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Urban systems in the Roman Near East: historical and functional dimensions of urbanism in Roman Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Arabia

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Chapter 1 Settlements in the northern Levant

1.1 Introduction

In order to understand how and why the urban systems of the Roman Levant functioned as they did, this chapter will first discuss how the urban systems were actually shaped. That means it is necessary to bring together the actual cities in the context of their geographical and historical settings, and to determine their civic status, settlement size and levels of monumentality.

The northern provinces of the Roman Levant, Syria Coele, Syria Phoenice, Osrhoene and Mesopotamia, are remarkable because there were only a limited number of cities, but these were particularly large, the more so compared to the overview of the cities in the southern Levantine provinces. And while the province of Syria was not a very large province, even before it was divided into Coele and Phoenice by Septimius Severus, the average distance between these cities was nonetheless 32.9 km, a much larger distance than what can be seen in the south. With the eastwards expansion beyond the Euphrates, Roman control expanded over an area even more characterised by a few large cities.

As already indicated in the geographical overview, the agricultural zone was limited by the Syrian steppe and desert zones. With cities mostly bound to areas suitable for agriculture, we find the main urbanised zone in and around the western coastal area, which will be discussed here first. Our focus will then move east towards the cities on the Euphrates, Palmyra, and the cities of northern Mesopotamia.

Along the coast, settlements were located on the mostly rather narrow coastal plain between the Mediterranean and the Syrian mountain ranges in the north, and the Lebanon range in the south. Here we find, from north to south, the Seleucid foundations of Seleucia and Laodicea, and the old Phoenician cities of Arados, Byblos, Berytus, Sidon and Tyre, interspersed by a number of smaller settlements, both dependent and independent. Inland, we also find settlements spread along the various plains and lower highlands that border the coastal mountain ranges on the eastern side. Antioch and its dependent settlements covered the Amuq plain and the surrounding highlands. To the northeast, we find Cyrrhus in its own fertile plain. Further south, Beroia (Aleppo) and Chalcis ad Belum were located in the plain named after the latter city. Following the Orontes to the south, the large and marshy Ghab Valley fell within the territory of Apamea. Further upstream were Larissa and Epiphanea, before entering what had been the kingdom of the Emesenes, with Arethusa and Emesa. On the west, it was bordered by Raphanea and Mariamme, which had previously formed the easternmost part of the territory of Arados. The last of these valleys, the Beqaa, had Heliopolis (Baalbek) at its heart, formerly part of the territory of Berytus. In addition, the as yet unlocated city of Chalcis sub Libano should be located

somewhere in this area. This had been, for 70 years, the main city of an independent Iturean kingdom.⁸⁴ Across the Antilebanon mountains was Damascus.

Among the Syrian cities, only Heliopolis (Baalbek) acquired urban status during the studied period. Before the Roman occupation, it had already existed as a sanctuary, probably founded in the Hellenistic period as part of the territory of Chalkis; even earlier, it seems to have been a minor tell settlement since the Neolithic period.⁸⁵ Several cities were Seleucid foundations, notably among them the Tetrapolis, the largest four cities in the region: Antioch, Apamea, Seleucia and Laodicea. The majority of the cities, however, had existed long before the Hellenistic period. Thus, instead of large-scale creation of new cities, on an urban level the Roman impact was more to provide a different impulse within the development of an already existing settlement pattern, much like previous political entities had left their own mark on this development. As this chapter will show, the main difference lay in the higher level of scale to which these places developed, and the impact this had on settlement development in the countryside.

1.2 Regional descriptions

1.2.1 The Seleucid core

The tetrapolis (Figure 7), the four great cities of Syria, are remarkable examples of the potential scale and splendour of urbanism in the Roman East. On more than one level, they also stand apart among the cities of the Roman Levant. As mentioned above, in the first place they were considerably larger than almost all Levantine cities, while at the same time being relatively young foundations. But also within the Hellenistic period, they were important centres for the Seleucid dynasty. In the second and first centuries B.C.E. they were granted the privilege to call themselves 'holy' and 'inviolable', and halfway the first century B.C.E., Antioch was the first (and only) city to call itself a metropolis.⁸⁶

Antioch was not initially the largest of these cities, or most important per se. And in the first century of the Seleucid kingdom, there was no fixed capital. Seleucia Pieria and Laodicea ad Mare were major port cities. Antioch served as a staging point towards Asia Minor, while Apamea served as the military headquarters directed towards the south. But Seleucia was

⁸⁴ Andreas J. M. Kropp, *Images and Monuments of Near Eastern Dynasts, 100 BC - AD 100* (OUP Oxford, 2013), 29–31.

⁸⁵ Margarete van Ess, 'Scientific Aims of the German-Lebanese Archaeological Project in Baalbek', in *Baalbek/Heliopolis: Results of Archaeological and Architectural Research 2002-2005*, ed. Margarete van Ess and Jeanine Abdul-Massih, *Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises. Hors-Série 4* (Beyrouth: Ministère de la Culture, Direction Générale des Antiquités, 2008), 11–29.

⁸⁶ John D. Grainger, *The Cities of Seleukid Syria* (Clarendon Press, 1990), 162, 176–77; Kristina M. Neumann, *Antioch in Syria: A History from Coins (300 BCE–450 CE)* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 110.

