



Summary :

Elaeoussa is a city of Cilicia Trachea. The location of the city's ruins is identified with the modern village of Ayaş, on the coast between Korykos and the River Lamos (Lamas or Limonlu Çayı). The city was built on an island, which was connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land. Its heyday was in the 2nd century AD, although the glory days continued until the 6th century AD.

Other Names

Sebaste, modern Ayaş

Historical Region

Cilicia Trachea

Geographical Coordinates

1. Historical Background

The first evidence of habitation in Elaeoussa dates from the 3rd century BC. It is a coin from the years of Ptolemy III dating from the 3rd century BC, when the region was under Egyptian control, while two more coins are attributed to the period of the Seleucid King [Antiochus II](#) (mid-3rd century BC). Towards the late 2nd century BC, Elaeoussa was a military base of the [Seleucids](#), as indicated by numismatic evidence. However, in the early 1st century BC the city appears to have been 'sacred and autonomous'. The former military station must have developed and turned into an ordinary Greek-like city in the same period.¹ It is believed that at the time Elaeoussa, with its harbour and fortified position on the island, must have been under the control of a local tyrant subjected to the important religious state of Olba.²

In the years of [Mark Antony](#), the city, together with the entire district of Cilicia Trachea, must have been under Tarkondimotus Philantonios, son of Straton, the Great, and then under his son. After the sea battle of Actium and his defeat by Antony (30 BC), [Octavian Augustus](#) relieved Tarkondimotus Philopator (the son of the Great) from certain positions in Cilicia Trachea and gave them to Archelaus of Cappadocia. One of these positions was Elaeoussa as well as all coastal positions from Mount Korykos to Mount Lamos.³ Shortly later (circa 20 BC) the name Sebaste appears on bronze coins. Archelaus is supposed to have changed the name of the city out of gratitude towards his patron, Augustus. This is what Strabo must mean when he says that Archelaus was responsible for the habitation of the city and the formation of a kingdom whose capital was the same city.⁴ However, neither Strabo nor Plinius report the new name.⁵ The first who mentions Sebaste is Flavius Josephus in a text talking about Archelaus being accommodated by Herod Antipas (before 12 BC).⁶ Later, the name Sebaste is reported by Claudius Ptolemy and Stefanos Byzantios.⁷ In the early 1st century AD the city minted its own coins, on which it is reported as the metropolis of Sebaste, thus proving that the city claimed precedence over the district of Cilicia Trachea.⁸

[Archelaus I](#) was succeeded by his son Archelaus II in 17 AD. In the meanwhile, the districts of Cilicia Trachea and neighbouring Isauria were convulsed by subsequent revolts in 6, 36 and 51/52 AD. During the second bloody revolt Archelaus II had to call in the governor of Syria Marcus Trebellius with 4,000 legionaries to suppress it. Archelaus fell from power two years later, in 38 AD, when Caligula offered the district to Antiochus IV of Commagene, who held power until 72 AD. According to Suetonius, the fact that [Commagene](#) and Cilicia Trachea became a province is attributed to [Vespasian](#). However, the report of Josephus about the concession of the 'Islet of Cilicia' from Vespasian to the daughter of Antiochus Iotape and her husband Alexander, the great-grandson of Herod of Judaea, must concern Elaeoussa, which, as a result, remained independent over an indefinite period of time.⁹ In the years of Vespasian the city was connected with the great road artery leading from the River Melas to the Cilician Valley.¹⁰



There are few historical events from the 2nd century AD concerning Sebaste and Cilicia Trachea. [Hadrian](#) visited the region in 115-116, when he was elected emperor in Syria, and in 131-132, during his second journey. The city was in its heyday in the second half of the 2nd century, when it was extended beyond the island and its inland. Elaeoussa was then an important hub in the region and incorporated Korykos, which, according to sources from the early 3rd century, such as the Byzantine Stadiasm, is reported to have been a small town. A serious blow for its welfare came when the city was occupied, together with other coastal cities of [Cilicia](#), by the Sāsānian king of Persia [Shāpūr I](#).¹¹ Although it was soon liberated thanks to a Roman counter-attack, it took the city a long time to recover. In the district of Cilicia Trachea (often called Isauria ever since in resources) there were once again raids and revolts by populations on the mountains, who often invaded the coastal cities.¹² This situation went on until the late 4th century.

