

## The Port Illustration on the floor mosaic of the Yakto Villa

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*The most important materials that can shed light on the historical atmosphere of Antiocheia on Orontes are mosaic panels. The floor mosaic obtained from the Daphne Yakto villa provides valuable information by showing the topography, the architecture and the daily life of Daphne and Antiocheia on Orontes. While a part of the academic research labelled the U-shaped, colonnaded structure filled with water as a reservoir, certain details of the depiction give us clues to the possibility that this could actually be a port. Records provided by antique writers on the city and comparisons made with architecturally similar material seem to yield data that support the idea that this structure functioned as a commercial port.*

*Günümüzde Antiocheia on Orontes antik kentinin tarihsel dokusuna ışık tutan en önemli malzeme mozaik panolarıdır. Daphne Yakto villasından ele geçen taban mozaïği, Daphne ve Antiocheia on Orontes kentlerinin antik dönem topografyası, yapıları ve günlük yaşamına ait tasvirler içermesi açısından önemli bir buluntu grubunu oluşturmaktadır. Mozaik tasvirinde gözlenen U planlı, kolonadlı ve ortası suyla dolu olan yapı, araştırmacılar tarafından su rezervuarı olarak tanımlanırken, tasvirde gözlenen detaylar liman yapısı olabileceği yönünde ipuçları vermektedir. Kentle ilgili antik yazarların kayıtları ve mimari yönden benzer malzeme ile yapılan karşılaştırmalar, yapının bir liman yapısı işlevinde olabileceği şeklindeki değerlendirmemizi destekleyen veriler sunmaktadır.*

Keywords: Antiocheia on Orontes, border mosaic, water reservoir, port.

The floor mosaic that was revealed by the excavations carried out in the Daphne Yakto villa in 1932 provides a lively depiction of the topography, architecture and daily life of Daphne and Antiocheia (Fig.1). The villa, which was a countryside residence for Daphne, is also known as the Ardaburius villa. He was magister militum of Antiocheia during 450-457 A.D., thus dating the mosaic to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century (Campbell 1934: 202).

The buildings illustrated on the border that frames the central panel of the floor mosaic have no spatial relationship with each other. Generally being frontally depicted, they are identified by inscriptions or by scenes pointing to their function. Among them, there is an interesting U-shaped structure with a roof supported by a colonnade (Fig. 2). Its middle is filled with water and there is an illustration reminiscent of a boat. Making use of records of antique writers and comparisons made with architecturally similar materials, our interpretation of the function of this building is presented below.

There are certain suggestions that have been put forward by previous scholars on the nature and function of this structure. To quote from Malalas (Jeffreys 1963:147), after building an aqueduct extending from Daphne to Antiocheia, Emperor Hadrianus erected a spectacular reservoir to store and control water flowing from Daphne's Saramanna source and named it as "theatre of source of Daphne". Based on that, R. Chowen and D. Levi suggested that this building could be the reservoir mentioned by Malalas (Chowen 1956: 275-277; Levi 1947: 326). However, if one compares it to architecturally similar formations, one gets the impression that this structure was meant to be a port. The aim of this article is to demonstrate this by reference to some similar architectural material. The fact is that in his piece "Antioch Mosaic Pavements", while Levi declares the building is a water reservoir, he also asserts that there is a boat-like depiction on the water-filled area of the illustration, which appears to support our hypothesis (Levi 1947: 329).

On the other hand, Chowen believed that this building presented a public scene for those who sat on the theatron and watched the water go by (Chowen 1956: 275). He then backs his assertion by stating that on his visit to Africa in 128 A.D., Emperor Hadrianus had built an aqueduct extending from Carthage to Zaghoun Mountain, after which

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Figure 1  
Levi, 1947, Fig. LXXIX/a  
The mosaic of Yakto villa, topographical border

he also ordered a reservoir to be constructed by the water source on the mountain (Chowen 1956: 277). As mentioned above, Levi suggested that the building on the depiction could be a storage area from where the water coming from Daphne's Kastalia and Pallas sources was to be distributed (Levi 1947: 326). However, to the right of the U-shaped structure, there is another formation illustrated in the mosaic that might be a water reservoir. Furthermore, water flowing into this second structure is clearly indicated with two separate white lines which symbolize the Pallas and Kastalia sources whose names are inscribed in the upper part of the mosaic border (Fig. 3). Within this context, the reservoir which Malalas referred to as storing water coming from sources of Daphne must be this second building located to the right of the U-shaped structure on the mosaic.

On the basis of Libanios's remarks about a dock by the River Orontes for ships to manage their loads (Downey 1959: 652), the same U-shaped structure can be thought of as a port building. The following comparisons with architecturally similar material present information that confirms this assertion.

The building on the mosaic includes a colonnaded area consisting of columns designed in Ionian style. This colonnaded part, behind which stairs are placed in a U-shape, encircles the water in the middle. While there is the image of a boat in this water-area, a sort of platform to which the boat approaches is observed to be attached to a stair that is placed in front of the colonnaded area (See Fig. 2).

