

The Network of Communication Routes in Anatolia in Late Antiquity and Medieval Times

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I. THE HISTORY OF ANKARA

Ankara is a prominent city in the heart of the old cultural landscape of Anatolia. Being a traffic junction for centuries it is a good starting point for our presentation on major roads and smaller routes in Asia Minor since Roman times. Ankara has a long history, the geographer Pausanias (about 115–180) referred to an idea of the Hellenistic period by describing Midas, the mythical king of the Phrygians, son of king Gordios and the goddess Cybele, as founder of the city. According to the tradition Midas found an anchor there, in Greek *Ankyra* (Ἄγκυρα) – this was the origin of the settlement's name (Pausanias 1, 4, 5). Archaeological remains date back to prehistoric times and to the Hittite period. Since the 8th century BCE Ankara was part of the Phrygian Empire which was conquered by the Persians two centuries later, in the middle of the 6th century BCE. After numerous conquests and large territorial gains in Asia Minor Darius the Great (549–486 BCE), the third king of the Achaemenid empire, built a large road to improve communication throughout his wide empire, partly by using older elements and structures. This so-called *Royal Road* connected Susa in Persia with Sardis in Western Anatolia, it was about 2,700 km long and one of the most important traffic routes in Antiquity. The historian Herodotus (490/80 – around 424 BCE) mentioned its numerous stations and excellent resting places (Herodotus 5, 52, 1). But unfortunately, concerning various parts of Anatolia the course of the road is not exactly known, especially because the names of settlements connected with the road are not mentioned in our sources. There is only archaeological evidence which is sometimes ambiguous. Therefore, different reconstructions of the road's itinerary are known. But there is a general consensus that the *Royal Road* run north of the Great Salt Lake Tuz Gölü (in Greek *Tatta Limnē*) and passed Ankyra. The connection with the Euphrates region in the east and the Hermos region in the west was beneficial for the city; numerous travellers, soldiers as well as merchants, brought their money there and helped the local economy to flourish (Mitchell 1993, I 129; Müller 1997, 48–65).

In the first half of the 3rd century BCE the Galatians, being a Celtic people of three tribes, appeared in the region; they served as mercenaries for king Nicomedes of Bithynia (280–255/53 BCE) in 278 BCE, but soon afterwards they quit the service and pillaged the landscapes in these parts of Asia Minor. Ten years later, in 268 BCE they were beaten in a battle by the Seleucid king Antiochus I (281–261 BCE) and forced to settle down: the tribe of the *Tolistobogii* (Τολιστοβόγιοι) received the settlement area in the farthest west, around the old cities of Pessinus (Ballıhisar) and Gordion (Yassıhüyük); the tribe of the *Trocmii* (Τρόκμοι) settled in the area of Tabia / Tavium (Büyük Nefes), about 250 km further to the east and connected by one road at least, which most probably was a part of the *Royal Road* in Persian times (*TIB* 4, Karte; Müller 1997, 54). The landscapes in between, around the city of Ankyra and in its wider hinterland, were assigned to the third tribe of the *Tectosages* (Τεκτόσαγες). Henceforward, the whole region was called Galatia. In the year 25 BCE, *Galatia* was established as a Roman province by Augustus (27 BCE – 14); the territory went beyond the areas inhabited by the three Galatian tribes and reached the border of the province *Asia* in the West and the wide mountain range of the Taurus Mountains in the South. Ankyra was decided to function as its capital. As a result of the consecration of the Temple of Augustus and Roma in the year 19/20, the city became the centre of the regional Imperial Cult, too. It was a wealthy *Central Market Town*, a central place situated at a strategic position, important for administration, worship, trade and education. To fulfil the upcoming duties, a network of communication roads was needed to interact with other capitals at a greater distance as well as with the various smaller *Market Towns* in the vicinity. The network of regional routes had to be maintained, too. Local routes connecting the numerous villages in the hinterland were important for the supply of the city with food and vegetables, with building materials and utility goods. In the Flavian dynasty between 69 and 96 Ankyra became the *most important* road junction in central Asia Minor due to the consistent enlargement of its system of communication routes (*TIB* 4, 127). Its strategical importance was enormous, controlling the roads and landscapes in the north of the Great Salt Lake. Due to its beauty and significance the city was visited by numerous important travellers, among them several Roman and Byzantine emperors: Hadrian (117–138) for example visited Ankyra in 117, Caracalla (211–217) in 215, Constantius II (337–361) in 347 and 350, Julian (361–363) in 362 and Jovian (363–364) in 364.