2. Coinage and Cults

Because there is no historical and epigraphic evidence, the coins of Elaeoussa are an important historical source.¹³ The city started to mint its own coins in the early 1st century BC – a series of extremely rare silver four-drachma coins, which carry the inscription ‘of the sacred and autonomous Elaeoussa’ and show the head of goddess Tyche wearing a tower-like crown on the **obverse** and a female deity, probably [Aphrodite Euplia](#), on the reverse. More often are found bronze coins from about the same period, with the heads of Zeus, Athena and Tyche on the front, and the heads of Nike, Mercury and Aphrodite on the back, often followed by the inscription ‘ΕΛΑΙΟΥΣΙΩΝ’ (of Elaeoussa). After the adoption of the name Sebaste, together with the former types (Heads of Tyche and Athena/Nike), new types [Caduceus (staff)/Dolphin and Herakles’ Club/Nike] bearing the inscription ‘ΣΕΒΑΣΤΗΝΩΝ’ (of Sebaste) and, more rarely, ‘ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΩΝ’ (of Metropolis) appear. Then there was a gap in time corresponding to the period of Archelaus II, before bronze coins appeared again, representing King Antiochus on the front and Apollo, Tyche and Queen Iotape sitting on the back side. There are inscriptions naming the royal couple (Antiochus and Iotape). In the Roman Imperial period, Elaeoussa minted coins in the years of Antoninus Pius (138-161), Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Aurelius Verus (161-169), Commodus (180-192) and Valerian (253-260), which are the latest known coins. The common type shows the upper part of Athena on the front and of Poseidon or Nike on the back. The city is reported as Sebaste, while certain words appear, such as metropolis, sacred, sanctuary, autonomous, free, flagship and coastal. The latter two prove the importance of the city’s harbour and possibly indicate its capability of accommodating divisions of the imperial fleet.

According to numismatic and epigraphic evidence, the most significant cults in the city were those of Athena, Aphrodite Euplia, Mercury and Zeus.

3. Economy

Strabo says that Elaeoussa was a particularly fertile island very close to the mainland.¹⁴ Its riches came mainly from olive trees, after which the city was named (‘elaea’ in Greek = olive) and other Mediterranean products, such as wine and cereals. The neighbouring inland was particularly rich in timber, which made Cilicia a classic strategic point to build and bunker the fleets. Finally, the region of Elaeoussa was rich in fish catch, according to Oppianus.¹⁵

4. Elaeoussa in the Late Roman Period and the Middle Years

There is little historical evidence about the city from Late Antiquity and the Byzantine period.¹⁶ The district of Cilicia Trachea was Christianised in the early 4th century AD. There are two known bishops coming from the city: the first, Menodorus, participated in a local synod in Tarsus in 434 and the second, Alexander, participated in the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (454). The city suffered, just like the entire region, from the raids of the Isaurians towards the late 5th century, while a particularly strong [Monophysite](#) movement developed there. The bishops of Sebaste are not reported in the activities of the 6th and 7th century, which, in combination with archaeological evidence, implies a period of decline. In the 11th century Sebaste came under the bishop of Tarsus, which indicates that it must have been an unimportant small town at the time. However, it appears again in the 14th century, incorporated in the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia.

5. Monuments



The original settlement was on the island, which covered an overall area about 128,000 sq. m. The island looked like a small hill with the remains of a **three-aisle Byzantine basilica**. Italian excavations that started in 1995 have brought to light significant findings, although some monuments have not been fully researched yet.¹⁷ For this reason, but also because the locals collected stones from several monuments and the theatre in the 19th and the 20th century, the description of the city's remains given by Francis Beaufort, who travelled to the southern Asia Minor to map the coasts on behalf of the British Navy and was the first who identified Ayaş with Sebaste, is valuable evidence.¹⁸ Beaufort gives a brief description of the city's remains but gives a rather clear picture of the buildings visible in his time.

The most important monument of the city is the **peripteral temple**, built on a high **podium**, on the eastern part of the island, in a prominent position, at the highest point of the low hill overlooking the city. The temple was visible from the sea. It measures 32.94 × 17.6 metres. A series of underground rooms of unknown use has been excavated under the **stylobate**. The **pteron** consists of 6 columns on the front and 12 on the long sides. Five columns are preserved in place. It is quite strange that no traces of the southern colonnade of the pteron have survived. The fluted columns from limestone are a combination of the Composite and the Corinthian order. The **epistyle** consists of three fasciae decorated with a **cyma**, and a **frieze** representing a male figure riding a dolphin and a sea-horse.