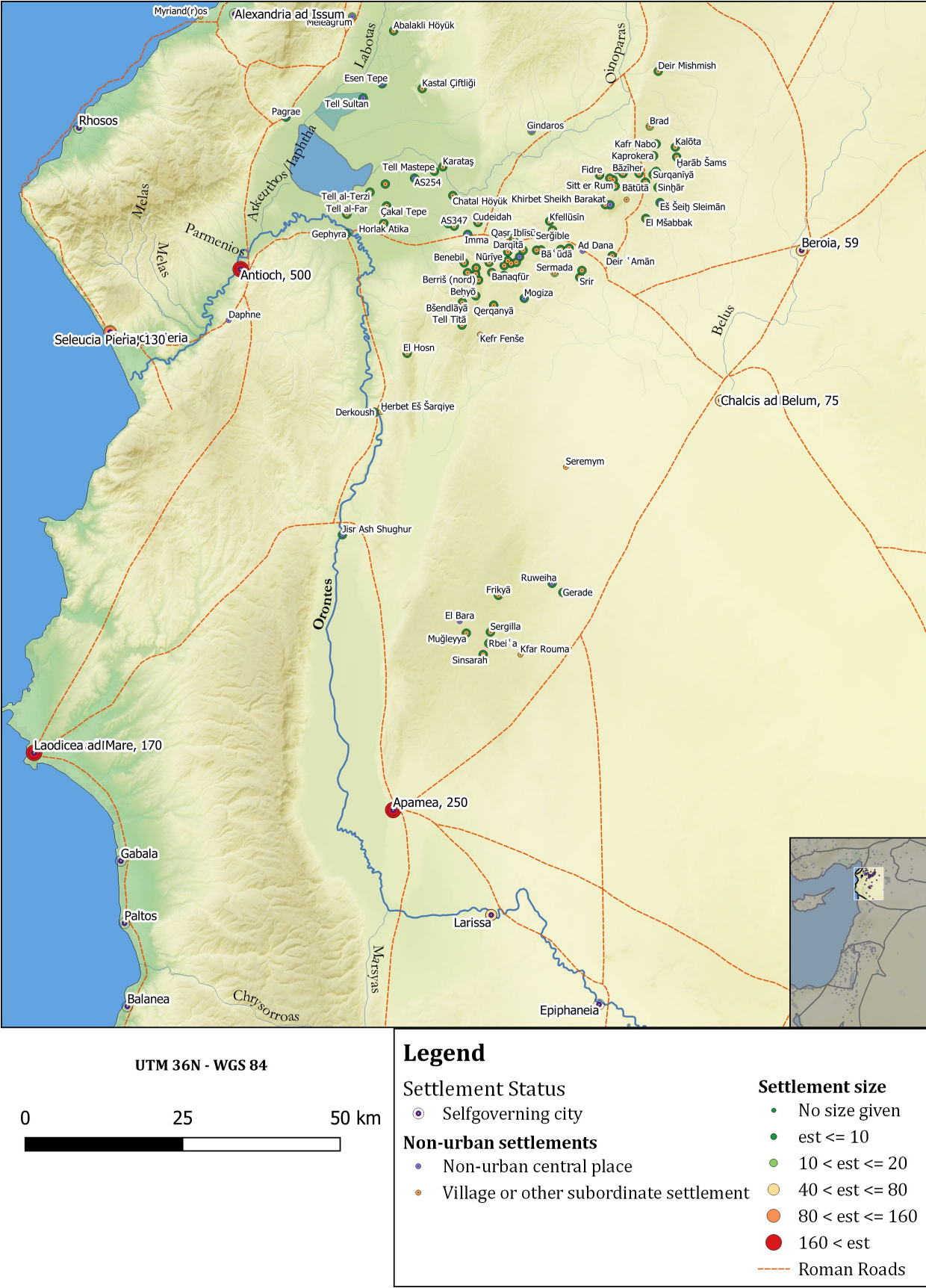


Figure 7 The Tetrapolis

captured by the Ptolemies for several decades, and Apamea became less relevant with the Seleucid conquest of Palestine, allowing Antioch to become the more prominent of these cities.⁸⁷

1.2.1.1 *The size of Antioch and its suburbs*

The size of Antioch's built-up area is only known by approximation. The archaeological record for the city is relatively limited, compared for instance to Dura Europos. Research is hampered because much of the ancient city is buried beneath several meters of river sedimentation, and covered by a rapidly expanding modern city. Some traces of the antique street grid and the main colonnaded road are recognisable in the modern plan, and there are standing remains of parts of the city wall, citadel, a temple and aqueducts, but not much more.⁸⁸ The most comprehensive archaeological project took place between 1932 and 1939 under the auspices of a committee of various institutions, chief amongst them Princeton University, led by field director William A. Campbell. The project was cut short when the region, which was a League of Nations mandate under French control, was transferred to Turkish control. Even though the initial aim of the project was to uncover the layout of the city and find some of the greater monuments the city offered in the past, focus shifted to the search for mosaics when the first of these was encountered, and in the end the expedition added rather little to what was already known from literary sources.⁸⁹ In later years little research took place, except for a somewhat belated publication of the fifth part of the *Antioch-on-the-Orontes* reports in 1972 on the colonnaded street, by Jean Lassus, one of the members of the 1932-1939 excavations.⁹⁰ Only from 2004 did a new series of urban surveys start in Antioch, a major feature of which has been the study of the walls.⁹¹

To arrive at the best estimate of the city's size, four aspects need to be studied. First and foremost, the walled area of the city. For many cities, the city walls are practically the only indicator for the built-up extent of the city, and to a certain degree this is true for Antioch as well. The second aspect is the actual area suitable for buildings within these walls, as the walls of Antioch do not only enclose the city itself, but by make use of the natural defences granted by Mount Silpius and Staurin and enclose parts of these mountains as well. Thirdly, the course of the Orontes river.

⁸⁷ Grainger, *The Cities of Seleukid Syria*, 120–28.

⁸⁸ Grégoire Poccardi and Jacques Leblanc, 'Etude de La Permanence Des Tracés Urbains et Ruraux Antiques à Antioche-Sur-l'Oronte', *Syria* 76, no. 1 (1999): 91–126, <https://doi.org/10.3406/syria.1999.7645>.

⁸⁹ W. A. Campbell and R. Stillwell, eds., *Antioch-On-the-Orontes*, vol. 3 (Department of art and archaeology of Princeton University. In-fol., fig., pl., 1938), 3–6; Christine Kondoleon, ed., *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City* (Worcester (Mass.): Worcester Art Museum, 2000), 5–8; Glen Warren Bowersock, *Studies on the Eastern Roman Empire: Social, Economic and Administrative History, Religion, Historiography* (Keip Verlag, 1994), 423, 424.

⁹⁰ Jean Lassus, George Wicker Elderkin, and Richard Stillwell, eds., *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, vol. 5 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

⁹¹ Hatice Pamir and Gunnar Brands, 'The Asi Delta and the Asi Valley Archaeological Project in 2004: Samandağ and Antakya Surveys', *ANMED* 3 (2005): 103–8.

Besides forming an important boundary for the city, part of Antioch lay on an island in the river, but as the course of the river has changed over time, this island no longer exists. Determining the shape and size of the island would help to determine the city's size. Finally, the possible extent of the suburbs is of importance. This is clearly the most tentative of these aspects, both because of the lack of archaeological data, as well as the simple fact that it can be hard to clearly define where suburbs end and the countryside begins.

Walled area and built-up area

Part of the construction history of the city walls is known. The initial Hellenistic settlement was already walled, and so were second century B.C.E. expansions onto the island and in the mountains. Under the Roman Empire, the walls were either restored or expanded by Tiberius, and were expanded again in the first half of the fifth century by Theodosius II on the southwestern side of the city.⁹² The final large-scale modification took place under Justinian, who reduced the size of the city walls to match the smaller Antioch of his time, limiting its extent in the north and west.⁹³

As said, considerable parts of the ancient city wall of Antioch are still intact, mostly over the crest of Mount Silpius and Staurin. As Gunnar Brands wrote in 2004, the walls show a clear variety in building styles at various points, betraying several building and repair phases. A joint German-Turkish team studied the city's defences until 2009, but their results have not yet been published; parts of their mapping efforts are shown in Weferling et al.⁹⁴ It is clear that most of the visible remains essentially represent the Justinian, sixth-century state of the walls with later Medieval repair phases, while several parts of what may be Hellenistic walls are visible as well. Furthermore, 18th- and 19th-century engravings by Cassas and Bartlett, as published in Downey, also show a clear Late Roman building style for the walls on the south side of the town, which were destroyed when Ottoman barracks were constructed there.⁹⁵

On Mount Staurin, Pamir and Brands have clearly identified the existence of an inner and an outer wall, as indicated on Figure 8. They were able to trace the outer wall from the north over the Parmenios gorge, in the direction of the Byzantine citadel. Although the exact way it was connected to the Silpius stretch remains unclear, there are indications of a five-sided tower where

⁹² Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, 1961), 92–94, 163–235, 452.