The city of Antiocheia was situated in a very important and fertile area by virtue of its being founded at an intersection point between the roads to the east and west. The River Orontes, and the canals joining it, facilitated the transfer of goods to Seleucia Pieria, Antiocheia's port settlement through the river. From there, they could further be sent to the Mediterranean (Downey 1962:27). A similar design was realized during the reign of Emperor Claudius who connected Rome, first to the port of Ostia through the canals he built on the River Tiber, and then to the sea (Sear 1982:123; Savile 1941:231). By virtue of the remaining ruins, it is widely known that in the antiquity there were many docks that ships could resort to across the River Tiber (Blackman 1982:187 Fig. 2). Libanios, from the 4th century A.D., offers us the most comprehensive information on Antiocheia. While describing the town, he wrote that ships carrying wheat approached the city and discharged their load to a stone-made dock, from where their goods were taken to the agora by the river. (Downey 1959: 652, Downey 1959: 652)<sup>1</sup>. This statement also supports the observation that the description on the mosaic shows a boat on the water-filled area of the U-shaped structure approaching a sort of a platform. The goods that were unloaded on this platform

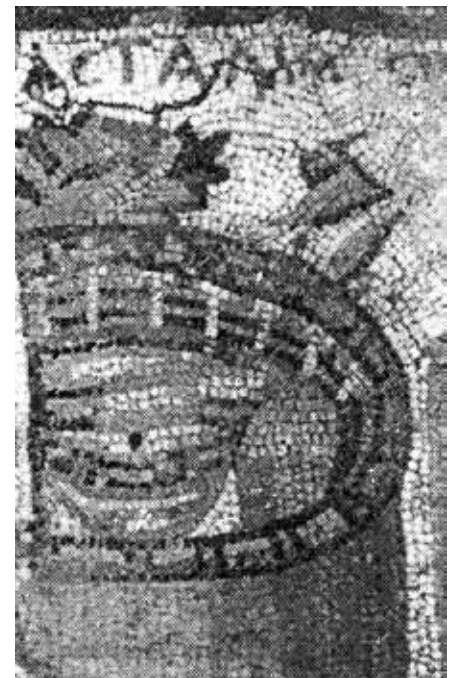


Figure 2  
Campbell, 1934, Fig. XXII/A  
The mosaic of the Yakto villa, topographical border, U-shaped structure

<sup>1</sup> For one of the oldest examples of the complex allowing ships to approach cities through rivers, please see Lothal dock and its canals from the Harapan region, India (J. W. Shaw., *Greek and Roman Harbourworks, A History of Seafaring Based on Underwater Archaeology* (ed. G. F. Bass), 1972, 88-89), please see a harbour settlement possibly situated on the Nile, Egypt in 3rd millenium B.C. (N. M. Flamming., *Cities in the Sea*, London, 1972, 40).



Figure 3  
Levi, 1947, Fig. LXXIX/a  
The mosaic of the Yakto villa, topographical border, U-shaped structure and water reservoir



Figure 4  
Boyce, 1958, Fig. 10/1  
Harbour Illustration on a coin from the Antoninus Pius period of Pompeiopolis

were first taken to the frontal staired area of the colonnade that was painted in black in the mosaic. From there, they were carried to the agora by the river. Farther on, a man is seen walking to the left of the U-shaped building, carrying a basket in his outstretched right hand and a package under his left arm. Even though it is not really possible to make a precise point, the presence of this man can be evaluated as if he is carrying goods unloaded from the port. This colonnaded part and the black stairs behind it must have been designed to offer the public a recreation area where they could relax and enjoy the breeze<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, architectural similarities between the U-shaped structure and the harbour descriptions on a Pompeiopolis city coin (Fig. 4) and on the Kelenderis mosaic (Fig. 5) further present evidence in line with the idea that this structure was a port rather than a water reservoir.

Excavations that were carried out in Kelenderis revealed a floor mosaic in which a city scene presenting the harbour and some surrounding buildings was described (Zoroğlu 1994: 31, fig. 15) (See Fig. 5). What is interesting in this depiction is a U-shaped structure, with a tiled roof supported by a colonnaded part consisting of arched-columns extending throughout the harbour (Zoroğlu 1995: 265). The depiction of the city-port in the mosaic is highly important since it provides valuable information on the location and plan of the Kelenderis harbour. On the water-filled area of the structure, there are again portrayed a sailboat and a simple boat. Zoroğlu believed this building to function as an entreport or shops for the harbour. (Zoroğlu 1993: 195, fig. 13; Zoroğlu 1994: 32, fig. 15). The structure next to it, with its high windows and dome, looks similar to the port baths whose remains we find today and whose current location coincides with the plan suggested in the mosaic (Zoroğlu 1995: 265). Because the stylistic characteristics of both the geometric adornments and the lotus buds placed in the border framing the mosaic are dated to either the second half of the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century A.D, the mosaic itself should be traced back to the same dates (Zoroğlu 1993:196; Zoroğlu 1999:519).