The deity to whom the temple was dedicated is uncertain. Excavations in the city tend to accept the assumption that it was dedicated to Aphrodite Euplia because of the representation of the marine company on its architectural decoration.¹⁹ The building dates from the second half of the 1st century AD. In the early Byzantine period, in the 5th or 6th century AD, a small Christian chapel was built inside the temple.²⁰ The floor of the church was covered with mosaic, revealed by Gough in the 1950s, but not preserved today. It represented heaven and Jesus Christ at the centre, while the style is reminiscent of the Antiochian.

A big three-aisle early Christian basilica can be seen at the northern end of the island; it was surrounded by a thick perimeter wall or a **portico** and a baptistery.

The theatre of Elaeoussa is on the slope of an inland hill, to the south of the island, where the city had developed already from the 1st century AD. The rocky hill accommodating the **cavea** is covered mainly by modern houses, which had been using the theatre as a dump until about 1995. It is directed to the south. The theatre was extensively destroyed by the inhabitants who collected its stones (already from Late Antiquity) and their agricultural activities and, as a result, the stages of the building cannot be accurately dated on the basis of archaeological evidence. The excavation of 1995-2001 has not revealed the shape of the monument yet. It was a theatre in Greek style with a diameter of 55 m. The cavea was divided into eight rows (cunei) by six stairs but only parts have survived. The **orchestra** was 13.5 m in diameter, while the theatre is estimated to have been seating about 2300 people.²¹

The **skene** (wooden structure) developed in two stages: the first was in the 2nd century AD and the second in the early 3rd century. In the second and more luxurious stage the skene was rebuilt using extrinsic material (granite from **Troad** for the columns and marble from Prokonnesos for the **capitals**). The theatre must have been abandoned about 260 AD, after the city was captured by Shāpūr. Today on the site of the skene there are two buildings from the 6th century serving as tanks. The aqueduct leading to the island ran underneath the theatre.

A paved street has been excavated to the south of the theatre, directed from east to west. Traces of an earlier building, probably from the 1st century AD, have been discovered on the eastern part of the cavea; it was decorated with two-colour mosaics and there must have been some connection with a bathing complex. Immediately south of the building of the skene there was a building with a colonnade (probably a stoa), with 18 of its columns preserved until 1818. It dates from the early 2nd century, while the two tombs excavated around the theatre must have been a little earlier (1st century AD).

The Agora of the city, to the south of the theatre, has been partly excavated. Among the findings were a long perimeter wall and numerous architectural parts of an impressively big building from the 6th century, decorated with mosaics and interiorly divided into three **aisles**. It was probably an early Christian basilica, which covers the largest part of the square. Earlier buildings have been traced



on its foundations. The building is surrounded by a baptistery, tombs and two fountains, which indicates that some saint or martyr was worshipped there.

In the mainland there is an impressive complex, the so-called great baths of the city. They were probably built about the 2nd century AD. A [gymnasium](#) must have existed to the west of the vast square. A second bathing complex lies on the hill of the temple and dates from the late 1st or the early 2nd century AD. A third bathing complex has been excavated near the site of the city's harbour. These baths have been extensively destroyed because of the subsequently built Byzantine wall of the harbour. Thirteen rooms have been identified. An odd circular building has been excavated in the same area; it is partly carved on the rock and was surrounded by a pteron with 24 columns and had a total of six openings. It must have been built in the 5th or 6th century AD.

Finally, in the mainland there are traces of three [aqueducts](#) Beaufort saw. The one of them leads to the city, while the two others are within some distance from the city. The most important of them runs along the coast from the River Lamos to Korykos and dates from about 400 AD, according to epigraphic evidence.²²

The most impressive topographical element of Eleaoussa is the fact that the city is full of burial monuments.²³ The most important necropolis was to the southeast and was used from the 1st to the 7th century AD. Both early research and modern excavations brought to light a series of tombs, such as aedicula tombs, house tombs, sarcophaguses or burial monuments with elaborate architectural decorations.