Between 396 and 399, the province *Galatia* was divided into two smaller units, *Galatia Prima* and *Galatia Secunda*. Due to its excellent infrastructure and outstanding road-network Ankyra kept its status and became capital of the first named province, while the second one was ruled from Pessinus, some 130 km away. Emperor Anastasius I (491–518) spent his summer there in the years 497, 498 and 505. In the late seventh century the provinces were replaced by larger territorial units, which should be called *Themata* from the early ninth century onwards. For a better defence especially against the Arabs who invaded Anatolia periodically, each of them was governed by a *stratēgos*, an official who possessed both, military and civil power. The largest of the original four units was *Opsikion*, covering most parts of North-western Anatolia – and its capital was Ankyra, which remains one of the most important cities in Anatolia, in spite of the serious destructions made by the Persians in the year 622, destructions, which changed the settlement's character completely and transformed a spacious ancient city into a mediaeval fortress (*TIB* 4, 58; Foss 1977, 29). At least temporarily the *komēs tu Opsikiu*, the most powerful military official of this period, took his residence at Ankyra (*TIB* 4, 59, 127). After reduction of the theme *Opsikion* in the 8th century, Ankyra became the capital of the new created *Bucellarian* theme, which is attested for the first time in the year 767 (*TIB* 4, 62). The city remained important in the following centuries, even after its capture by the Seljuks in 1080/81, in the times of the crusaders (around 1101) or under the rule of the Turkish dynasty of the Danishmends (1227–1243), due to its well-developed infrastructure and its widely ramified network of roads and communication routes.

II. METHODICAL REFLECTIONS AND GENERAL REMARKS

Different types of sources are used for the reconstruction of the Late Antique and Mediaeval road system in Asia Minor. The general course of the routes is documented by literary sources. Extremely important for the reconstruction of the system are itineraries like the so-called *Itinerarium Antonini* from the late 3rd century, describing 17 main and many regional routes throughout the Roman Empire; the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* from the year 333, depicting the way from Southern France throughout Anatolia to Syria and Palestine; or the famous *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a mediaeval copy of an ancient road map, a map with various processing levels, starting in Hellenistic times, and the last one dating around the year 435. Furthermore, hagiographical texts contain valuable information concerning routes, for example the Life of St Theodore of Sykeōn, a widely travelled saint

in the 6th and 7th centuries, or the Life of St Euthymius the Younger, a holy man who lived in the 9th century (Malamut 1993). Beyond, the observations of Byzantine historians, of Arabic geographers or Western crusaders should be mentioned here. Unfortunately most literary sources just mention toponyms, place names of towns or villages, of mountains or rivers, which is only sufficient for the reconstruction of a general travel route. But these sources usually fail by describing the concrete surfaces and conditions of the roads; these facts are usually ignored. Very useful but only for the reconstruction of local and regional road conditions are the collections of mediaeval documents: for example, the numerous documents of the Lembiōtissa Monastery near modern Işıklar köy are important for our knowledge of the hinterland of Smyrna (İzmir) in the 13th century; the documents from the monastery St Paul at Mount Latros provide valuable information concerning the landscapes around the estuary of the Maeander, between Milēsia Limnē (Bafa Gölü) and the mountain of Mycale (Samsun dağ) from the 10th to the middle of the 13th centuries (1246/1254).

For the reconstruction of communication networks, archaeological remains are more essential than written sources: all over Anatolia road sections with original pavement survived, sometimes covered with heavy stone blocks and accompanied by spillways at their sides; one can find several Roman and Late Antique bridges with their characteristic vaults and arches. Furthermore, the numerous milestones, which were produced from pre-Roman times to the second half of the 6th century, served as indicators for a road by mentioning the distance to a *caput viae*, a geographical target. However, archaeological remains of stations or resting places, which are so well documented in literary sources, starting with the above quoted Herodotus, are very rare and sometimes hard to identify: only one station all over Asia Minor is known without any doubts, the mansion of Döşeme boğazı in Pamphylia, near Maximianupolis, today Kovanlık, in the wider hinterland of modern Antalya (TIB 8, 719–721; Hild 2010, 112).