⁹³ Downey, 519–57.

⁹⁴ Gunnar Brands, 'Orientis Apex Pulcher-Die Krone Des Orients: Antiochia Und Seine Mauern in Kaiserzeit Und Spätantike', *Antike Welt* 35, no. 2 (2004): 16; U. Weferling et al., 'Antiochia Am Orontes – Geodäsie Un Photogrammetrie Als Unverzichtbarer Beitrag in Bauhistorischen Und Archäologischen Projekten', no. Allgemeine Vermessungs-Nachrichten (2007): 295-298 images 3 and 4.

⁹⁵ Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, images 20 and 21.

the walls would have met.⁹⁶ The outer wall also showed several building phases. While clearly dating to an early period, the various building styles have as yet not been securely matched to specific building phases, and Brands suggests that, although it could be the wall of Epiphaneia, one of the early Hellenistic expansions of the city, it could also be the outer wall mentioned in Strabo, or the early imperial walls described by Malalas.⁹⁷ On the northern side, further towards the city, this outer wall seems to run quite close to the inner, Justinian wall. This corresponds to one of Cassas' engravings showing the remains of a ruined, older additional gate close in front of a larger one.⁹⁸

For the walls on Silpius, it seems very likely that there was no 'outer' wall here; instead, there was one single wall with several construction and repair phases. Some stretches of the wall were found to match the design of the wall shown in Cassas, in the plains on the southern side of the city, running from the mountains to the river. This section would have been the 'Theodosian' expansion, enclosing more of the city in a southerly direction.⁹⁹ Its location can be pinpointed without much doubt, as the Phyrminios, the torrent along which it lay, is still visible in older photographs, and the ravine through which it ran is rather obvious. Essentially, from the last point at which the walls are still discernible, it ran northwest up to the Orontes.

On the side of the river, a long stretch of the Justinian wall was mapped by the Princeton expeditions, and its location is confirmed on aerial photographs from the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰⁰ On that basis, the location of the left branch of the Orontes was traced as well. However, it is thought that before Justinian's restructuring of the defences – he also dug a canal, straightening the river along the new wall – this branch of the river turned westwards where the Parmenios, running down from the mountain, joined the Orontes.¹⁰¹ The Tiberian wall would then have followed this river course (see Figure 8). The further course of the wall is mostly speculative, with only the bridge gate and two short stretches of the Justinian wall as known points in the fortifications.

⁹⁶ Hatice Pamir, Gunnar Brands, and Shinichi Nishiyama, 'Hatay Yüzey Araştırmaları 2007: Antakya, Samandağ, Yayladığı ve Altınözü', *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantıları* 26, no. 3 (2008): 8.

⁹⁷ Hatice Pamir, Gunnar Brands, and Çevirici Figen, 'Hatay İli, Antakya, Samandağ ve Yayladağı: Yüzey Araştırması 2006', *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantıları* 25, no. 3 (2007): 403; But note as well this student report at the Technical University of Berlin after work done in the area, mentioning that there may be grounds to believe that this was in fact Iopolis, and Epiphaneia should be sought against the slopes of Mount Silpius, as also described by Downey <http://baugeschichte.a.tu-berlin.de/hbf-msd/MSD-ab_2006-08/antiochia_web.pdf> accessed 11-07-2013.

⁹⁸ Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, Images 11 and 20.

⁹⁹ Pamir, Brands, and Figen, 'Hatay İli, Antakya, Samandağ ve Yayladağı: Yüzey Araştırması 2006', 402; Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, 612.

¹⁰⁰ Poccardi and Leblanc, 'Etude de La Permanence Des Tracés Urbains et Ruraux Antiques à Antioche-Sur-l'Oronte'; Charles R. Morey, 'The Excavation of Antioch-on-the-Orontes', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 76, no. 5 (1 January 1936): 639, <https://doi.org/10.2307/984752>.

¹⁰¹ Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, 548.

That leaves the southern tract of the 'Tiberian' wall, of which nothing can be said with certainty. Knowing its location would help to reconstruct the city's size in the second century. The wall at least incorporated the bridge gate, but should not be sought further to the north-east than that. The first two main street digs of the 1930s expedition were located at this location, but did not find any traces of the city wall.¹⁰² It is of course conceivable that the wall ran closer to the location of the Theodosian extension. In the proposed figure, the wall is drawn in a straight line from the bridge, perpendicular to the main road, towards the mountains.

