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FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEYS CONDUCTED IN THE ANCIENT CITY AND TERRITORIUM OF NEOCLAUDIOPOLIS*

Vezirköprü, located 110 km southwest of the Samsun Province on the Black Sea coast in the north of Türkiye, is the fifth largest district of Samsun in terms of population and is also the district with the highest number of villages in the country with one hundred and sixty villages. The town situated on an important route, has witnessed continuous settlement from ancient times to the present. One such settlement is the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis. While no standing structures of the site have been discovered to date, numerous artefacts from the ancient city are scattered throughout the district. In this context, to investigate the district's history, identify its archaeological and cultural assets, and determine the location of the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis and its connections with the surrounding area. The research began in 2018 and was completed in 2024. During the surveys, nearly 160 villages were visited, yielding substantial data about the distribution area of the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis. The data obtained during the survey were evaluated under two main headings: settlements and tombs. This study aims to present the survey findings to the scientific community.

Key words: Black Sea Studies, Samsun, Vezirköprü, Phazemon, Neopolis-Neoclaudiopolis, Andrapa.

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РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ, ПРОВЕДЕННЫХ В ДРЕВНЕМ ГОРОДЕ И НА ТЕРРИТОРИИ НЕОКЛАВДИОПОЛЯ

Везиркёпрю, расположенный в 110 км к юго-западу от провинции Самсун на черноморском побережье севера Турции, является пятым по численности населения районом Самсуна и районом с самым большим количеством деревень в стране — сто шестьдесят. Город, расположенный на важном пути благодаря своему расположению, был местом постоянного заселения с древних времен и до наших дней. Одним из таких поселений является древний город Неоклавдиополь. Хотя до сих пор не обнаружено ни одного сооружения, относящегося к городу, расположенному в Везиркёпрю, многочисленные артефакты древнего города разбросаны по всему району. В этом контексте было проведено исследование с целью изучения истории и выявления археологических и культурных ценностей района, а также определения местоположения древнего города Неоклавдиополя и его связей с окружающей средой. Исследования начались в 2018 г. и были завершены в 2024 г. В ходе исследований, проведенных в период с 2018 по 2024 г., было посещено около 160 деревень, что позволило получить существенные данные о распределении древнего города Неоклавдиополя. Полученные в ходе исследования данные были оценены по двум основным направлениям: поселения и гробницы. Целью данного исследования является ознакомление научного сообщества с результатами исследований.

Ключевые слова: Черноморские исследования, Самсун, Везиркопрю, Фаземон, Неаполь—Неоклаудиополис, Андрапа.

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Introduction

Vezirköprü, where the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis is localised, is one of the largest districts of Samsun province and is located 110 km southwest of Samsun. Located in the Central Black Sea Region, the district borders Alaçam and Durağan in the north, Bafra in the northeast, Osmancık in the southwest, Havza in the east, and Saraydüzü in the west (fig. 1). While it was a village settlement named Phazemon in the Hellenistic Period, in the Roman Period, it was raised to the status of a city by Pompeius and named Neapolitis. In the following period, the city was named Neoclaudiopolis in honour of the Roman Emperor Claudius, and coins were minted under this name until the Byzantine Period. During the Roman period, the city, which was located on an important road junction leading to Samsun-Havza (Thermai) in the south, Kastamonu-Taşköprü (Pompeiopolis) in the west, Tokat-Niksar (Neokaisareia and Samsun (Amisos) in the east, emerged on the stage of history with the name Andrapa within the Byzantine territory after the division of Rome into two. After the region came under Turkish rule, the city became known as Gadegara for a time and began to be called Köprü next, which means “bridge” in Turkish. Thereafter, the city was rebuilt by Grand Vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha during the Ottoman period, thus taking the name Vezirköprü, which has survived to the present day.

Although the district has a hilly geography, it also houses plains suitable for agriculture. The region has witnessed continuous occupation for thousands of years as different ecosystems have created suitable environments for human habitation. The earliest studies on the prehistoric periods of the district were carried out by Kökten (Kökten et al. 1945: 361) in 1940—41. These studies were followed by the surveys conducted by Dengate and Alkım (Alkım 1973: 435—438; Alkım 1978: 542—547; Dengate 1978: 245—258) in the 70s. Although these studies in Vezirköprü yielded important data from the Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, they do not sufficiently illuminate the Hellenistic and Roman Periods of the city. The earliest studies on the Hellenistic and Roman Periods were initiated by Kahl, French and Olshausen (Kahl 1991; French 1988; Gerhard nad Olshausen 1991: 612—613). The focus of these studies carried out in the 80s and 90s was on the coins and inscriptions of the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis, localised to today's Vezirköprü (fig. 2). Subsequently, surveys were conducted by a team formed by Bekker-Nielsen between 2010 and 2013 in order to identify the Roman roads in the region (Bekker-Nielsen et al. 2015: 1—96). Despite all these studies starting as early as the seventies, no comprehensive study has yet been conducted examining and presenting the district as a whole. Therefore, a project called “Neoclaudiopolis Ancient City and Territorium” was initiated in 2018 to overcome the localisation problems and determine the boundaries of the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis, one of the region's important Roman cities. During the surveys conducted between 2018 and 2024, nearly 160 villages were visited, yielding substantial data about the distribution area of the ancient city of Neoclaudiopolis. The data obtained during the survey were evaluated under two main headings: settlements and tombs.

