

The Burnaz Harbor, Tax Exempt, and the Economic Boom in the Eastern Mediterranean

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Archaeological surveys document an economic boom and an increase in settlements in East Plain Cilicia as of the fourth century AD. Ruins of numerous *ex novo* settlements, small-sized villages, and farmsteads with olive groves decorate the valleys and hilltops of the East Plain Cilicia, which yield olive and wine presses. Plain Cilicia was already known for its peculiar wine. The number of olive presses dated to the Late Antique Period by the archaeological surveys exceeds the wine installations.¹ Olive oil production stimulated the economic boom in East Plain Cilicia, and olive oil was the main commodity dispatched from harbor towns to the Mediterranean market. Landlords and the church in rural areas and governors in the plain controlled the production of olive oil, and harbor towns ran the trade. Supply and demand worked well, and the economic boom enabled even the small harbors such as Burnaz to participate in interregional maritime trade. In the time of such an economic boom, *ex novo* foundation of the Deli Halil settlement, situated high on a volcano and overlooking the Sea at the northeastern tip of the Gulf of Iskenderun to control the maritime trade at the ancient harbor of Burnaz, appears as a deliberate enterprise of the closest metropolis Epiphaneia. The present study aims to examine the foundation of the ancient settlement of Deli Halil concerning the late antique economic boom of the region, the tax-exempt granted due to the natural catastrophes, and the rise of maritime trade at small harbors, such as Burnaz.

The River Pyramus-Ceyhan and its tributaries irrigate East Plain Cilicia meandering through the flat land as a massive body of water; the river flows to the Mediterranean Sea by the ancient town of Mopsuestia-Misis. Inhabitants of the plain enjoy a mild Mediterranean climate with a fertile land of deep alluvial deposits suitable for tilling the soil to cultivate grains and a green pasture suitable for husbandry. In the past vineyards, olive groves, and orchards decorated the first hills of the Amanus and Taurus mountains ranges. The river with its tributaries functioned as smooth venues for estuarine transport to dispatch commodities swiftly to the regional and interregional Mediterranean market via maritime trade. Karaçay stream, as one of the tributaries of the River Pyramus at the southeastern part of the plain running from the Amanus mountains to the west, has an early Holocene branch forking to the south flows through a basalt canyon in the north-south direction, through the Kısık Pass, as the shortest and the most convenient venue to proceed to the Mediterranean Sea by the Burnaz harbor (fig. 1).

Plain Cilicia is geologically an earthquake zone; particularly the western skirts of the Amanus Mountain Range, the coastal Issos Plain, and the northeastern part of the Cilicia Plain are on big fault lines where catastrophic earthquakes took place in the past.



Fig. 1: View of the site of the Burnaz Roman harbor.

The region suffered several earthquakes on a magnitude scale, of which mostly epicenter was Antioch. Catastrophic earthquakes and tsunami devastated the region from the first half of the first century to the sixth century AD, one of which the epicenter was Anazarbos metropolis, the capital of Cilicia Secunda in 521 AD. The rural settlements of Plain Cilicia increased the production of olive oil as the main commodity between the two historical earthquakes at the time of emperors Theodosius I and Justinianus, fourth and sixth centuries.² The towns were quick to heal the wounds of their inhabitants receiving aid for relief after the earthquakes. As the demand kept on rising, eastern and northeastern corners of Plain Cilicia became one of the major olive oil suppliers of the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean market. The economy boosted as of the middle of the fourth century AD.

