

Chiltern U3a – 17 Jan 2020
Notes for Talk on Roman sites in N Cyprus
Salamis and Soli
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[001]

Good Morning.

1. INTRODUCTION:

[002] It gives me great pleasure to talk about a couple of archaeological sites - Salamis and Soli - that my wife and I visited in N Cyprus as a part of a touring holiday in N Cyprus in Oct 2017. Unlike our previous speaker on Cyprus, Margaret Filsell, who lived there for a while, we were just generally touring around in a coach with a fairly tight time schedule. As usual I was trigger happy with my camera.

[003] I will be covering three sections from Salamis site - The Gym and Baths complex, the all important Latrine and The Theatre. I will also cover two sections from Soli site – The Basilica and the Theatre.

Has anyone been to either of these sites?

[004] Apart from Google or Bing maps, and one item from the British Museum, the slides were taken by me.

[005] You can see from this map that Cyprus is strategically positioned to control this part of the Mediterranean. It is surrounded by Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Egypt. Salamis was one of the most important cities on the eastern side. Soli is on the west.

The excavated site in Salamis covers an area of one square mile. I will be covering only certain parts. There is a great deal besides these to see such as the temple of Zeus, the Agora etc. which we did not visit.

A quick potted history of Salamis ... so that you have an idea of the historical backdrop to the state of the sites and structures you will see.

Salamis was the first city of Cyprus in classical Greek times. Legend has it that it was founded in 12th century BC by a hero of Trojan War.

Replaced by Pafos on the west coast in early 2nd century BC.

Salamis was devastated in AD 116 by the Jewish insurrection of Artemion against the Romans. The Cypriot Jews massacred 240,000 Greeks. A Roman army reconquered it. Emperor Hadrian helped it to recover. Laws were passed to forbid any Jews to live on the island.

As a Roman colony, it prospered.

Salamis's distinction was regained in AD 346 when it was refounded as Constantia. It became a Christian City.

[006] This is how the site looks now on Google satellite view.

We visited the gym/baths complex and the theatre.

The backdrop for the theatre is not the sea. I am rather surprised about it.

The gym was enlarged by the Romans with the addition of baths.

The gym is considered to be the **pearl of Salamis**. It gives an idea of the life style enjoyed in Hellenistic and Roman times. Columned gymnasium was used for training and exercise. These are indicators of a rich city that enjoyed sport and recreation.

It suffered from several earthquakes. Magnitude 7 around AD 332-333. The last Roman-period earthquake, magnitude 8, was in AD 365.

Archaeological excavations began in the late 19th century. Some of the finds are in the British Museum. Excavations started again in 1952 until 1974 when the Turks invaded. International embargo stopped further excavations but I gather that they have restarted.

Some believe that 90% of the city remains buried under the sands!

[007a] This is the overall plan of the site on display there. This plan should really be laterally inverted – with the sea to the right. I suppose it is the Muslim convention.

The Gymnasium Bath Complex

[007b] If we enlarge the gym area ...Baths, Swimming pools and a columned courtyard - used as an exercising ground and for pampering. The main latrines are in this corner.

The baths have the sauna, hot room, cold room, furnace etc. They are in pairs – presumably one for the ladies and the other for the gents.

Two swimming pools – one at each end.

Some of the columns were originally in the theatre but they were used in the Gym after the earthquakes destroyed the theatre in the 4th century.

[008] We can get an idea of what the complex looks like from the top of the Theatre.

[009, 010, 011, 012] These are the views as we approach them. Columned gym and swim area on the left and the baths on the right.

[013. 014, 015, 016] We pass the first of the two swimming pools.

[017] Northern portico is surrounded by headless statues.

[018, 019 (Z)]

[020] There is one statue in black marble - that of Persephone **(Z)**

As regards the statues, it is believed that at one time there were statues of the gym masters. They have been replaced by statues of ladies.

The second pool is now coming in view.

[021] There are a few theories as to why the statues are headless. In earliest time, the bodies of the statues were made in advance. When you purchase a body you liked, the head of one's household god was made separately to go on top of it.

Another theory is that during the earthquake, the statues fell over and the heads that were separated were taken by souvenir hunters during excavation.

Yet another theory is that keen Christians made them headless as they were a sign of pagan worship.

The toes are exposed.

[022] Close up view of the toes.

Some of the heads are in Nicosia's Museum.

[023] At least one has found its way into the British Museum ... By researching BM online, I extracted a fair bit of information about it.

[024] This is the view of the pools area from the statues end.

This whole length must have been tiled. Here and there, you can see tiles such as these **[025, 026]**

[027] The colonnaded courtyard must have been the forum, the market place and the heart of the city rather than a place for just education and culture of the body.

The columns were re-erected in 1950s ... they are of mixed origin as they have been destroyed and rebuilt several times.

[028, 029]

[030] Some fluted columns.

[031] In some cases, the Corinthian Capitals are too small for the size of the pillars. The pillars here are smooth and rounded.

[032]

[033] Some inscription Can any one please translate it?

[034] This is the overall view from the other (western) end of the complex. There was a stone column with the statue of Emperor Augustus in the centre.

[035] It was destroyed in the earthquakes of 332 and 342 AD.

Some of the columns are originally from the theatre.

Moving on to the next interesting item ...

The Latrines

[036] It is the largest in the island. It is a semi-circular colonnaded structure with seating for 44 men. The one for the ladies was elsewhere and it was smaller.

[037] The wall in the back was built by the puritanical Christians in the 4th century.