1. Settlements

Since the region is very rugged and especially the northern part where Şahinkaya Canyon is located is very rocky, hillside settlements are more common than mound-type settlements. Ten mounds were identified and analysed in Çalköy, Yarbaşı, İncesu, İnkaya, Yağınözü, Narlısaray, Adatepe, Oymaağaç, Göl and Taşlıyük villages during the surveys. These mounds are mainly located on the lands on the two slopes of the Istavroz Stream (also known as Istavloz Steam). Excavations were carried out only at Oymaağaç Höyük. The mound was investigated in detail during the Alkım period, and excavations started by Czichon (Czichon et al. 2011: 169—250; Czichon and Yılmaz 2014) in 2007 are still ongoing today (figs. 3: 1—7). The findings obtained from the mound, which is identified as Nerik, the sacred city of the Hittites, are significant in terms of revealing that the mound was inhabited in the Hellenistic and Roman periods as well as being a Bronze and Iron Age settlement and that the settlement continued uninterruptedly from prehistoric times to the present day. The stone tools found in the mound in Adatepe Village, 4 km north of the district centre, revealed that the oldest settlement in the district dates back to the Early Chalcolithic Period. During the investigations on the mounds, it was observed that many of them had been destroyed by illicit diggings or road construction works, while some of them had been subjected to agricultural activities, and the presence of many illicit digging pits evinced that they had been subjected to intense destruction by treasure hunters. The investigations on the mounds yielded a large number of sherds, pithoi and tile fragments dating to the Bronze, Iron, Hellenistic, Roman, Late Antique and Middle Ages. Ceramic finds dating back to the Bronze Age, as well as marble column bases and foundation blocks dating back to the Roman Period, reported to have been excavated by the villagers through illicit diggings, were found in the Camii Tepesi Höyük located in the Kayalı Mevkii adjacent to the Istavroz Stream in Çalköy (figs. 4: 1—5). Another mound with building remains is located in Yarbaşı village, oriented northwest-southeast, also situated on the banks of the Istavroz Stream (fig. 5: 1). Rubble stone vaulted structures are observed in some of the many illicit digging pits opened on the mound. In addition, there are traceable wall rows in the south of the mound (figs. 5: 2—7). The mound yielded pottery belonging to different periods ranging from the Iron to the Middle Ages.

Another settlement type identified during the surveys is fortresses. The earliest fortress settlement was found at Çalköy-Gavurevi Mevkii (fig. 6: 1). Located on the upper side of the hillside settlement at a point dominating the terrain, the fortress is spread over an area of approximately 200 m^2 in diameter and has a half-moon-shaped fortification system consisting of unworked small rough stones (figs. 6: 2—7). Since the northern slope of the fortress has a steep rocky structure, this side did not require a fortification structure. As the walls lie in ruins, taking measurements was impossible. Some of the remains of the walls in the south of the fortress indicate that there were sections built adjacent to the interior of the fortification wall. The Iron Age ceramics found on the slope extending from the fortress to the Yörükçal road revealed that the fortress also belonged to this period.

After the death of Alexander the Great and the disintegration of his empire, many kingdoms were established. One of these was the Kingdom of Pontus, founded in 281 BCE. The most famous king of the kingdom, also known by the name of its founder, Mithridates, was undoubtedly Mithridates Eupator VI. The reason why he stands out so prominently compared to other kings is that he spent his life fighting against the Romans and delayed the Romanization of Anatolia to a great extent. In these struggles, which continued until 66 BCE, the numerous fortresses and watchtowers built especially on the Black Sea coast and inland, were one of the greatest weapons used by Mithradates Eupator VI against the expansionist policies of Rome. The study of the fortresses in the region has provided essential data shedding light on the archaeology of the Black Sea.

The most important fortress examined in detail during the surveys is undoubtedly the Sagylion Fortress, also mentioned in Strobon's work. Localised to Büyükkale by researchers such as Olshausen and Biller (Olshausen and Biller 1984: 162), the fortress is located at an elevation of 1400 m and dominates the Vezirköprü plain (fig. 7: 1). The highest point of the castle, situated on a steep cliff extending in the east-west direction and called "Flag Hill" today, is accessible by partially preserved steps carved into the rocks (fig. 7: 2). The open areas in the fortress contain Hellenistic Period cut stones without mortar at the bottom and Roman and Byzantine Period 4—5 m height and 1.30 m width fortification walls built with Khorasan mortar, brick and rubble stone (figs. 7: 3—5). The fact that no second example of these Hellenistic Period walls encountered in Sagylion has been found makes this site even more significant (Temür 2023: 123—125, fig. 2—22).

The most striking feature of the fortress is the evidence discovered in the southwest part, which is believed to belong to the stepped rock tunnel mentioned by Strabo (fig. 7: 6). Since the entrance has been destroyed, it is only possible to make a definitive statement through excavation. However, Strabo writes, "*The water-rich cistern in Sagylion, now abandoned, was useful to kings in many respects. Arsakes, one of the sons of King Pharnakes, attempted to revolt by declaring himself ruler but was captured and executed here. Although the fortress was taken by Polemon and Lycomedes, both kings, Arsakes was captured not by force but by starvation and thirst. Taking no provisions with him, he fled from the plains into the mountains and found the cisterns filled with large rocks, for Pompeius had ordered them to be filled and the garrisons demolished, lest they should be of any use to those who went up for banditry. This is how Pompeius had organised the administration of Phazemonitis"*. The cistern in question must be the one mentioned by Strabo, which was destroyed by Pompeius and filled with rocks, since the other cistern in the fortress, carved into the rocks, is 4 m in diameter and 6 m deep and is in good condition (fig. 7: 7). It is also not large enough to meet the needs of an army. The survey around the walls revealed fragments of ceramics, pithos, roof tiles, and cylinders dating back to the Roman and Byzantine periods. These remains are significant as they evinced that the fortress was built in the Hellenistic Period and that the walls were repaired and reused during the Roman and Byzantine periods.

Another fortress surveyed in Vezirköprü is located 32.5 km northwest of the centre of Vezirköprü on a very steep rocky area bearing the same name. The height of the cliff where the fortress called Kocakaya is located is 103 m from the walking level (fig. 8: 1). The summit of the rocky area is reached via six rock steps that can be traced in places (fig. 8.2). There are libation pits just to the right of the rock steps (figs. 8: 3—4). On the slopes of the rocky area, rows of walls extending from one side to the other were found. The southeast of the rocky area houses fortification walls 3—4 m high on flattened rocks, built of semi-worked stones and plastered with Khorasan mortar (fig. 8: 5). To the northeast of the rocky slope is a 3 × 3 m square room carved into the bedrock on one side and closed with a plastered stone wall on the other, likely used as a tower or for a similar function. To the southeast of the cliff is a 2.70 m wide, 4.50 m long and 2.20 m deep cistern carved into the rock (fig. 8: 6). A large amount of glazed Byzantine ceramics, roof tile fragments and a very small amount of Roman ceramics can be observed in the area.