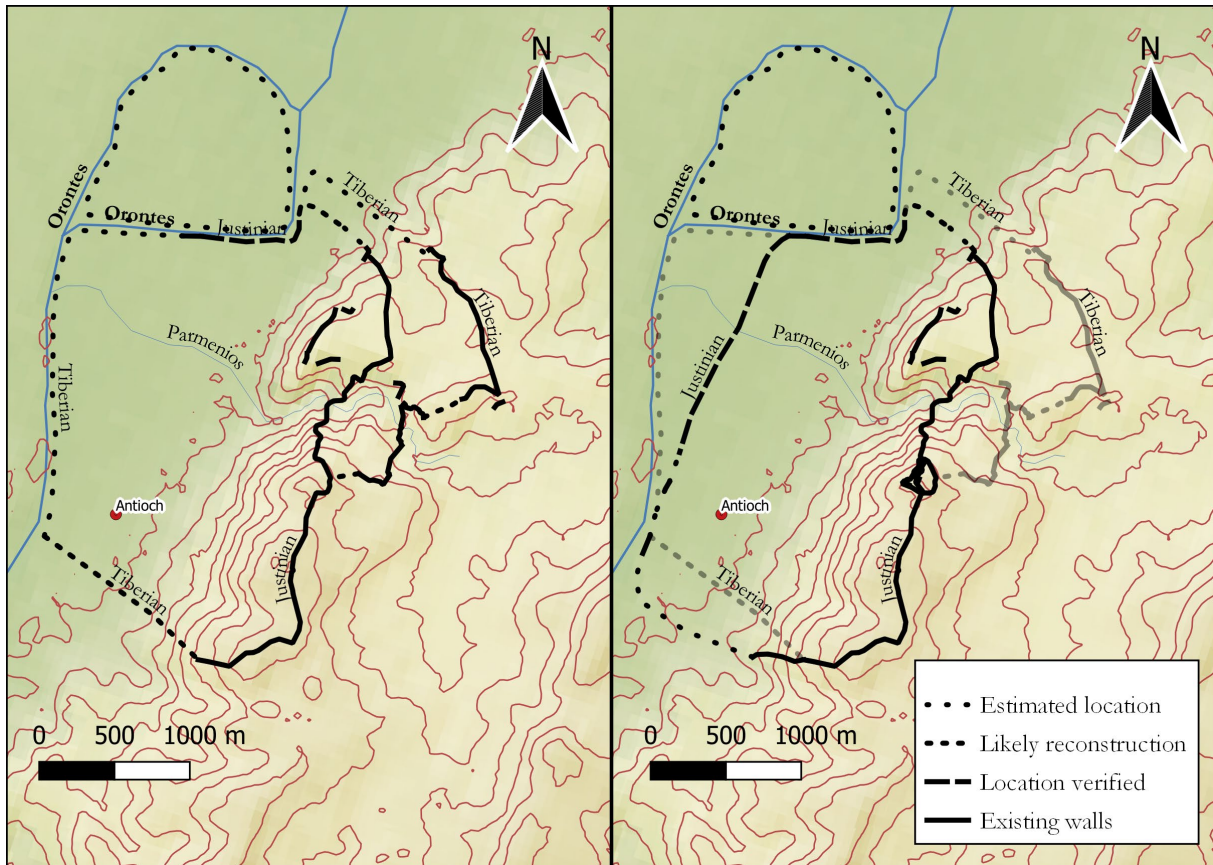


Figure 8 Tiberian (left) and Justinian (right) walls of Antioch

At its greatest possible extent, this gives a total walled area of 627 ha within the proposed line of the walls on the mainland. However, as is shown in Figure 8, the actual walled area for any period would have been smaller than that. For the Justinian period, 'only' 455 ha of the mainland city was actually walled. While the Justinian walled area is fairly secure, for the earlier periods a larger degree of uncertainty exists. The second-century walled area would be larger in most directions, except the southern extension, with around 590 ha plotted in the map. The northern extension could easily be 10 hectares larger or smaller, if at the last stretch the outer wall ran closer (or less close) to the Justinian wall. Similarly, on the south side, the city might also have been larger, if the

¹⁰² Downey, 206, 620; Lassus, Elderkin, and Stillwell, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, 5:31, 72.

Tiberian wall was positioned further out in that direction. On the other hand, on the riverside the city might actually have been smaller by up to 15 hectares, depending on the course of the river. Therefore, a range of 565 to 610 hectares is a safe estimate for Antioch's walled area in the second century (not counting the island, see below).

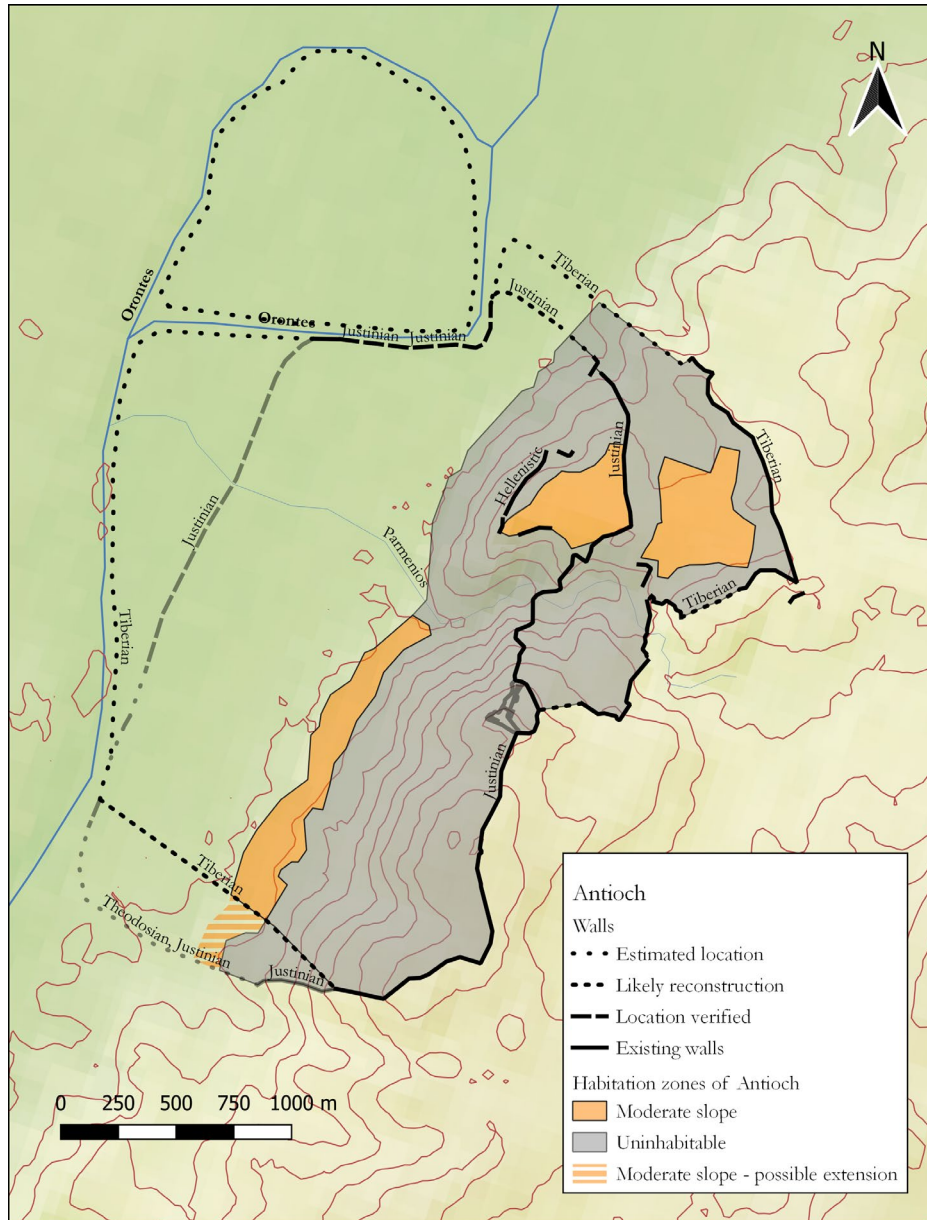


Figure 9 Moderate slopes and uninhabitable areas

Naturally, as a significant part of this area consists of the slopes of Silpius and Staurin, considerable corrections should be made for the actual buildable area within the walls (Figure 9). Looking at slope levels, modern construction, and finds by the Princeton team it can be determined which parts of the mountainside might have been built upon.¹⁰³ In the first place, the

¹⁰³ W. A. Campbell and R. Stillwell, eds., *Antioch-On-the-Orontes*, vol. 2 (Department of art and archaeology of Princeton University. In-fol., fig., pl., 1938), 215.

lower slopes of the mountains, marked as orange areas in Figure 9, could and clearly did see construction, contrary to what Poccardi for instance claims.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, two areas on mount Staurin are level enough for habitation, one measuring 13,5 hectares within the inner wall, and one measuring about 17,5 hectares within the outer wall. Three sections of the eastern of these areas were studied with geophysics, and showed indications of a regular street pattern with at least eight *insulae* of roughly 65 by 30 meters, oriented in a north-south direction. Additionally, ceramic surveys in the area indicated it was inhabited from the Hellenistic period onwards.¹⁰⁵

For the Justinian city, that takes away 178 ha of uninhabitable area, reducing it to 277 ha of buildable area within the walls. For the proposed area of Tiberian walls, the total non-buildable area would be around 235 to 245 hectares. The figure is relatively secure compared to that of the whole city, as most of the walls on the mountain are known; only the southern extent is hypothetical, but bound by the limits of the Justinian wall. The actual buildable area for the second century would be between 330 and 365 hectares (with 50 to 55 hectares on the lower slopes and plateaus of the mountains).