After catastrophic natural disasters rulers used to organize and coordinate to rebuild the town with the help of local elites. It was the task of a town administrator to heal wounds and restore infrastructure. The piety of the local elites was also a great help to restore structures of the monastic complexes. Emperors also took initiatives to relieve the pain of people. Euergetism, which symbolized the power and presence of the empire, was a Roman imperial response to the earthquakes manifested in several forms. After the 115 AD earthquake, Antioch received financial support as leverage to rebuild the infrastructure and houses, evidently archaeological excavations at Antioch well-documented earthquake layers providing a terminus post quem and ante quem for the settlement history.³ The earliest surviving floor mosaics and structures of Antioch are dated between the years after the first and before the last catastrophic earthquakes; that is to say, the uncovered structures have been dated after the second quarter of the second century AD and before the second half of the sixth century AD earthquakes. The emperors not only financed disaster reliefs and oversaw restoring and rebuilding programs, if in need also remitted taxes of earthquake-hit regions for a certain period. The tax exemption was another act of euergetism of the empire witnessed in the late fourth century as a policy of the Theodosian era, recorded in Codex Theodosius. Provinces of

the Orient were granted tax remission for forty years, which covered general tax accounts to the decurions, the private and patrimonial taxpayers, and the taxpayers of the divine imperial household, for every right subject to State service.⁴ The remission of all taxes provides a reasonable explanation for one of the causes of the economic boom and increase in the number of settlements based on the agricultural economy, which had a surplus of the olive oil production dated to the late antique period in Cilicia Secunda.

The Deli Halil settlement measured ± 80 ha in size and 1-mile distant from the ancient city of Epiphaneia that is ten times larger in scale than the new building program. Foundation of a town on higher slopes of a volcano, which looks over the Burnaz harbor, (fig. 2), as a sizable and well-organized settlement with its olive oil presses and depots in exceeding numbers, seems an enterprise of the only metropolis of the Issos Plain, the city of Epiphaneia. Two earthquakes defined the beginning and end of the Deli Halil settlement as a short-lived town from the early fifth to the last quarter of the sixth century dated based on pottery and amphorae finds. Foundation of a town one-tenth size of its metropolis and situated 1-mile close looks a new district to the metropolis was built deliberately, for a specific purpose. Building a new district required the acquisition of new land and high-budget construction works. An ambitious project, as such, must have been taken on more solid grounds than disaster relief. The Imperial initiative could only achieve such budgeted enterprise, and an act of emphyteusis could only be a manifestation of imperial euergetism.

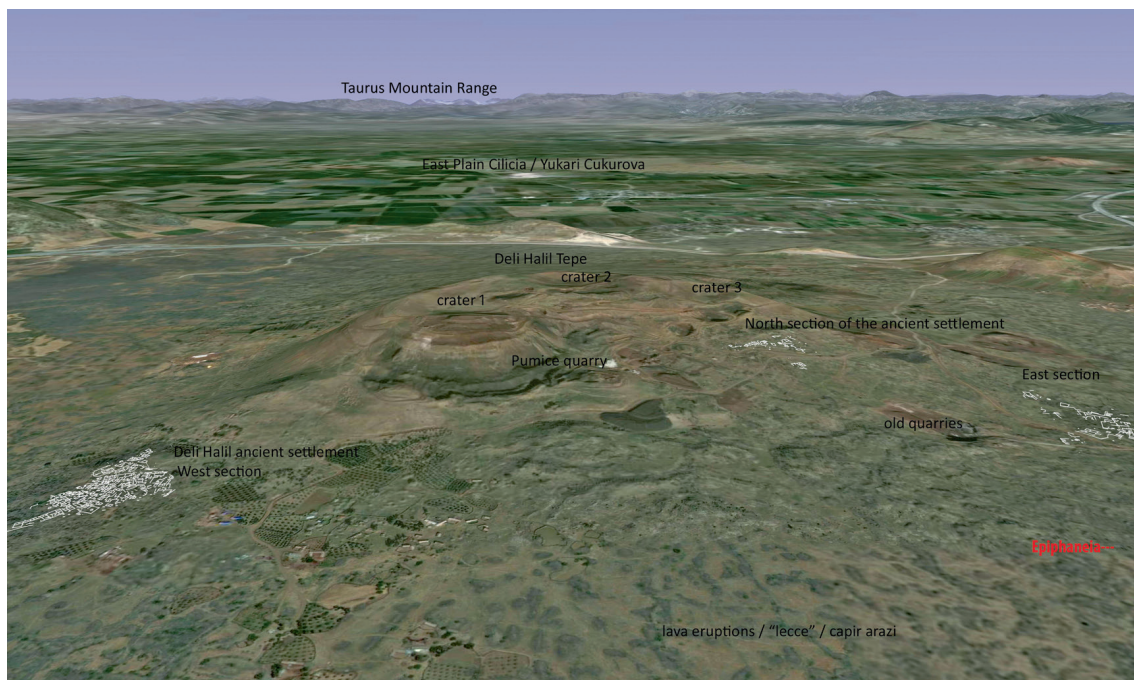


Fig. 2: Landscape of the Deli Halil ancient settlement on the Deli Halil volcano.