In Soli Pompeiopolis, a coin dated to the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius was found (See Fig. 4). The harbour depiction on that coin displays similarities with the architectural features of the structure shown in the mosaic (Boyce 1958:68 Fig. 10) since the U-shaped structure with a roof supported by a colonnade is also present on that coin. In the water-filled part, there is an illustration of a water-god. According to the information provided by Beaufort in his piece *Karamania*, the Pompeiopolis harbour looks like a basin surrounded by semi-circular walls or breakwaters (Beaufort 1818: 249, 259). The structure depicted on the Pompeiopolis coin and the research conducted by Vann's team which validated the presence of breakwaters (Vann 1994:530-534), confirmed Beaufort's descriptions and his city plan (Beaufort 1818: 249, 259). The closest example to the form and location of the water-god in the middle of the water-filled area of the building is a figure of a god that was placed at the entrance of the Ostia port that was depicted on a sestertius from the reign of Emperor Nero (Boyce 1958: Fig. 10/2). Several suggestions have been put forward as regards the identification of this port god shown on the coin (Boyce 1958: 71; van Buren 1911: 194, footnote 2.). The similarity observed in both illustrations led to a conclusion that the god depiction in Pompeiopolis, which is a province, must have been adopted by the capital Rome (Boyce 1958:77). Port structures with similar plans have already been observed in depictions placed on coins from the Imperial period at Ostia (Savile 1941: 231, Fig. 9), Corinth and Mothone (Boyce 1958: Fig. 13) (Fig. 6).

<sup>2</sup> For portico examples encircling the harbour in the ancient Anatolian cities of Miletos and Elaiussa Sebaste, please see Akurgal, 1988, 451, Schneider, 2008, 101-102.





As the capital of the Seleucian Kingdom, Antiocheia was the administrative centre of the Syrian province during the Roman period. Situated between the River Orontes and the Silpius Hill on a crossroads for trade routes extending from east to west, the city was strategically very important. With its fertile lowlands and abundant water resources, Antiocheia produced grain, oil and wine. Its agricultural appeal and strategic significance made the city a very important trade centre across the eastern and Greco-Roman world. The River Orontes and its canals into the city provided a route for the Persian, Indian and Chinese goods to be first transported to Seleucia Pieria from Antiocheia and then to the Mediterranean ports (Downey 1962: 11).

The mosaics displaying scenes from the city life shed light on the settlement from the antique period and its structural features. Currently exhibited in the Museum of Archaeology of Hatay, the floor mosaics of the Yakto villa are particularly remarkable since they provide indispensable information on the city life and the architecture of Antiocheia, whose structural characteristics were heavily damaged by earthquakes. The fact that the River Orontes was appropriate for small ships to sail along and that Antiocheia's canals offered an easy route into the port of Seleucia Pieria and thus to the Mediterranean enable us to imagine the idea of a port, connected to the city, into which ships would approach to load and unload.

In his piece "Antioch Mosaic Pavements", Levi's theory that the U-shaped building constituted a water reservoir is refuted by his remarks about a boat-like illustration placed in the middle of the water-filled area of the same building (Levi 1947: 329), while this testifies to the point made in this article. There is no evidence accommodating a setting in water reservoirs of the antique period that

Figure 5  
Zoroğlu, 1999, Fig. 2  
Harbour illustration on Kelenderis mosaic



Figure 6

Boyce, 1958, Fig. 13/ 4, 13/5

13/4- Harbour Illustration on a coin from the Antoninus Pius period of Corinth

13/5- Harbour Illustration on a coin from the Emperor Caralla period of Mothone

allowed ships or boats to enter. However, Libanios's remarks on ships unloading wheat by the river in Antiocheia (Downey 1959: 652), confirms the existence of a port by the River Orontes. The fact that in the mosaic, the boat was depicted as approaching a platform-like area<sup>3</sup> reminds us of the presence of a setting where ships could use as a dock to unload their trade goods. Furthermore, it is also plausible to deduce that, since the city agora was situated by the river, trade goods were first unloaded in this port from where they were then taken to the agora. Because the U-shaped structure on the mosaic is colonnaded, it also recalls Vitruvius's statements that porticos and shipyards that accessed the commercial centre of cities were constructed at ports that enjoyed a natural curve or U-shape (Vitruvius. V. XII.1). Architectural similarities between our U-shaped structure and the ports of Pompeiopolis and Kelenderis<sup>4</sup> remain as further evidence for the hypothesis that this was a port. Because the mosaic illustrations of Yakto and Kelenderis are dated to the mid-5th century A.D, they also chronologically overlap with each other. Although the Pompeiopolis coin is an earlier example, ports with similar plan were built in the capital and in provinces during the entire Roman Imperial period (Boyce 1958: Fig. 13).

<sup>3</sup> For boats that were used for transportation on the river, please refer to Lionel Casson, "Harbour and River Boats of Ancient Rome", *JRS* 55 I/2, 1965, 31-39

<sup>4</sup> For an illustration of a port with similar plan, please see the portico of the Kenchreai port of Corinth, dated to the end of 4th century A.D., in L. İbrahim et. al. *Kenchreai. Eastern Port of Corinth*, Leiden, 1976, Fig. 94; for the circular port observed on late-period coins of Side, please see A. M. Mansel, *Side. 1947-1966 Yılları Kazıları ve Araştırmalarının Sonuçları*, Ankara, 1978, Fig. 76.

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