The second main area of the city was the island formed by two branches of the river, which no longer exists. Libanius described it as follows: “The new city stands on the island which the division of the river formed [...] The form of this new city is round. It lies in the level part of the plain, the whole of it in an exact plan, and an unbroken wall surrounds it like a crown.”¹⁰⁶ As mentioned above in relation to the walls on the mainland, Poccardi studied the course of the river and the shape and size of the island with the aid of maps and old aerial photographs from the French Mandate period (Figure 10).¹⁰⁷ He argues that the reconstructed map of the city as drawn by Wilber, which is often used as the basis for other maps, shows the island as smaller than it could possibly have been, as the circus appears to be drawn out of proportion and out of place. In fact, the entire map appears to be out of proportion, which is odd, as the expedition produced far more accurate maps to show its findings in the reports.¹⁰⁸ Essentially, the island should have been drawn with a larger extension to the north. Beyond that, however, Poccardi’s reconstruction of the right fork of the river is no less hypothetical than that of Wilber, nor does he give any clear

¹⁰⁴ Poccardi and Leblanc, ‘Etude de La Permanence Des Tracés Urbains et Ruraux Antiques à Antioche-Sur-l’Oronte’, 124 note 48.

¹⁰⁵ Hatice Pamir and Gunnar Brands, ‘Asi Deltası ve Asi Vadisi Arkeolojisi Projesi: Antakya ve Samandağ Yüzey Araştırmaları 2005’, *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantıları* 24, no. 2 (2006): 410–11; Gunnar Brands and Cornelius Meyer, ‘Antioch-On-The-Orontes and Seleucia Pieria 2004: Preliminary Results of the Geophysical Survey’, *Arkeometri Sonuçları Toplantısı* 21 (n.d.): 150.

¹⁰⁶ Libanius, *Or.* 11.203-204.

¹⁰⁷ Poccardi and Leblanc, ‘Etude de La Permanence Des Tracés Urbains et Ruraux Antiques à Antioche-Sur-l’Oronte’.

¹⁰⁸ Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*; Kondoleon, *Antioch*, xv. In Kondoleon’s case this is rather astounding, as in the legend, the author who recreated the map clearly refers to the same article by Poccardi that shows how Wilber’s map is out of proportion.

arguments for why he draws it where he does.¹⁰⁹ In comparison to the left fork of the river – which shows clearly on Poccardi's photos and on CORONA satellite imagery – the right fork has not left such obvious traces.¹¹⁰

Campbell's team did not manage to locate it either. During a heavy flood in 1938 the expedition hoped to gain some additional insight into the lie of the old channels by photographing the area



Figure 10 Reconstructions of the island by Wilber, Hoepfner and Poccardi

from the mountains, but as they stated, there was such a vast amount of flooding that little could be gleaned.¹¹¹ Hoepfner's reconstruction suggests taking the current riverbed as the limit of the northern edge of the island. This seems as likely as any of the other options, and allows for a far larger area for the palace, placed east of the circus, rather than west.¹¹² Considering the layout of the outer wall as discerned by Brands, and accepting the suggestion by Hoepfner that the wall was located more or less in line with the northern side of the island, there is much to be said for Poccardi's reconstruction. However, the resulting shape of the island is far removed from what Libanius describes, a supposedly circular or symmetrical in shape. In the spirit of Hoepfner's reconstruction, but with the northern side matching that of Poccardi (and in a sense Wilber), I've created the reconstruction shown in Figure 11. This would give an island of 120 ha. But, considering that the shape is very tentative, it could easily have been over 30 hectares larger, if

¹⁰⁹ Grégoire Poccardi, 'Antioche de Syrie : Pour Un Nouveau Plan Urbain de l'île de l'Oronte (Ville Neuve) Du IIIe Au Ve Siècle', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 106 (1994): 1014–16, 1022–23.

¹¹⁰ Poccardi and Leblanc, 'Etude de La Permanence Des Tracés Urbains et Ruraux Antiques à Antioche-Sur-l'Oronte', Especially 102–103 figs 5, 106–107 6, 108–109 7 and 116–117 fig 11; Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey, 'Corona Atlas of the Middle East', 5 June 2013, <http://corona.cast.uark.edu/>. See chapter three for the use of Corona images by the AVR project in locating sites in Antioch's territory.

¹¹¹ Campbell and Stillwell, *Antioch-On-the-Orontes*, 1938, 3:6.

¹¹² Wolfram Hoepfner, 'Antiochia Die Grosse : Geschichte Einer Antiken Stadt', *Antike Welt* 35, no. 2 (2004): 3–9.

any of the other reconstructions end up being closer to the truth. For the whole city, that would give between 685 and 730 ha of walled area, of which 450 to 515 ha was buildable.