Besides tax-exemption the municipality needed practice of emphyteutic law to be applied to land of the temple of the Deli Halil settlement, which decorates a strategic hilltop having a panoramic view of both most of the quarters of the newly founded town and the entire Issos Plain, the Gulf of Iskenderun, and the Burnaz harbor. A perpetual emphyteusis lease must have been issued to the city of Epiphaneia to cultivate the arid land of the Deli Halil volcano by planting it with olives⁵. An emphyteusis lease was an act of Roman civil law that ‘parcels of land of municipalities which are enclosed within the wall of the municipality, or which adjoin the space within and without the walls, or those parcels of real estate which belonged to temples, but which were sought on a petition by different persons...shall remain in the possession of the decurions, the members of the brotherhoods, and the guilds...’⁶. The basalt land of Deli Halil volcano, owned by its temple, must have fallen out of use and become arid land close to the municipality of Epiphaneia. The strategic southern slope of the volcano overlooks the Gulf of Iskenderun and the harbors along the coast. It is the most convenient site to watch over the activities on the maritime route and the trade at the Burnaz harbor. Besides, basalt depots are the best storages to keep goods at a steady temperature until exported via interregional Mediterranean trade. The metropolis Epiphaneia must have needed a new district to produce olive oil and store the commodity in circular basalt depots as a warehouse from where the annual product could be dispatched to the Burnaz harbor to sell in the market via maritime trade (figs. 3, 4). Thus, the amelioration of the land of the Deli Halil settlement and assigning a new function to the site must be due to the emphyteutic lease, which facilitated the economic boom of the macrogeographic area.

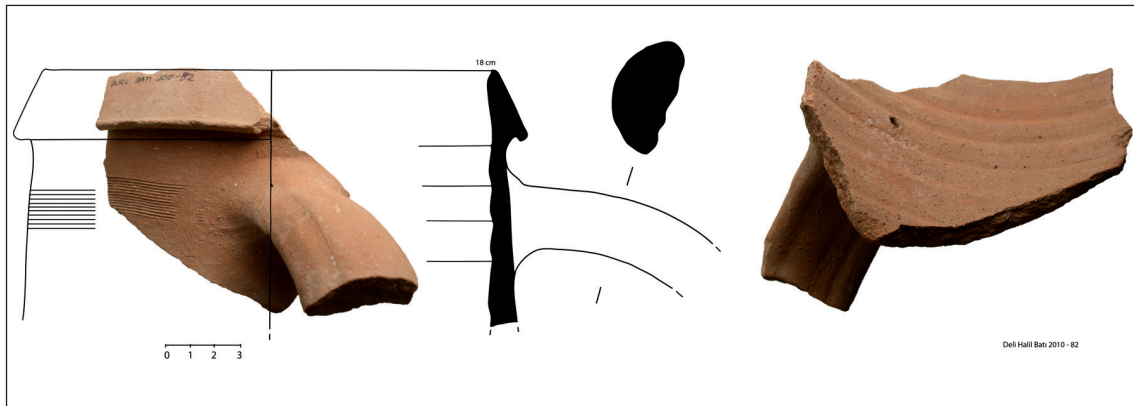


Fig. 3: North African Transport amphorae found at the west section of the Deli Halil Settlement (Key type 62).