There is also a fortress settlement at Kale Mevkii in Tekkekıran Village, 13 km southeast of Vezirköprü (fig. 9: 1). Located to the west of the Istavroz Stream, the fortress is situated on a steep rocky area in the east-west direction at a point to control the terrain. Remains of walls with Khorasan mortar and flattened areas for the placement of fortification walls are visible on the fortress (figs. 9: 2—5). The eastern side of the fortress is bordered by a cliff with the Istavroz Stream flowing below, while the western side is bordered by a hillside settlement with a very dense ceramic assemblage from the Iron, Late Iron, Roman, Seljuk, Byzantine and Medieval periods (fig. 9: 6).

The research in the region revealed that the fortresses were not used on their own but supported by rocky areas selected at strategic points in the terrain used as watchtowers (see: Temür 2024), especially during the struggles with the Roman Empire (figs. 10: 1—5). Although some of these rocky areas are called fortresses by the villagers, they should be distinguished from the fortresses with structures on them and inhabited by people; they are primarily located on hillsides with rocky areas suitable for settlement, and they are natural, high rocky areas used for surveillance of the enemy. Although levelled areas for placing wall structures were found in some of the investigated watchtowers, no traces of walls were discovered. The watchtower in the "Kaplancık Kanyon", located in the continuation of the "Şahinkaya Kanyon" within the borders of Kaplancık Village, stands out from the others in this respect (figs. 11: 1—4). There is a watchtower built inside a rocky area with rooms inside. This watchtower, considered to be built to control the river transportation on the Kızılırmak, is accessed by steps carved into the rock, as in other similar watchtowers. After the completion of the construction of the Altınkaya Dam, the steps were flooded. It is impossible to see these steps today.

The rock steps identified during the surveys are found in many of the settlements in the Pontus Region (figs. 12: 1—5). These steps, one of the most characteristic features of Hellenistic Period architecture, were used in structures defined as "stepped tunnels" as well as watchtowers (figs. 13: 1—7). It is believed that the stepped tunnels made by carving the rock with a certain slope were used as cisterns, escape tunnels or for cult purposes (De Jerphanion 1928: 24; von Gall 1967: 504; Şenyurt and Bulut 2020: 228—229). It is recorded that, in the surrounding provinces, there are 39 of these stepped tunnels, which are found in many of the fortresses in the Pontus Region (Şenyurt and Bulut 2020: 228; Bulut 2020: 47—48).

Cisterns are another structure found in the watchtowers (figs. 14: 1—5). As in Sagilion and Kocakaya fortresses, cisterns were also found on watchtowers. The cisterns carved into the rocks on the watchtowers in the villages of Esen, Özyörük and Ovacık are a good example of this. The common characteristics of these cisterns carved into the rocks are that they are 2—4 m in diameter and 3—6 m deep. Other common features are that they narrow towards the mouth and are plastered in places to ensure watertightness. The fact that these cisterns, built in the Hellenistic period but also used in the Roman and Byzantine periods, are not very large strengthens the opinion that they were built to meet the daily needs of the soldiers stationed in the watchtower. When we examine the settlements with watchtowers, it becomes clear that they are primarily simple rural settlements built on sloping terrains near water. The common characteristic of these settlements is witnessing uninterrupted occupation from the Bronze to the Middle Ages.

The ceramics, roof tiles and pithoi found in the settlements are evidence of continuous occupation. Unfortunately, very little architectural texture has been found on the settlements. The biggest reason for this is the settlements being used as agricultural land today. The remains of walls, some of which have survived to the present day, are found in the villages of Asarkaya, Kaplancık, Yeşiltepe and Türkmen. The wall remains in these regions do not exhibit the high-quality artistry observed in the Sagylion Fortress.

The watchtowers and settlements identified during the surveys in Vezirköprü revealed critical data for the elucidation of the Hellenistic Period of the region. These data evinced that the sites in question have similar characteristics to other settlements of the Pontus Region. The data to be obtained through surveys provide limited information. A better understanding of the socio-economic structure of the region is only possible through scientific excavations.

2. Tombs

Many tombs were identified during the surveys conducted in Vezirköprü. These can be grouped as tumuli and rock, chamosorion, stone cist, vault, and tile tombs. All 22 tumuli identified during the surveys had illicit digging pits, while some were levelled due to agricultural activities, and some were destroyed during road construction works (figs. 15: 1—9). The preserved diameters of the tumuli vary between 10—80 m, while their heights reach up to 30 m. Considering the site selection of the tumuli, some were built on flat terrain and some on the slopes dominating the terrain. It is impossible to say anything about the burial chambers of any of the tumuli since none were found intact. The only excavated example of these tumuli is the "Ahmetbaba" tumulus. The tumulus was rescued by the Samsun Museum after illicit diggings, but since the burial chamber and dromos of the tumulus were destroyed, we lack extensive knowledge about the site.

In order to understand the architecture of the tumuli found in Vezirköprü, we need to look at the tumulus excavations in Samsun. However, not much work has been done on tumuli not only in Vezirköprü but also across Samsun in general. The tumuli studied are mostly the ones that were destroyed by illicit diggings and then rescued by the Museum. Many of these tumuli have been destroyed, and their finds are scattered in museums and private collections (Atasoy 1997: 51—52). The first of these tumuli is the "Lerdüge" tumulus (Akok 1948: 835—853). Located in the Havza District, the tumulus is 16 m high and 35 m in diameter and consists of a burial chamber and dromos covered with a cut stone vault. Another tumulus with similar characteristics is the "İkiztepe" tumulus

(Alkım et al. 1988; Bilgi 1988; 1999; Alkım et al. 2003; Bilgi et al. 2005), located in the Bafra District consists of a dromos and a burial chamber as in the Lerdüge tumulus. Another tumulus is the "Tepecik" tumulus in the Kavak District, dating to the 2nd century BCE. The 10 m high and 30 m in diameter tumulus consists of four sections: a dromos, an anterior chamber, and a burial chamber with an offering chamber behind it. The "Baruthane" tumuli in the İlkadım district dating to the 3rd — 2nd century BCE are two other tumuli with similar characteristics (Atasoy et al. 2005: 153—165). The southern tumulus, carved out of conglomerate rocks, consists of two chambers and is 15 m high and 40 m in diameter. The 8 m high and 30 m in diameter tumulus in the north consists of three intertwined chambers. Another tumulus excavated is the "Dondortepe" tumulus, dating to the 3rd century BCE in the Canik District. As in the Baruthane examples, the tumulus was carved out of conglomerate rocks. It consists of two dromos, a front room and a burial chamber with a burial niche on the sides (Ünan 2009: 1—28). The burial chamber seems to have been reused in the 1st century CE by adding a second dromos to the west of the tumulus. The "Toptepe" tumulus in the Canik District and the tumulus in the Atakent District reveal a similar structure with a burial chamber with a dromos and a barrel-vaulted upper cover.