[038] They had arm rests. You can see water channel. Apparently, they would use a wet sponge at the end of stick.

[039] The guide here was laughing away as he explained the operational ritual. This would be the reservoir for water.

[040] We walked back towards the baths along this portico

The Baths

[041] Didn't have enough time to explore the **baths**Just some superficial views. They were deeply buried in sand until 1926.

There are the usual hot and cold baths, saunas and sweating rooms.

This section leads to the sauna.

[042, 043, 044, 044, 045] The walls are quite thick... elaborate carvings have been taken away to the museums.

[046] Cavities for underfloor heating

[047] This is a water channel. They relied on water via an aqueduct, part of a 50 km long water system. It was capable of meeting the needs of 120,000 people.

[048] We made our way towards the Theatre.

[049] The **Roman Theatre** was spectacular. It was not discovered until 1959.

Built over 2,000 years ago, during the reign of Emperor Augustus (30 BC to AD 14), to hold 15,000 spectators in 50 rows of seats, but it was destroyed by earthquakes in the 4th century.

Today, the smaller restored theatre is used as a venue during summer months. There are just 18 of the 50 rows. Just as well, I did not have to climb that many to take the pictures!

There are two statues at the entrances. **[Point out]** There is a broken spiral column.

[050] A small circular surface in the centre – perhaps used for sacrifices. One description I read suggested there was a channel for blood although I didn't see any.

[051] This is the view that the performers would have had.

[052, 053] The first few rows are original with white limestone casing.

[054] Brown limestone was used in the reconstruction.

[055] After the earthquakes of the 4th century, the original stones and decorative blocks were carried off for use in other buildings.

The sheer capacity of the theatre of 15,000 is an indicator that Salamis was the most important city for a long period. [Wimbledon Centre Court has a similar capacity]

[057, 058] A glimpse of area we did not cover ... may be for another occasion or another of you.

[059] We move on to the second site - **Soli**.

First a potted history of **Soli**.

Probably there have been settlements here from 11th Century BC. Built in the beginning of 6th century BC.

Exported copper and timber to Greece in return for finished luxurious metal vessels from there.

The city flourished in Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Early Christian period.

Played an important role in the history of the island during the revolt against the Persians. Destroyed by Arab invasions in the 7th century.

Good water supply, fertile soil, a protected harbour and nearby copper deposits and timber to smelt the copper. The copper was exhausted by the end of the 4th century.

The stones from the ruined city were transferred by the British to build Port Said in the later half of 19th century.

Excavations began in 1929 by Swedish archaeologists.

[060] This is the Google satellite view of the site. The covered area protects the site of the Basilica and there is a theatre at an higher level.

[061] The audience in the theatre would have had the sea as a spectacular backdrop. The white rectangular section is the site of the Basilica.

[062] Basilica of Soli

[063] St Mark was baptised here.

The site dates from the fifth Century AD during the Byzantine period and the church was dedicated to **St. Auxibius**, a Roman soldier in the first century AD, who converted to Christianity and was baptised by John Mark. He was later ordained by Paul and became the first Bishop of Soli.

[064] Three aisled building, approximately 200m in length.

It houses the best preserved mosaics and marble floor in Northern Cyprus.

The next three slides are pictures of the display boards as they give a better view of the shape and colours. It was not easy to take pictures at the right angle and the items have faded away due to direct sunlight over many years and are covered in dust. The roof was put up in the 1990s.

Originally, mosaics were of geometric design but gradually they introduced animals and later opus sectile decoration pavements made from small coloured stone tiles.

[065] White Swan, called the Soli Swan

[066] Some geometrical patterns near the Swan

[067] A multicoloured duck surrounded by dolphins.

We will see these as they appear on the site shortly.

[068, 069, 070] Raised walkways help you get round the basilica.

I believe there is an inscription in Greek which says, 'God save those who gave this mosaic'.

[072] One major highlight is the **white swan**. Four lotus flowers in the corners. Two branches of vine coming out of two vases in the opposite corners. Birds pecking at the vine (bottom right hand side). I have seen some birds doing that at our home as well.

[073] You can see geometric mosaics adjacent to this panel.

[074, 075] This is the mosaic with a **small multicoloured duck** in the centre, flower motifs surrounding it, hexagonal patterns with dolphins.

[076 to 081] Here are some of the mosaics with geometric design.

[082 to 084] Mosaics went out of fashion and simple geometric tiles were used in later years.

[085 to 089] There are enormous number of structural pieces neatly stacked and awaiting some sort of organising.

We move on to the final item on my agenda.

Roman Theatre

[091] It is on the site of the original Greek amphitheatre. The dark areas in this plan indicate the remains of the old theatre.

[092] It dates from AD 3rd century. The town was destroyed by the Arab raids of AD 7th century. Excavations completed in 1962.

Its width is 50 m. Capacity for 4,000 (compared to 15,000 at Salamis).

The orchestra floor and the platform of the stage buildings are original.

It is overlooking the sea below.

There are these steps at either end to go up to the stage.

[093] It is on the northern slope of a hill.

[094] The seats are new, and built up to half-way level. You can see the remains of the old one beyond the top level of the current seating. **[Z to show old part]**

[095] I believe the original seats were taken by the British for use on the quayside of Port Said..

There is a feeling that it has been over restored and has lost its character.

[096] As we left the theatre I was intrigued by this little piece **[097]** – not sure what it signifies. Does any one know what it says...

That brings me to the end of today's presentation on the two Roman sites – Salamis and Soli in Northern Cyprus.

I hope some of you will have a chance to visit them.

[098] Thank you.