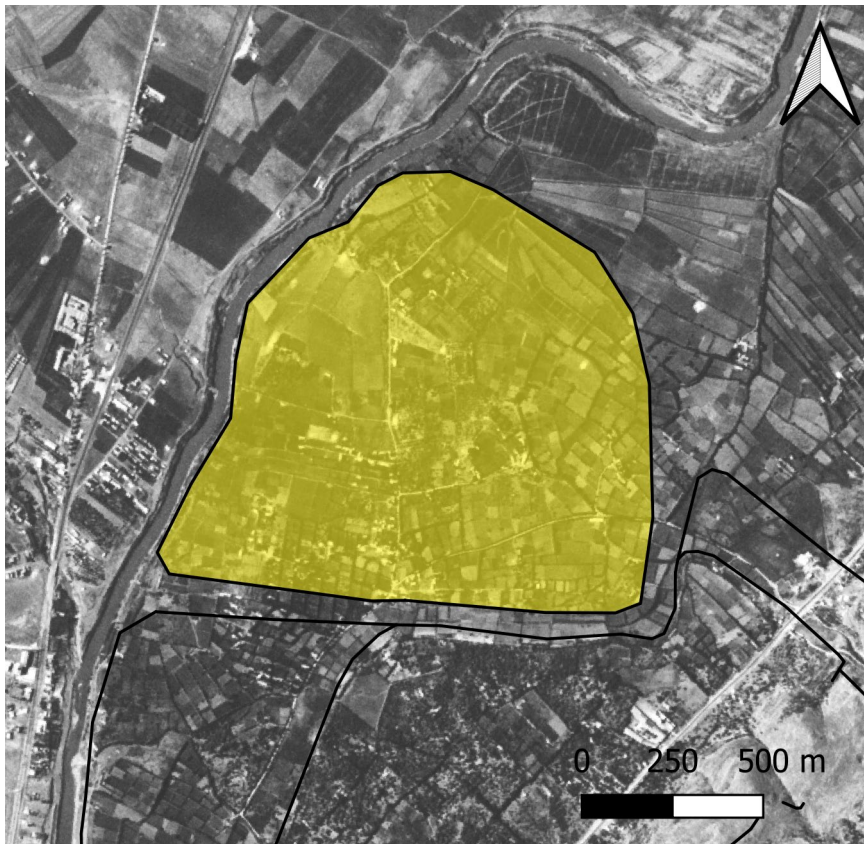


Figure 11 Reconstruction of the island

Extra-mural Antioch

If the walled area of the city already left some room for discussion, it should come as no surprise that determining the extramural area of the city is particularly tricky. There is, however, little doubt that the city did possess considerable suburbs. Although the literary evidence comes mostly from later authors, we read in Libanius: “Let one count over also what lies outside the gates [...] if one were to bring together into one form what is now divided into three, the part which is now before the city would be sufficient to be a city itself”.¹¹³

For the suburbs on the north-eastern side of the city, several interesting remarks were made by Casana and Wilkinson in the light of the Amuq Valley Regional Projects, although unfortunately, this is all they reported on it:

Results of survey in this area suggest that contrary to earlier, historically-based reconstructions of the growth of the city, the densely settled, urbanised area of Antioch extended as far as the Byzantine city walls as early as the third century

¹¹³ Libanius, *Or.* 11.231

B.C. [...] By the first century A.D., the suburbs of the city extended at least 2 km to the north of the city walls, as is suggested by ceramics from the Roman occupational horizon in this area.¹¹⁴

Without any additional details it is impossible to know how densely this area would have been built-up. Are we looking at a spread out of housing with gardens? In another article Casana only adds that several fifth- and sixth-century houses were uncovered about a kilometre north-east of the walls.¹¹⁵

Additional indications for the location and size of the suburbs may come from the continuation of the urban street grid outside of the city walls. Like many Seleucid cities, Antioch was organised in an orthogonal city grid, with roads running perpendicular to each other at fixed distances, the blocks thus formed known as *insulae*. While for Antioch the grid and its survival in the layout of the modern city have already been studied since the 1930s, it was once again Poccardi who showed that on the south-western side the grid continued for about 2 km beyond the walls and perhaps further, on both sides of the river. To the north-east, there are similar, but far less clear traces for at least about 700 m. This of course does not answer the very important questions of when the grids expanded in these directions, nor how the land was used.¹¹⁶ Towards the south-west, the 2004 report of Pamir's Asi Delta and Asi Valley Archaeological Project surveyed the east bank of the Orontes between Daphne (Harbiye) and Antioch, indicating an agrarian character for the region, with small villages or single farms from the Hellenistic period at the earliest, and two noria-type waterwheels.¹¹⁷ Looking at other Syrian cities, a similar continuation of the Hellenistic urban grid beyond the walled area can also be seen for Aleppo and Damascus. In both cases, however, this is clearly an organisation of the countryside rather than a continuation of the city proper, and in the Roman period around both those cities, as well as around Emesa, the countryside is reorganised into a centuriation grid.¹¹⁸

Like several other cities of the period in the Roman Near East, Antioch's cityscape was defined by its long, monumental colonnaded main street. In the case of Apamea, it has been shown that the

¹¹⁴ Jesse J. Casana and Tony J. Wilkinson, 'Settlement and Landscapes in the Amuq Region', in *The Amuq Valley Regional Projects*, ed. K. Aslihan Yener, Stephen Batiuk, and Robert Kriech Ritner, vol. 1 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2005), 42.

¹¹⁵ Jesse J. Casana, 'The Archaeological Landscape of Late Roman Antioch', in *Culture and Society in Later Roman Antioch* (Oxbow Books, 2004), 118–20.

¹¹⁶ Poccardi and Leblanc, 'Etude de La Permanence Des Tracés Urbains et Ruraux Antiques à Antioche-Sur-l'Oronte', 111–13, 126.

¹¹⁷ Pamir and Brands, 'The Asi Delta and the Asi Valley Archaeological Project in 2004: Samandağ and Antakya Surveys', 106; Hatice Pamir and Gunnar Brands, 'Asi Deltası ve Asi Vadisi Arkeoloji Projesi: Antiocheia, Seleuceia Pieria ve Sabuniye Yüzey Araştırmaları 2004 Yılı Çalışmaları', *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantıları* 23, no. 2 (2005): 99.

¹¹⁸ F. Villeneuve et al., 'Le Paysage Antique En Syrie : L'exemple de Damas', *Syria* 67, no. 2 (1990): 349–54, <https://doi.org/10.3406/syria.1990.7161>.

colonnade, lined with shops, continued for 70 meters beyond the walls of the city.¹¹⁹ Similarly, if we had an idea about the length of Antioch's main street beyond the walls, this might help in defining the extension of the suburbs as well. The only figure for the length of the main street mentioned in the actual excavation reports is the 3400 m that Lassus records, which roughly matches the distance from the outer south-western wall to the presumed location of the outer north-eastern wall.¹²⁰ Jean-Pierre Callu devoted an article to this, trying to arrive at a sensible estimate based on Wilber's map and ancient sources, but finds them hard to reconcile, because Malalas and Dio Chrysostom suggest figures nearly twice as high. The only thing we can say is that the idea that a section of the colonnaded street extended beyond the walls fits well with the remarks by Casana and Wilkinson.

Of course, without further excavations, there is no knowing exactly where the colonnades ended or began, and whether they only extended to the north-east and/or south-west. Considering Malalas' remark that the town extended a mile towards the south, Callu points out that wherever we locate the Cherubim Gate in the Tiberian wall, it must have been far less than 1479 meters from the Daphne Gate in the Theodosian wall, thus suggesting that even then the Daphne Gate did not indicate the limit of the city.¹²¹

There are also some indications for an extension of the city at the western side of the Orontes. Of main interest here is the inscription published by Feissel in 1985, found on the western side of the river, about 500 meters from the bridge along the road to Alexandretta. It mentions the digging of a canal 2.5 km long to supply the fullers' quarter in 73/74 C.E., by inhabitants of various quarters of the city.¹²² While such forms of production were not necessarily located outside the city proper, it could be imagined that workshops related to metalworking were located on the west bank, as there are clear signs of mining activities 8 km from the city in that direction, around Kisecik in the Amanus mountains.¹²³ Beyond that, the only indication is the statement by Libanius, that when looking out from the Diocletianic palace, "there is a view worthy of the emperor, with the river flowing below and the suburbs feasting the eyes on all sides."¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Jean-Charles Balty, 'Apamée: mutations et permanences de l'espace urbain, de la fondation hellénistique à la ville romano-byzantine', *Bulletin d'études orientales* 52 (2000): 174.

¹²⁰ Lassus, Elderkin, and Stillwell, *Antioch-on-the-Orontes*, 5:146.