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1. Equini Schneider, E. 'Elaioussa Sebaste – Dall'età ellenistica alla tarda età imperiale', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaioussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), p. 34.
 2. Inferred by the fact that the municipality of Kanytelleis, which, according to epigraphic evidence, in the imperial period belonged to Eleaoussa, in the Hellenistic period it was controlled by Pleistarchus, the supervisor of the sanctuary of Olba: MacKay, T.S., 'The major sanctuaries of Pamphylia and Cilicia', *ANRW* 2, 18, 3 (Berlin 1990), pp. 2085-2086.
 3. Dio Cassius, LIV, 9; Strabo, 12.1.4 and 14.5.6.
 4. Strabo, 14.5.6. See Equini Schneider, E. 'Elaioussa Sebaste – Dall'età ellenistica alla tarda età imperiale', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaioussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), p. 35.
 5. Plinius, *NH* 5.93 (Eleoussa) and 5.130 (Elaeoussa insula).
 6. Flavius Josephus, *De bello Judaico* 1, 23.4. Alexander, the son of Herodes, was married to the daughter of Archelaus, Glafyra: Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, 16.10.7.
 7. Ptolemy, 5.7.4; Stephanus of Byzantium, see entry 'Ελαιούσσα: Η νυν Σεβαστή'.
 8. Burnett, A. – Amandry, M. – Caradice, I., *Roman Provincial Coinage* (London 1999), pp. 563-564, no. 3067-3068 and 3715-3722.
 9. Revolts: Dio Cassius, LV, 28.3 (6 AD); Tacitus, *Annales* VI, 41 (36 AD) and XII, 55 (51-52 AD). Ascension to the throne of Archelaus II: Heberdey, R. – Wilhelm, A., *Reisen in Kilikien ausgeführt 1891 u. 1892 im Auftrage der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien* (Wien 1896), note 155 A. Concession of Cilicia Trachea to Antioch IV: Dio Cassius, LIX, 8.2. Verified by Claudius: Dio Cassius, LX, 8.1. Vespasian: Σουητώνιος, *Vespas.* 8. Alexander and Iotape: Flavius Josephus, *Ιουδ. Αρχ.* 18.5.4. The correlation of the island of Cilicia with Eleaoussa was shown by Mitford, T.B., 'Roman Rough Cilicia', *ANRW* 2, 7.2 (Berlin 1980), p. 1245, note 67.
 10. Equini Schneider, E., 'Elaioussa Sebaste – Dall'età ellenistica alla tarda età imperiale', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaioussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), p. 38.



11. The capture of Elaeoussa and Korykos refers to the Greek part of the famous bilingual inscription of Shāpūr I, known as *Res Gestae Divis Saporis*. Honigmann, E. – Maricq, A., *Recherches sur les Res Gestae Divis Saporis* (Bruxelles 1953), p. 149, note 12-13. See also Μαλάλας, Ι., *Χρον.* 12.26.
12. Revolts and raids by bandits and outlaws are reported for the reigns of Gallienus (*Historia Augusta, Tyr. Trig.* 26), Probus (*Historia Augusta, Prob.* 16.4-6), Konstantios II and Valens (354 and 367-368 AD). Ammianus Marcellinus 14.2.17-19 and 27.9.6.
13. Tekin, O., 'Le monete di Elaiussa conservate nei Musei di Mersin e di Anamur', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), pp. 55-62. See also Tekin, O., 'Le monete', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste II. Un porto tra Oriente e Occidente*, vol. II (Roma 2003), pp. 541-596.
14. Strabo, 14.5.6.
15. Oppianus, *Halioutika* 3, 205-210.
16. Ruggieri, V., 'Sebaste bizantina', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), pp. 43-47.
17. Excavation exhibitions were presented in the journal *Kazı sonuçları toplantısı* from 1996 onward. See also Equini Schneider, E., 'Scavi e ricerche a Elaiussa Sebaste', *Missioni archeologiche italiane. La ricerca archeologica, antropologica, etnologica* (Roma 1997), pp. 347-352 and 'Commercio e sviluppo urbano della Cilicia Tracheia in eta imperiale: il caso di Elaiussa Sebaste e di Corycos', Bettini, A. – Giannatasio, B.M. – Quartino, L. (edit.), *Atti. IX Giornata Archaeologia* (Genova 1998), pp. 125-152. As for earlier research, see Kirsten, E., 'Elaiussa-Sebaste in Kilikien. Ein Ausgrabungswunsch an den Ausgräber von Side und Perge', *Mansel'e armagan. Mélanges Mansel* (Ankara 1974), pp. 777-802 and Kirsten, E., 'Diokaisareia und Sebaste, zwei Städtgründungen der frühen Kaiserzeit im kilikischen Arbeitsgebiet der Akademie', *AnzWien* 110 (1973), pp. 347-363.
18. Beaufort, F., *Karamania* (London 1823), pp. 241-243. About the extensive bibliography of earlier researchers and travellers describing Elaeoussa, see Mc Kay, M., 'Elaeoussa', *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Classical Sites* (Princeton 1977), p. 294.
19. Equini Schneider, E., 'Elaiussa Sebaste – Dall'età ellenistica alla tarda età imperiale', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), pp. 37-38.
20. The most important publications about the temple include the description by Keil, J. – Wilhelm, A., *Denkmäler aus dem Rauhen Kilikien (MAMA III, Manchester 1931)*, pp. 226-237 and Gough, M., 'A temple and church at Ayas (Cilicia)', *AnatSt* 4 (1954), pp. 49-64. The Italian mission researched part of the temple and modified some of the earlier conclusions: Baldassare, P., 'Il tempio', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), pp. 115-128.
21. Equini Schneider, E. – Baratta, G., 'Il teatro', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), pp. 189-240.
22. Hunger, H., 'Die Bauinschrift am Aquädukt von Elaiussa-Sebaste. Eine Rekapitulation', *Tyche* 1 (1986), pp. 132-137. About the aqueducts and the major reservoirs supplying the city with water, see Equini Schneider, E., 'Prime Note su cisterne e terme della città', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste I. Campagne di Scavo 1995-1997* (Roma 1999), pp. 83-93.
23. Machatschek, A., *Die Nekropolen und Grabmäler im Gebiet von Elaiussa Sebaste und Korykos im Rauhen Kilikien* [Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phil.-Hist. Klasse. Denkschriften, 96 (Wien 1967)] and Equini Schneider, E., 'La necropoli nord-orientale', Equini Schneider, E. (edit.), *Elaiussa Sebaste II. Un porto tra Oriente ed Occidente* (Roma 2003), pp. 383-524.