Excavations of the tumuli in the region reveal that the tumuli generally consist of a dromos and a burial chamber. It is evident that the dromos and burial chambers of the tumuli, which were mostly carved into conglomerate rocks, were made of cut stone and then covered with piled earth (Akok 1948: 835—853; Özsait 2003: 273—284; Atasoy et al. 2005: 153—165; Ünan 2009: 3—4; 2013: 394). It is understood that the "Ahmetbaba" tumulus, the only excavated example in Vezirköprü district, continues the tumulus tradition of the region with its burial chamber structure with dromos. However, it is impossible to date it with certainty since no example with an exposed burial chamber was found among the other identified tumuli. Therewith, considering the similar examples in the region and the burial tradition, Hellenistic-Roman Periods are suggested.

Another burial type is rock tombs (figs. 16: 1—11). The rock tombs identified during the surveys were categorised into three subtypes. The first of these is the "Paphlagonia Type". The ones found in Esen (figs. 16: 1—4) and Küçükkale (fig. 16: 5) villages belong to this subtype. Paphlagonia type rock tombs (Leonhard 1907; von Gall 1966) appear as a part of the tradition of the Pontus Region. Dating back to the 5th century BCE, this architectural form is similar to Phrygian rock monuments (Ramsay 1882: 256—263; Ramsay 1888: 350—382; Ramsay 1889: 147—189; von Reber 1897: 531—598; Koerte 1899: 80—153; Haspels 1971: 73), and is considered to be a reflection on the rock of the local wooden residential architecture influenced by Achaemenid architecture and Greek art (Forbes 1983: 93 ff.; Vassileva 2012: 250). This subtype comprises single or multiple burial chambers with flat or triangular pediments. The most distinctive feature is the columned entrance in the form of a temple façade. It is known that this type of rock tomb, which was widespread in the Hellenistic period, continued to exist in smaller sizes in the Late Hellenistic-Early Roman Periods. The widespread use of the vault cover and the arch is considered a Roman influence. As in the Esen Rock Tomb, Paphlagonia type rock tombs are found in many provinces such as Samsun, Sinop and Kastamonu. In light of similar examples, the Esen Rock Tomb is dated to the Hellenistic period.

The second subtype is the semi-circular, rough-worked rock tomb with an arched entrance and vaulted ceiling on a levelled terrace at the top of the rocky area in the Küçükkale (fig. 16: 6) and Türkmen (figs. 16: 7—9) settlements. We lack information about the burial beds since the site was severely damaged due to illicit diggings. Since there are no finds to date the tomb, it is impossible to give a precise date. However, the tomb can be dated to the Roman Period based on the form.

The rock tomb at Özyörük, classified as the third subtype, has a rectangular plan and a vaulted ceiling as in the Paphlagonia type but has no columns at the entrance (figs. 16: 10—13). In addition, the death bed is not in the ground but in the form of an arcosolium niche carved into the wall opposite the entrance. The arcosolia were carved into the rock in the form of an arch, and sarcophagi or urns were placed inside; sometimes they were simply carved into a rock surface and sometimes built inside a burial chamber. Although the timing of their emergence is controversial, it is generally accepted that this subtype started in the Late Hellenistic Period, became widespread in the Roman Period and continued to be used until the Early Byzantine Period (Çelgin 1990: 150). In Anatolia, it is known that their use began during the Roman Period and intensified especially during the Early Christian Period. Since Anatolian geography is mountainous and rocky, and it is easier to construct arcosolia compared to other rock tombs, they are encountered in almost all regions of Anatolia. Rock tombs with similar features are frequently encountered in the neighbouring provinces of the Pontic Region, such as Tokat and Ordu besides Samsun. Since no finds or inscriptions were found at the Özyörük Rock Tomb, it is impossible to date it precisely. However, considering the intensive use of arcosolia tombs in Anatolia in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE and similar examples, it seems possible to assign a similar date range for the Özyörük Rock Tomb.

The third group of tombs are the chamosorion tombs (figs. 17: 15). These tombs are found in many regions of Anatolia, such as Phyrgia, Cilicia, Caria, Pamphylia and Paphlagonia. They are known to have been used continuously from the Hellenistic Period to the Early Byzantine Period. However, it seems that these tombs were not widely used in Vezirköprü and throughout the region. Although the terrain is suitable for this type of tomb, the complex artistry can be suggested as one of the reasons why they were not preferred. The Vezirköprü examples are of the "simple rock tomb" type defined as simple chamosorion, formed mainly by rectangular carvings of conglomerate rocks. Although no single tomb lid was recovered in one piece, the broken fragments indicate that they were simple, undecorated, unprofiled, flat-roofed and single-piece tomb lids and that flagstones were mostly used for this purpose. The directions of the tombs showing rough workmanship indicate that different directions were preferred depending on the structure and shape of the rock in which the tomb was carved. At this point, we can say there is no unity of direction. When we examine the location of the tombs, we see that sometimes a relatively high rocky area is preferred, as in the Boğazkoru (figs. 17: 1—3) and Sandıkkaya (figs. 17: 4—5) examples, while sometimes they can be built at walking level, as in the Evkaya tombs. These tombs, which measure 2.30 m in length and 0.85 m in width, are believed to have been inhumation burials. However, examples of cremation practices in different parts of Anatolia are also known (Söğüt 2012: 565). It is difficult to say anything about the status of the tomb owner. However, its relatively simpler craftsmanship compared to chambered rock tombs, yet more intricate than stone cist tombs, indicates that it may have been favoured by individuals belonging to a middle-income group positioned between the lower and upper classes. Since no intact tombs were recovered and no elements such as ornamentation or profiles that could help date the tombs were found, it is very difficult to date them, but it is known that they became widespread during the Roman Period. Except for Vezirköprü, this tomb type is not encountered in Samsun except for a few examples. No finds were recovered from these sites either. Hence, although a definite date cannot be suggested, the Hellenistic-Roman Period date range is suggested since this type is found in settlements belonging to the period in question.