¹²¹ Malalas 346.8 ff, referred to in Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, 612; Jean-Pierre Callu, 'Antioche La Grande : La Cohérence Des Chiffres', *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Antiquité* 109, no. 1 (1997): 150–52, especially notes 132, 137 and 140.

¹²² Denis Feissel, 'Deux Listes de Quartiers d'Antioche Astreints Au Creusement d'un Canal (73-74 Après J.-C.)', *Syria* 62, no. 1 (1985): 77–103, <https://doi.org/10.3406/syria.1985.6922>; Getzel M. Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 84, 93 note 27.

¹²³ Fokke Gerritsen et al., 'Settlement and Landscape Transformations in the Amuq Valley, Hatay', *Anatolica* 34, no. 0 (31 May 2008): 262, <https://doi.org/10.2143/ANA.34.0.2031568>.

¹²⁴ Libanius, *Or.* 11.239.

While the exact size of the suburbs remains unclear, it should at least be possible to make an estimate of their size (Figure 12), fully acknowledging that future research could change these figures significantly. Towards the north-east, if we were to count the whole area between the river and the mountains, the extent of two kilometres mentioned by Casana would add an area of over 260 hectares. This figure is unreasonably high, as it is far more likely that the suburbs extended only a limited distance from the main road, if we compare for instance the suburbs of sixteenth-century Damascus and Aleppo, where the suburbs running along main trade routes extended at most a 100 meters on either side outside the city wall.¹²⁵ And we might just as

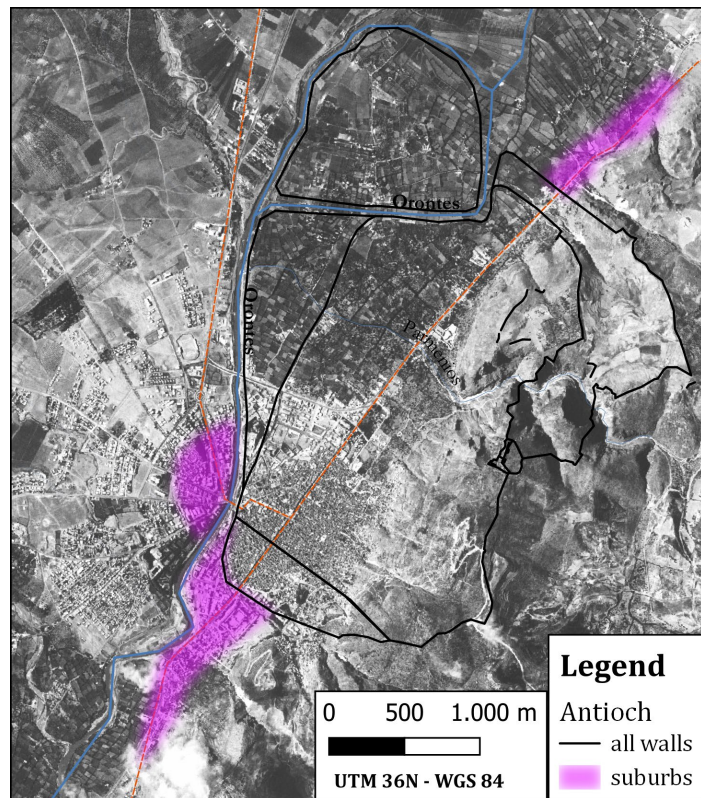


Figure 12 Possible extent of suburbs

well expect only linear settlement along the road itself, while further from the road only farms were located, organised along the centuriated grid mentioned above. For the full two kilometres, this would put the inhabited size of the suburbs in a far lower range of 20 to 60ha. Taking the fifth-century houses at one kilometre distance as the minimum known extent, we would end up with a minimum figure of 10 to 30 hectares for the north-eastern suburbs.

Towards the south, if we were to take the full width between the river and the mountains, for the full length of Malalas' Roman mile, we would end up with at most 75 hectares. Of course, here too it is far more likely to similarly expect that settlement was located mostly along the road, and that further from the gates the width of the suburbs would decrease, giving a far lower figure of 15 to 45 hectares. It is also important to note that it is equally possible that in the second century not even the area between the Cherubim Gate and the Phyrminios was fully covered by suburbs, let alone the area beyond it. The city may quite well only have expanded in that direction in the three and a half centuries up to Malalas' writing. A minimum of 15 hectares and a (very unlikely)

¹²⁵ André Raymond, 'La Conquête Ottomane et Le Développement Des Grandes Villes Arabes', *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 27, no. 1 (1979): figs 2, 3, <https://doi.org/10.3406/remmm.1979.1845>.

maximum of 110 (the area up to the Theodosian wall, plus the 75 hectares mentioned above) indicates the far greater uncertainty in this direction.

Concerning the western quarter, nothing can be said with any degree of certainty. Going by the assumption that this suburb may have been similar in size to the other suburbs, a range between 10 and 110 hectares would be just as good an estimate as any for the western urban extension, with 30 to 60 hectares as a suggested 'likely' range.

So, as a total, the suburbs could range somewhere between 30 and 280 hectares, which, again, indicates how tentative these figures are. For the total buildable area, adding the 450 to 510 hectares of the city proper, we end up with 480 to 795 hectares. In what follows, we will maintain a 'safe' minimum estimate for the city at 450 ha, with 50 hectares for the suburbs, giving us 500 hectares for the built-up area of Antioch.

1.2.1.2 Apamea, Laodicea and Seleucia Pieria

Of the three remaining cities of the Tetrapolis, Apamea is the best studied. Belgian investigations started after an initial exploration of the site by Franz Cumont in 1928. From the 1960s investigations were led by Jean-Charles Balty, and from 2001 onwards by Didier Viviers. Up to the breakout of the civil war in 2011, the Belgians undertook 43 archaeological missions.¹²⁶ Of course, other teams were active as well on the site, such as the Syrian-American mission that studied the theatre from 2008 to 2010.¹²⁷

The city of Apamea lies around the eastern side of Qalat al Madiq, a large Medieval Islamic hilltop fortress. The hill itself shows evidence of habitation from the Neolithic onwards, and was a sizeable fortified settlement throughout the Bronze Age. This tell was in use during the Hellenistic period from the early third century B.C.E. at the latest, likely functioning as a citadel as well.¹²⁸ With Alexander's conquest, a garrison of Macedonian veterans was installed, and sometime in the following century a city wall was built around the, by that time already sizeable, city.¹²⁹ As Strabo mentions, Apamea housed the Seleucid royal stables, military headquarters

¹²⁶ Agnès Vokaer and Didier Viviers, 'Travaux de La Mission Archéologique à Apamée de Syrie XLIIIe Campagne (2009)', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire* 88, no. 1 (2010): 113–49, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rbph.2010.7795>.

¹²⁷ Cynthia Finlayson, 'New Excavations and a Reexamination of the Great Roman Theater at Apamea, Syria, Seasons 1–3 (2008–2010)', *American Journal of Archaeology* 116, no. 2 (2012): 277–319.