Road sections, bridges and milestones were real elements of the former roads; but in between these so-called *fixed points* there are areas known as *transport zones*, landscapes of different size, where the road-lines are not exactly known and somehow uncertain. Several aspects are important when trying to fill these gaps and find out the most probably road course: one has to think about the geographical conditions in general and possible landscape changes, about different geographical conditions in former times, particularly in terms of river shifting or relocation of estuaries, for example concerning

the huge rivers Hermos (Gediz çay), Kaÿstrios (Küçük Menderes) or Maeander in Western Anatolia. One has to think about climatic changes, the guarantee of water, the missing of obstacles like swamps, the existence or possible disappearance of fords and so on. Computer programs like the *Digital Elevation Model* can determine a *Least-cost path*, the somehow easiest connection, a route which theoretically can be used with the least effort. These results allow some ideas concerning the course of the former roads in between the *fixed points*. But on the other hand it is always important to consider the hypothetical nature of these solutions. There are just *models*, not depictions of historical reality – because the human factor is missing: for example the long-lasting presence of political enemies or bandits in a wider landscape, the existence of various travel uncertainties in special areas might have forced travellers to avoid a special road and to choose another one, even if this one was longer, more difficult and *in sum* clearly uncomfortable. However, because of its higher security it was consequently used and soon regarded as the regular connection between two settlements, while the other one, although theoretically and objectively being shorter and better (and therefore most probably the result of our *digital model*), was abandoned and finally forgotten.

The construction of the network of communication routes in Anatolia is usually linked with the Romans. This is basically right, but construction in this special context is not synonymous with establishment from scratch. The Romans usually assumed existing structures in order to expand and enhance them, often due to military or administrative reasons (Avramea 2002, 62; Belke 2008, 300). Worth mentioning in this context is the *koine hodos*, the street which led from Ephesus (Selçuk) through the valley of the Maeander and the inner parts of Phrygia up to the Euphrates, a connection already used in archaic times; the same applies for various sections of the Persian *Royal Route*.

According to a common view, a Roman road is structured as follows: first, the soil was tamped and fastened by a mixture of mortar and limestone. Then followed a layer of pebbles to create a solid foundation; afterwards a paving with huge stones or stone slabs followed. Regularly, the middle part of the road was higher than the edges; therefore, rain water could easily flow away. Spillways on both edges of the road prevented the dangerous baring by water. At regular intervals milestones gave orientation and information concerning the distances; bridges crossed the dangerous rivers and ravines to avoid risks and to save travel time; stations and resting places guaranteed a certain comfort; changing places for horses and mules ensured a constant speed of travelling.

These ideas are definitely not wrong, all mentioned elements can be found in different parts of Anatolia; but obviously road building was a slow and irregular process. Many roads in Asia Minor were not completely equipped with all these elements immediately after the beginning of Roman rule. The *Via Sebaste* in the area of Iconium (Konya) and Lystra (near Hatunsaray) for example was constructed in the year 6 BCE as a military road and therefore paved from its beginnings (*TIB* 4, 101-102); on the other side, the road from Ankyra in the western direction to Pessinus, probably a section of the former *Royal Route*, seems to be fastened only in the Flavian period, this means more than hundred years after the foundation of the province *Galatia*. The highlight of the accommodation system along the main communication roads was in Late Antiquity; from the late 6th century onwards it already lost its shine: in the 4th century there was, according to the itineraries, a dense network of stations at a distance of about 35 km, with changing places for animals in between the stages (Belke 2008, 302). But in the 6th century the travel distances grew, in the reign of the emperor Justinian I (527–565) there was only one station in a road section where in former times five to eight stations had existed (Külzer 2016, 191). Even the milestones as symbols of Roman rule in the wide landscapes of Anatolia were probably placed irregularly and with a certain time delay – some milestones on the old street in the west of Ankyra were obviously erected only in connection with the journey of emperor Caracalla in the year 215 (French 3.2 11).

The ancient and Late Antique network of roads persisted in principle in the middle ages. But in the 6th century the costs for care and repair of the roads, the maintenance of bridges, stations and so on, essential parts of the so-called *cursus publicus*, the traffic in public interest, were transferred from the Empire to the local residents. Because of the financial burden there was no significant expansion of the national road network anymore, the necessary repair of bridges was occasionally done by compulsory labour (Belke 2008, 303). However, an extension of regional and local routes is documented even in later centuries, for example in the above mentioned collection of monastery documents from mediaeval Western Anatolia. The construction work was in many cases the result of earthquakes or other natural disasters.