The fourth group, the stone cist tombs, is the most common (figs. 18: 1—4). The most prominent feature of these tombs, which are sometimes covered with a single or sometimes with several flagstone slabs, is that the body is laid directly on the ground. All the stone cist tombs found during the surveys were constructed in the east-west direction. The average length of these tombs is 2 m, and their width and depth can reach 1 m Mostly, limestones cut into slabs were used in these tombs, but there are also a few examples where local slate stones were preferred. The common point in these tombs, where there is no set rule regarding the location of the tombs, is that they were built in the east-west direction. Since all the tombs were destroyed, we lack information about their finds. However, the twelve stone cist tombs found during the excavations carried out by the Samsun Museum in the Cumhuriyet Quarter of Vezirköprü between 2012 and 2017 provide us with very important information since they were found together with their finds. The tomb finds and architectural remains recovered during these excavations were dated to the Roman Period. This date is also probable for the tombs identified during our surveys.

The fifth group of tombs are single-cell barrel-vaulted tombs (figs. 19: 1—5). These are single-chambered vaulted tombs built on slopes. The masonry consists of lime mortared, semi-worked stones, broken bricks and tile fragments, and its entrance has an arched structure made of bricks and flagstones combined with mortar. The tombs found in Şentepe (figs. 19: 1—3) and Çorakdere (figs. 19: 4—5) settlements, all of which were robbed, yielded no finds. Seven of these tombs dating to the Eastern Roman Period were identified. Since the floors were destroyed, no information about the benches could be obtained. In general, this type of tomb was used between the 1st and 6th centuries CE (Şimşek et al. 2015: 119). Since no finds were found in the Vezirköprü samples, the Late Roman Period is considered appropriate.

The other tomb group consists of sarcophagi. However, none of the sarcophagi identified during the surveys was found intact and in situ. The ones that were identified belonged to sarcophagus vessels, which were mostly used as spolia as animal troughs (figs. 20: 1—10), especially in village fountains. Their lids were mainly used as "musalla stones" (the stone on which the coffin is placed) in cemeteries or village squares. These sarcophagus basins made of marble or limestone were manufactured as a single piece, without any decoration and with plain artistry. Some had elaborate workmanship on the interior, while the exterior was crudely carved. The sarcophagi's lengths, widths and depths vary between 1.30—2.40 m, 0.62—0.90 m, and 0.30—0.62 m, respectively. These measurements indicate that some of the sarcophagi were used for children. Since no intact sarcophagi were found, we have no information about the skeletons or burial artefacts. Considering Samsun in general for comparison, there are few examples of sarcophagi. It is understood that most of the sarcophagi in the Samsun Museum are not excavation finds but were brought to the museum through purchase or confiscation. As in the Vezirköprü examples, these sarcophagi generally have rough workmanship, they are mostly undecorated, and the few decorated sarcophagus vessels have reliefs depicting a girland motif, a wool basket, a spindle, a mirror and a comb to emphasise that the sarcophagus belonged to a woman. The sarcophagi with acroteria and triangular pediments on their lids, like the ostotheks found in Vezirköprü, were dated to the Roman Period based on their construction techniques and decorative features, although no skeletons or finds were found inside. The same date is considered appropriate for the Vezirköprü examples.

During the surveys, marble ostotheks, which can be defined as small sarcophagi holding the bones and ashes of the cremated remains, were also found (figs. 20: 14—15). As seen in the ostothek lids found in the garden of a house in Yürükçal Village and the park in front of the District Governorate, these were not found intact but in pieces. The ostothek lids, which measure 0.70 × 0.50 m on average, were made with triangular pediments and acroteria, as observed in the sarcophagi.

The tombs made with roof tiles belong to the seventh type of tomb group. Although roof tiles were found in almost all settlements during the surveys, none were found intact. However, during the excavations conducted at Oymaağaç Höyük, tile tombs found in intact condition give us clues. These tombs, described as tile tombs in the excavation report, are composed of tiles roofed together on their short sides in the shape of a saddle, while the tiles on the head and foot parts are supported by stones (Czichon 2013: 9—10). The tombs, in which the skeleton was laid directly on the ground and had no burial artefacts, according to the excavation report, are dated to the Early Byzantine Period. Convex tile fragments found during the surveys revealed that tombs with convex saddle roofs were also used in the region. Tile tombs were generally used more than other types, especially in lower-income groups, since tiles are cheap materials and don't require much labour. However, due to their fragile nature and the fact that nothing remains except for broken tiles after excavation, they have not survived to the present day in large numbers. Moreover, since the tiles were found in fragments, it is challenging to determine whether they belong to a dwelling or a tomb. It is also difficult to date these tombs, which were continuously used from the Archaic Period until the end of the Byzantine Period. Although the tiles' forms and archaeometric methods provide partial data on dating, the direction of the skeleton and the tomb finds are the most obvious criteria for their identification. We have insufficient data on the tile tombs in Vezirköprü. The most comprehensive studies in Samsun were conducted in the Amisos necropolis, which now lies under the modern settlement. Tile tombs were frequently encountered in addition to underground rock tombs and direct burials in the form of inhumation in the studies carried out mainly as rescue excavations by the Samsun Museum (Şirin and Kolağasıoğlu 2016: 1—29; 2013: 2024: 73).

The identified tile tombs are divided into four groups: tile roof, tile-based, tile-supported, and concave tile tombs. In general, these tombs were reported to have no unity of direction as they were positioned according to the structure of the terrain, and most did not contain any burial goods. While the underground rock tombs unearthed in the Amisos necropolis showed a wealth of finds, the simple earthen and tile tombs did not contain many burial goods. It has thus been concluded that these tombs may have been used mostly by people with low income, and they were dated to the Hellenistic-Roman Period from the finds recovered. However, it is impossible to suggest a date for the Vezirköprü examples at this stage. Many medieval necropolis areas and tomb pits were also identified during the surveys. However, all of these burials consisting of simple earth tombs (inhumation), tiles or flagstones have been destroyed and do not reveal any measurements or typology. Medieval necropolis areas were found in Yukarınarlı, Karadoruk, Gömlekhisar, Halkahavlı, Cebeli and Sarıyar settlements. The tombs were dated to the Middle Age based on the ceramics found around the necropolis areas.