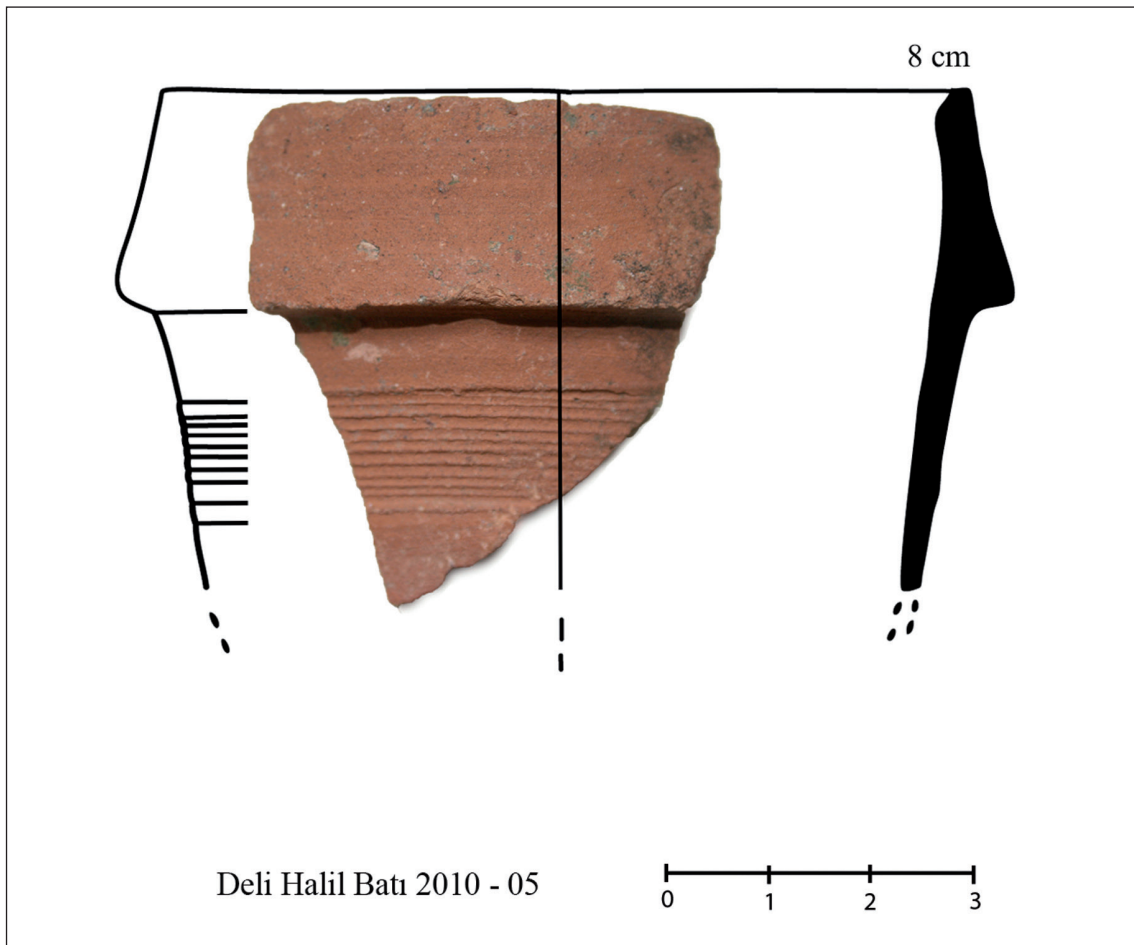


Fig. 4: North Africa spatheion found found at the west Section of the Deli Halil Settlement.

Notes

- ¹ Seton-Williams 1951; Çambel 1986; Hellenkemper 1986; Özgen – Gates 1993; Tobin 2004; Lehmann et al. 2006; Tülek 2009; Tülek 2014.
- ² Theophanes Conf. AM 6017; Mango – Scott 1997, 262.
- ³ Dio Cassius 24. 25. 407.
- ⁴ Codex Theodosius XI.28.09.
- ⁵ Bury 2001, 57.
- ⁶ Codex Theodosius X.3.5.

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Fig. 1, 2: Foto by F. Tülek. – Fig. 3, 4: Osmaniye Archaeology Survey team.

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