Up to the 6th century the *magistri officiorum* were responsible for the administration of the roads; later this task was done by the *logothetēs tu dromu* and his subordinates. His function is documented since the second half of the 8th century (762), but most probably it had existed still some decades before.

The condition of the road network was getting worse in the middle ages for various reasons, for example as a result of the above mentioned long-lasting presence of enemies. Neglect and lack of care were obvious in many parts of the Anatolian road system. These points, but also the gradual disappearance of waggons since the late 5th century (Belke 2008, 300) and the associated lower space requirement are responsible for a general shrinking of the road width: in Roman times many roads had a width of 6 meters and more (Belke 2008, 304), but in the middle ages there were only narrow paths. But anyway, this reduction was not a serious problem, because some travellers used ride animals like mules or donkeys, seldom horses; but most people went by foot in general, their space requirement was therefore very limited (Belke 2008, 301).

III. SELECTED COMMUNICATION ROADS IN ANATOLIA

The last part of our presentation will refer to some important communication roads. The earliest Roman roads in Asia Minor were orientated towards Ephesus, the capital of the province *Asia*. According to the testament of king Attalus III of Pergamum (138–133 BCE), this first Roman province in Anatolia was established in 133 / 129 BCE. The first governor was Manius Aquillius (129–126 BCE) who immediately started his road program. This means less the construction of new roads or the structural change and especially paving of the still existing routes, but rather securing and the erection of milestones; some of them are still preserved. The exact number of affected roads is unknown, but four main communication routes were determined by David H. French after several years of research: these are 1) the above mentioned *koine hodos*, a road which run from Ephesus in a mainly eastern direction along the Maeander and the foothills of the Messōgis, modern Aydın dağları, which passed Tralleis (Aydın) and Nysa (near Sultanhisar), crossed the river near Antioch (north of Başaran) and let via Laodicea (Denizli) and Chōnai (near Honaz) into the inner parts of Phrygia and further towards the Euphrates; 2) a road which let from Ephesus in a north-eastern direction into the upper valley of the Kaÿstrios river to Hypaepa (Datbeyı or Günlüce, near modern Ödemiş); from there it crossed the Tmōlos Mountains (Boz dağ) and continued to Sardis (Sart), the old capital of Lydia; 3) a road which run along the foothills of Mount Galēsion (modern Alaman dağ) to the western part of the middle Kaÿstrios valley, where it changed its direction and run mainly close to the coast-line in a northern direction towards Smyrna (İzmir), Cyme (Nemrut dağ) and Elea (Kazıkbağları); this road crossed the Troas and run towards Lampsakos (Lapseki) at the

shore of the Dardanelles, from where one could take a ferryboat towards the Gallipoli peninsula (Gelibolu yarımadası) and join the extended road network of the Balkans; 4) a road which started in Elea where it left the aforementioned communication route and led first in a north-eastern direction towards Pergamum (Bergama), then eastward into the inner parts of Lydia, starting with Thyateira (Akhisar) and the Gygaean lake (Marmara gölü); leading southward it reached Sardis where it met the route 2) coming from the Tmōlos Mountains; afterwards it continued in a south-eastern direction through the Cogamus valley (Alaşehir çayı) towards Tripolis (Yenice) and Hierapolis (Pamukkale); near Laodicea in the Lycus valley it reached the aforementioned *koine hodos*. It is worth remembering that the termini “road” or “street” do not mean only *one* connection route but several ones running parallel to each other in a certain distance. This was done for a better supply of the travellers.