3. Evaluation and Conclusion

During the studies carried out in 4 seasons between 2018 and 2024 in the Vezirköprü District of Samsun, nearly 160 villages were visited, a large number of archaeological data were identified, and the data obtained were evaluated under two main headings: settlements and tombs. Regarding the settlements, slope settlements were preferred over mound settlements due to the region's rugged and rocky geographical structure. It is known that the earliest settlement dates back to the Chalcolithic Period, and the examples examined during the surveys are mainly located on the lands on the two slopes of the Istavroz Stream. The survey on these mounds yielded a large number of sherds, pithoi and roof tiles dating to the Early Bronze, Iron, Hellenistic, Roman, Late Antique and Middle Ages. Except for a few, no architectural remains were found.

Another settlement identified during the surveys are fortresses. The earliest fortress settlement is the Iron Age fortress located at Gavurevi Mevkii in the Çalköy Quarter. The fortresses that witnessed the struggle between the Kingdom of Pontus and the Roman Empire are Tekkekıran, Sagylion and Kocakaya Fortresses. The Sagylion Fortress, mentioned by Strabo and now localised to Büyükkale, has many of the traditional features of Mithridates' fortresses, with its fortification walls dating back to the Hellenistic Period, rock tunnel, cistern and rock steps. Research conducted in the region revealed that the fortresses were supported by using the rocks selected at the dominant points of the terrain as watchtowers. Although locally referred to as fortresses, it is impossible to define these structures as fortresses. Rather, they are steep rocky areas located within the settlement area, controlling the roads and terrain, and are not suitable for settlement. Except for the watchtowers at Kaplancık and Asarkaya, the watchtowers identified house flattened areas for fortification walls, but no wall remains were found. They are recognised as watchtowers because of the presence of hillside settlements around them, rock steps and rock-cut cisterns large enough to meet the water needs of a small unit. The 3329 Hellenistic Period bronze Amisos coins in an in-situ jar unearthed by illicit diggings at the top of the Asarkaya watchtower support this view. These coins, which may have belonged to the soldiers serving in the watchtower, reveal how important the watchtowers were for defence.

The tombs identified during the surveys were categorised under eight types. Regarding the tumuli, which constitute the first type, it is impossible to say anything definite about the structure and period of the burial chambers since there is no excavated example. However, in the light of the "Ahmetbaba Tumulus" unearthed by illicit diggings and other examples excavated in Samsun, we concluded that the tumuli identified in Vezirköprü are also of the "burial chamber with dromos" type. Although it is impossible to date the tumuli precisely since the burial chamber was not found, it is understood that they belong to the Hellenistic-Roman Periods when compared with similar examples in Samsun and the burial tradition. The rock tombs, which constitute the second type, were evaluated under three subtypes. The first subtype, "Paphlagonia Type" rock tombs, dates to the Hellenistic Period and is the most common type in Samsun and the surrounding provinces. The rock tombs with a vaulted ceiling were categorised as the second subtype. These tombs were dated to the Roman Period based on their architecture. The third subtype of rock tomb is the "arcosolium", which has an entrance like the

Paphlagonia type rock tombs and a burial chamber behind it; the difference between the arcosolium and the Paphlagonia type rock tombs is that the arcosolium has no columns at the entrance and the burial beds are not in the ground, but inside the wall in the form of arcosolium niches. Since no finds or inscriptions were found in the tombs, it is impossible to date them precisely. However, considering the intensive use of arcosolium tombs in Anatolia in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE and similar examples, it seems possible to assign a similar date range for the Özyörük Rock Tomb.

The third group consists of chamosorion tombs. These tombs, defined as simple rock tombs formed by carving the floor of conglomerate rocks in rectangular form, are known to have been used continuously in Anatolia from the Hellenistic Period to the Early Byzantine Period. They have been built at walking level or on high rocks and have no directional unity. These tombs have rough workmanship and were covered with flat roofs and simple, undecorated, unprofiled and one-piece flagstones. This type of tomb, which is simpler than the chambered rock tombs and has more elaborate craftsmanship than the stone cist tombs, must have been preferred by middle-class people. It is impossible to date the tombs with certainty since no intact tombs were recovered, and no elements such as decoration or profile that could help date them were found. However, it is known that this type of tomb became widespread during the Roman Period.

The fourth group, the stone cist tombs, is the most common. The most prominent feature of these tombs, which are sometimes covered with a single or sometimes with several flagstone slabs, is that the body was laid directly on the ground. All the stone cist tombs identified during the surveys were constructed in the east-west direction. Since all were destroyed, we lack information about their finds. However, based on the intact specimens found during the rescue excavations carried out by the Samsun Museum in the centre of Vezirköprü, the Roman Period seems probable for the tombs identified during the surveys. The fifth group of tombs are single-cell barrel-vaulted tombs. These are single-chambered vaulted tombs built on the slopes. The masonry consists of lime mortared, semi-worked stones, broken bricks and tile fragments, and the entrance part of the tombs has an arched structure comprised of bricks and flagstones combined with mortar. The Late Roman Period is considered appropriate for the examples found in Vezirköprü, generally dated between the 1st and 6th centuries CE.

None of the sarcophagi or ostotheks found during the surveys was intact. The ones that were found belonged mainly to sarcophagus vessels, which were mostly used as spolia as animal troughs, especially in village fountains. Their lids were primarily used in cemeteries or village squares as resting stones. These sarcophagi and ostothek vessels made of marble, limestone or limestone were made in one piece; they do not have any decoration, and their lids were made with triangular pediments and acroteria. The fact that these sarcophagi and ostotheks, which have plain workmanship and no decoration or inscriptions, do not contain any skeletons or artefacts makes the dating problematic. However, based on the construction techniques, the Roman Period is suggested for dating.