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	Eyice S. , "Akkale in der Nähe von Elaiussa-Sebaste (Ayas)", <i>Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst, 1. Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann gewidmet</i> , Bonn 1986, 63-76

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	Scavi e ricerche a Elaiussa Sebaste (Turchia). http://w3.uniroma1.it/arceologia/Ricerche%20e%20scavi/Docente023/Equiniric.htm

Glossary :

	aisle The part of the naos of a church set off by the internal rows of piers or columns, namely by the structures supporting the roof.
	architrave or epistyle The lowest part of an entablature resting on the columns capitals and supporting the frieze.
	capital The uppermost part of a column or pillar crowning the shaft and supporting the entablature. The decoration of the capital characterizes the ancient greek orders of architecture. In Doric order the capitals are decorated with abacus and echinus, in Ionic with spiral scrolls (volutes), while the corinthian capitals are composed of small corner volutes and a basket-shaped body decorated with rows of acanthus leaves.
	cavea The auditorium or audience sitting of a theater.
	cyma / cymation Moulding decoration with ovals or tri-cusps alternating with lotus flowers. It was meant to separate or to lay stress upon two surfaces. In ancient architecture we distinguish Doric, Ionic and Lesbian cymation, according to their decoration and section form.
	frieze (1. architecture), (2. painting) 1. The part of the entablature resting on the architrave and below the cornice. In the Doric order the frieze is decorated with two alternative motives, namely the triglyph and metope, while in the Ionic order the frieze is a decoratively carved band. 2. Decorative horizontal band that sweeps parts of a vessel or the highest part of the walls in a room.
	obverse The face of the coin which bears the more important device. Due to ambiguities that sometimes exist, many numismatists prefer to use the term for the side struck by the lower (anvil) die.
	orchestra The performance space of the ancient Greek and Roman theatre, placed between the scene building and the cavea. It was usually semi-circular in shape and rarely circular.



	peripteral temple
Having a single row of columns on all sides.	
	podium
The base of a building	
	pteron, the
A colonnade parallel to, but apart from the cella.	
	scene (lat. scaena -ae)
The stage building of the ancient theaters originally used for storage but provided a convenient backing for performances.	
	stoa, portico, the
A long building with a roof supported by one or two colonnades parallel to its back wall.	
	stylobate
The top step of the crepidoma (the stepped foundation of an ancient Greek building) from which the columns rise.	
	three-aisled basilica
An oblong type of church internally divided into three aisles: the middle and the two side aisles. The middle aisle is often lighted by an elevated clerestory. In the Early Byzantine years this type of church had huge dimensions.	