The orientation of Roman roads towards Ephesus was given up not only in the 3rd century but still earlier in the late 1st or early 2nd century (*TIB* 13, Route A1). Henceforth the cities of Nicomedia (İzmit) and Nicaea (İznik) further to the northeast, but also Chalcedon, modern Kadıköy, at the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus, opposite of Constantinople, became more significant, mainly for military reasons. A main communication route started here and crossed Anatolia in a south-eastern direction towards Syria. From the 4th century it was often used by pilgrims travelling to the holy places in Palestine; therefore it is usually called *Pilgrims' Road* in literature. The road is well documented by itineraries and later literary sources, but also by archaeological remains like large parts of road sections and several milestones (*TIB* 4, 95). Among the cities connected with this road one should mention Iuliopolis (near Sarıyar barajı) and Sykeōn (north of Tahirköy) west of Ankyra; in the neighbourhood of both places Late Antique bridges are documented, archaeological *fixed points* of this road, helping to cross the rivers Skopas (Aladağ çayı) and Siberis (Girmir çayı, a tributary of the Sangarios). The *Pilgrims' Road* passed Ankyra, the Salt Lake Tuz Gölü was bypassed north or east. From the eastern bypass, there was a diversion to Caesarea (Kayseri); from there the travellers could go in an eastern direction to Melitene (Malatya) and the region of the Euphrates, or in a north-eastern direction to the junction Sebasteia (Sivas). From Sebasteia several routes led to the Black Sea, where a long, but because of the special geographical conditions difficult road along the whole coastline connected Heraclea, Sinope and Trebizond.

The main fork of the Pilgrims' Road run via Kolōneia (Aksaray) and Tyana (Kemerhisar) to the Cilician Gates, afterwards to the junction Tarsus. The road section between the last mentioned toponyms, between the Cilician Gates and Tarsus, was restored several times, finally in the 6th century; at this point the width of the road was consciously reduced because of the disappearance of the waggons (Belke 2008, 305). From Tarsus one road let eastward to Antioch on the Orontes, then in a southern direction towards Palestine. Another long communication road run from Tarsus in a western direction, along the Mediterranean coast to the Roman provinces of Pamphylia and Lycia: among others, it passed the *Market Towns* of Seleucia (Silifke), Sidē (Selimiye), Pergē (Hisar), Attaleia (Antalya), Myra (Demre) and Xanthus (Kınık).

Since the 7th, 8th centuries, a variant of this communication route became more important: most travellers went now via the cities of Dorylaion (Eskişehir), Amorium (Hisar) and Iconium (Konya) towards the Cilician Gates (*TIB* 4, 97–99; Belke 2008, 298). This route is documented by the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, by Arabic and Latin itineraries, but also by archaeological sources, a series of caravanserais (*TIB* 4, 97; Erdmann 1961, map). During the long Arabic – Byzantine wars this route was extremely important, both parties used it for their invasions and troop movements (Belke 2008, 300).

Less mentioned in the sources was a road which run from Ankyra southwards to Iconium, by passing the western shore of the Great Salt Lake Tuz Gölü; it is documented by some milestones, but only by one Crusaders' report, the "History of the expedition to Jerusalem" (*Historia Hierosolymitanae expeditionis*) written by Albert of Aix-la-Chapelle, reporting the tragic demise of a French army led by Guillaume de Nevers (564–574; *TIB* 4, 79, 108). In Iconium there was another communication road, documented by the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, leading in a south-western direction to Sidē in Pamphylia and to the coastal road along the Mediterranean shore (*TIB* 4, 102–103).

One of the oldest Roman roads in Anatolia led from Pergē in Pamphylia in a north–western direction; connecting the cities of Komama (Şerefönü near Ürkütlü) and Kormasa (Kozluca Höyük south of Boğaziçi köy) with Laodicea in Phrygia and the Lycus valley, furthermore with the *koine hodos* and Ephesus. This road is depicted in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*; like the four old roads in Western Anatolia mentioned above, it was adapted between 129 and 126 BCE by Manius Aquillius, the first governor of the province *Asia*. A milestone found in the area of Sidē mentions the distance of 331 miles (!) to the *caput viae* Pergamum (*TIB* 8, 275). There was another important road from Pamphylia

towards Laodicea, which passed among other settlements also Kibyra (near Gölhisar) and Themisōnion (Karahüyük). In the hinterland of this last village, there was a junction: a street let in a north-western direction via Heraclea Salbakēs (Vakıf) and the capital of Caria, Aphrodisias (near Geyre), to Antioch at the Meander.

Many other communication roads all over Western Anatolia are worth to be discussed here, but this is not possible within the allotted time. Finally it should be recalled that the Romans built their network of communication routes in many parts of Anatolia by using and extending older streets and roads. Paving of roads was not immediately done, in some sections it was never realized. The road system was expanded and perfected; its summit was in the 6th century. It continued through the middle Ages, but beginning with the 7th century decline started, many road stations were closed in the following centuries; the width of the streets was substantially reduced. Only in the Ottoman period the network of routes and roads in Anatolia flourished again. But this would be the subject of another presentation.

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