The tombs made with roof tiles belong to the seventh type of tombs. Although roof tiles were found in almost all settlements during the surveys, none were found intact. The fact that they are fragile and nothing but broken roof tiles were left behind after they were unearthed prevented most from reaching the present day. Since the roof tiles were found in fragments, it is difficult to determine whether they belong to a dwelling or a tomb. The dating of these tombs, which were in constant use from the Archaic Period to the end of the Byzantine Period, is also problematic. We do not have sufficient data on the tile tombs in Vezirköprü. The studies conducted throughout Samsun reveal that there were few funerary gifts left in tile tombs. The absence of funerary gifts suggests that these tombs may have been used mostly by low-income people. Tile tombs excavated in Samsun Region are dated to the Hellenistic-Roman Period. The same date is suggested for the Vezirköprü samples.

In conclusion, the settlements and tombs identified during the excavations in Vezirköprü provide important data in terms of understanding the architecture, ceramics, tombs and expansion area of the Ancient City of Neoclaudiopolis. These data reveal that it has similar characteristics to the other settlements of the Pontus Region. However, the data obtained through surveys are quite limited. In order to understand the socio-cultural and economic structure of the Ancient City of Neoclaudiopolis, excavations should be carried out in the region.

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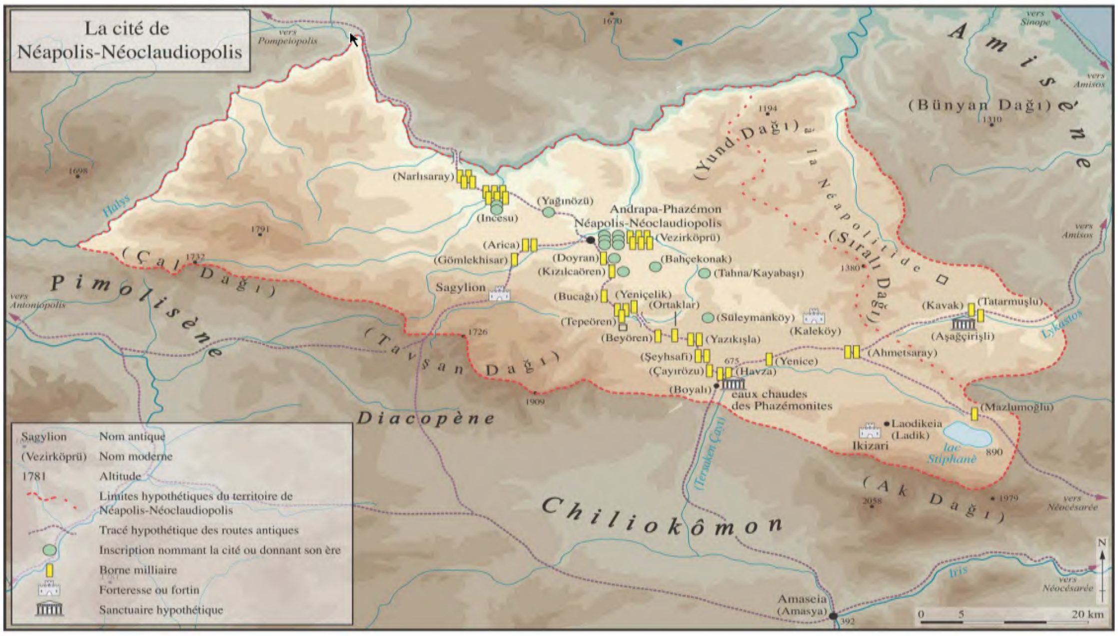

Fig. 1. The Neoclaudiopolis in Strabo's time (after Dalaison and Delrieux 2014: 164, Carte 2).

Fig. 2. The provincial map of Samsun.

Fig. 3. The Oymaağaç Höyük (Oymaağaç Excavation Archive).

Fig. 4. Cami Tepesi Höyük and architectural elements.

Fig. 5. Yarbaşı Höyük and building ruins.

Fig. 6. Gavurevi Fortress and city walls.

Fig. 7. Sagylion Fortress, city walls, cisterns, rock steps and ceramic sherds.

Fig. 8. Kocakaya Fortress, libation pit, rock steps and city walls.

Fig. 9. Kale Fortress, city walls and ceramic sherds.

Fig. 10. Kocakaya, Zindankaya, Küçükkale, Kudret Kayası and Asarkaya watchtowers.

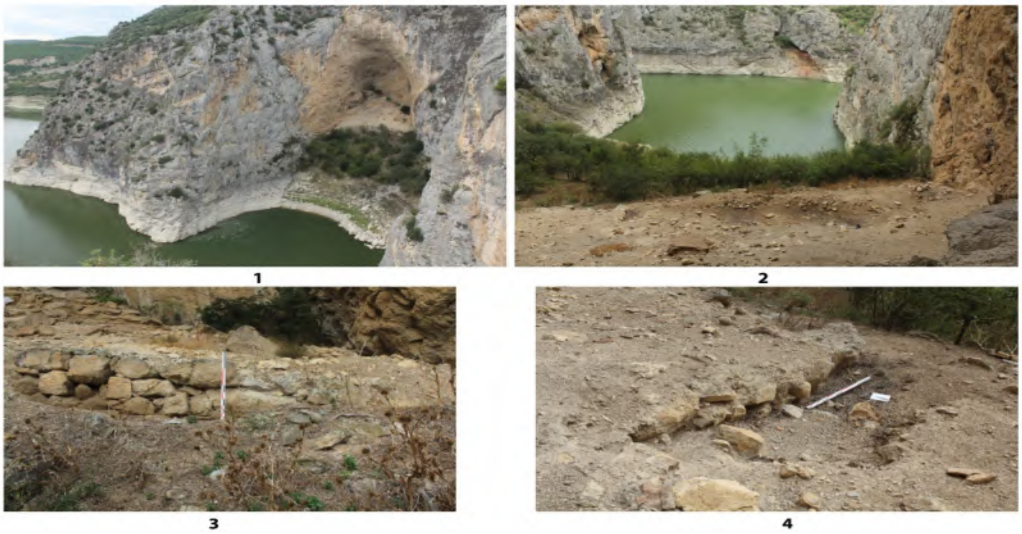

Fig. 11. Kaplancık watchtower and building ruins.

