especially during the Roman Period. Its importance became particularly pronounced due to its location at a very strategic point during the Mithridatic Wars. As Appian pointed out, in addition to its strategic military location, the citizens of the city supported Pompeius. They welcomed him into their city due to construction activities the development of the trade, good governance and peace.

In any event, we have enough evidence to state that Magnopolis was built and organised in the same way as the other cities founded by Pompeius along the main trade route in the region. After it had been acquired by Pompeius, the city was re- built and for a brief period reached the pinnacle of its existence.

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