Fig. 12. Kocakaya (Çekelan), Zindankaya, Özyörük, Büyükkale and Kocakaya rock steps.

Fig. 13. Küçükkale step tunnel, tunnel entrance and corridor

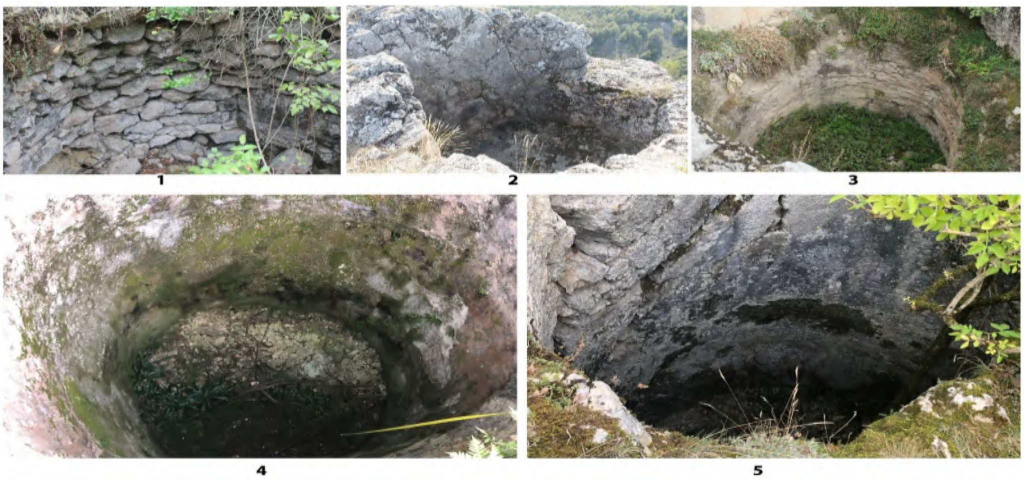

Fig. 14. Türkmen, Zindankaya, Büyükkale and Küçükkale cisterns carved into the rock.

Fig. 15. Yörükçal, Dökmetepe, Kabaktepe, Çal, Maltepe, Tekkıran, Ziraat Tepesi, Habiptepe and Kovaniçi tumuli.

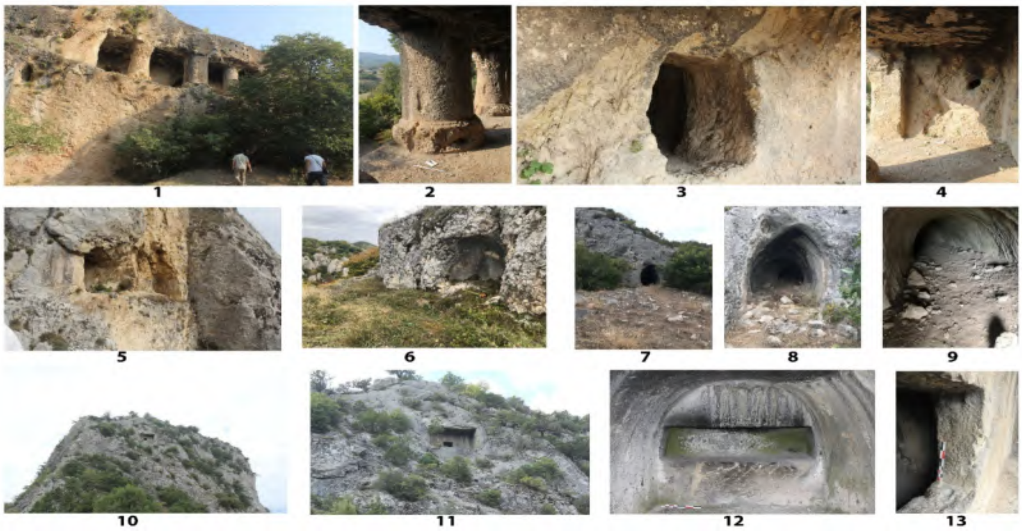

Fig. 16. Esen, Küçükkale, Özyörük and Türkmen rock tombs.

Fig. 17. Boğazkoru and Sandıkkaya chamosorion tombs.

Fig. 18. Akören, Örencik and Kıranalan stone cist tombs.

Fig. 19. Şentepe and Çorakdere single-cell vaulted tombs.

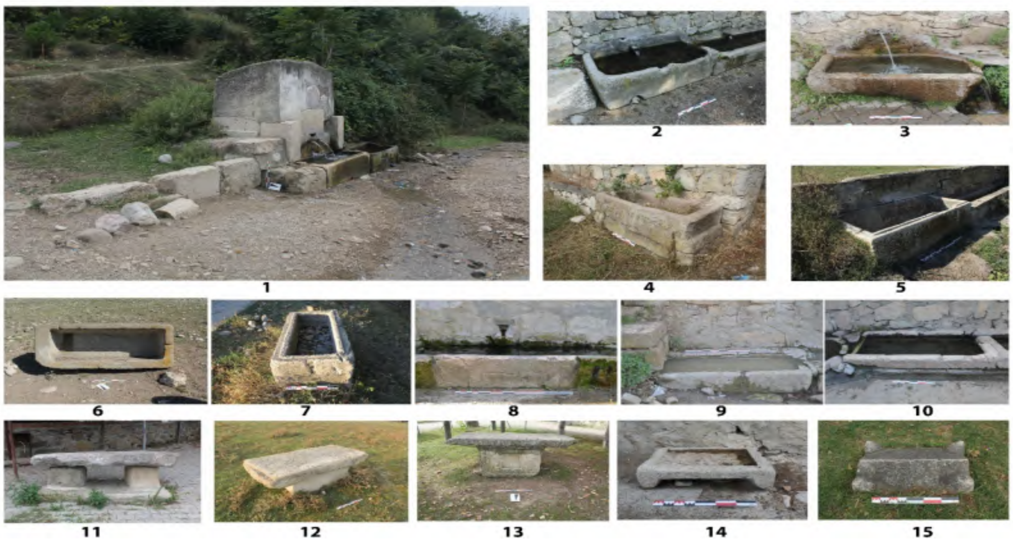

Fig. 20. Sarcophagi and ostotheks.