¹²⁸ M. Gelin, 'Qalaat el Moudiq, citadelle d'Apamée de l'Oronte. Résultats des travaux de 2004', in *Résultats du programme de formation à la sauvegarde du Patrimoine Culturel de Syrie 2002-2004: Cultural Heritage Training Program*, by Jānin 'Abd al-Masīh, Documents d'archéologie Syrienne ; 11 345386078 (Damas: Ministère de la Culture, Direction Général des Antiquités et des Musées, 2007), 363–88.

¹²⁹ Jean-Charles Balty, 'Apamée et la Syrie du Nord aux époques hellénistique et romaine.', *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 62, no. 1 (1991): 15–26, <https://doi.org/10.3406/remmm.1991.1518>; Pierre Leriche, 'Le Phénomène Urbain Dans La Syrie Hellénistique', *Bulletin d'études Orientales* 52 (2000): 99–125.

and a large part of the army.¹³⁰ Additionally, the Seleucids imported 500 elephants and kept them at Apamea, where the marshy Ghab Valley made a good habitat for them. In fact, as Pfälzner argues, the valley had originally been a habitat for indigenous elephants up to the Iron Age II period, when they presumably became extinct due to hunting activities.¹³¹

As a Roman city, Apamea grew to enclose 250 to 255 hectares within its walls.¹³² The city was the site of a large and well-known sanctuary of Zeus Belos, and housed an important Neoplatonist school. And under the Severans, Apamea regained some of its strategic importance, as it became the base of operations for the II Parthica. With all the research that took place in the city, we have quite a good insight into the history and monumentality of this city, showing a full complement of all status buildings associated with major cities. Furthermore, it is clear that (like in Antioch), a major reconstruction effort had taken place after the earthquake of 115 C.E., with both local and imperial investments, and hints at a rich local aristocracy.¹³³ At the same time, when it comes to urban housing, a number of large elite residences have been uncovered, but little is known of lower class living. As Charles Balty wrote in 1988: “the plan of the inhabited areas in the excavated zones does not allow us to calculate the total population [...]”.¹³⁴

In the case of Laodicea, modern Latakia, only an old study of the walls and a paper on the potential survival of the old city grid in the modern street pattern have shed some light on its size, giving a walled area of around 220 hectares, of which around 170 may potentially have been built up.¹³⁵ It was clearly an important city in the region. As a Hellenistic foundation at a pre-existing village, it was already a major city during the Hellenistic period. Under Roman rule it kept its privileges (*hiera kai asylos kai autonomos*), struck coins, and was granted colonial and *metropolis* status by Septimius Severus after having revolted against Pescennius Niger. This grant was also accompanied by a large reconstruction effort, as its revolt was severely punished

¹³⁰ Strab., ed. A. Meineke (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877), 16.2.10.

¹³¹ Peter Pfälzner, ‘The Elephants of the Orontes’, *Syria. Archéologie, Art et Histoire*, no. IV (1 December 2016): 159–82, <https://doi.org/10.4000/syria.5002>.

¹³² Jean-Marie Dentzer et al., ‘Formation et développement des villes en Syrie du Sud de l’époque hellénistique à l’époque byzantine : les exemples de Bosra, Suweida, Shahba’, in *Hauran V : la Syrie du sud du néolithique à l’antiquité tardive : recherches récentes : actes du colloque de Damas 2007. Vol. I.*, by Michel al-Maqdissi et al., Bibliothèque archéologique et historique ; t. 191. 852438184 (Beyrouth: Institut Français d’Archéologie du Proche-Orient, 2010), 193–170; Jean-Charles Balty, ‘Claudia Apamea. Données Nouvelles Sur l’histoire et La Topographie d’Apamée’, *Comptes Rendus Des Séances de l’Académie Des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 144, no. 1 (2000): 459, <https://doi.org/10.3406/crai.2000.16134>.

¹³³ Jean-Charles Balty, ‘Apamea in Syria in the Second and Third Centuries A.D’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988): 91–96.

¹³⁴ Balty, 96; Balty, ‘Apamée et la Syrie du Nord aux époques hellénistique et romaine.’

¹³⁵ Sauvaget, Mouterde, and Mouterde, ‘Le Plan de Laodicée-Sur-Mer’.

by Niger's troops. In fact, the reconstruction was paid for by Antioch, as a punishment imposed by Septimius, as Antioch had sided with Niger.¹³⁶

The city certainly had a sizeable harbour, including a lighthouse known from coinage. It had all the monuments and infrastructure one would expect in a major city as well: temples, an aqueduct granted by Herod the Great, baths and a large theatre. Antoninus Pius had a forum (not an agora, as typical for the region, but actually explicitly called a forum, φόρον, μέγα θίαμα) and baths constructed in the city.¹³⁷ And in the reconstruction by Septimius another public bath, a six-sided colonnade, a *kyneqion* (a structure for animal fights, perhaps an amphitheatre) and a hippodrome were built. The still surviving tetrapylon is also dated to the Severan period.¹³⁸ In fact, in later times Laodicea was well known for its hippodrome and its races.¹³⁹

Seleucia Pieria is another Hellenistic (re)foundation which had also been an important centre throughout the Hellenistic period. It was a strongly fortified port city, and when it was captured by the Ptolemies, they managed to maintain their occupation for several decades, despite the very short distance to Antioch. In the Roman period it stood out for acting as the base of the *classis Syriaca*.¹⁴⁰

Seleucia has a rather limited archaeological record, but there are visible remains of its fortifications, harbour and the tunnels and canals dug to prevent the silting up of the harbours. Furthermore, the agora was identified, including porticoes with rows of shops and warehouses or *horrea*.¹⁴¹ At the time of the excavations in Antioch, some work was also done in Seleucia, including excavations of a temple, residences and shops. Additionally, results of geophysical surveys in the early 2000s were published by Pamir, including a map of the lower town. Combined with the outline of the upper town based on Stillwell 1941, we get an idea of the size

¹³⁶ Klaus-Peter Todt and Bernd Andreas Vest, *Syria (Syria Prote, Syria Deuteria, Syria Euphratēsia)*, Tabula Imperii Byzantini 15 (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2014), II.1429-1449, <http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/7090-7>.

¹³⁷ Malalas, *Chron.*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1831), XI.280.

¹³⁸ Ingeborg Kader, *Propylon Und Bogentor: Untersuchungen Zum Tetrapylon von Latakia Und Anderen Frühkaiserzeitlichen Bogenmonumenten Im Nahen Osten*, Damaszener Forschungen 7 (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1996).

¹³⁹ Todt and Vest, *Syria (Syria Prote, Syria Deuteria, Syria Euphratēsia)*, II.1443-1444; Malalas, *Chron.*, XI.294.

¹⁴⁰ Denis van Berchem, 'Le port de Séleucie de Piérie et l'infrastructure logistique des guerres parthiques', *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 1985, 51-53, <https://doi.org/10.11588/bjb.1985.0.71899>; Todt and Vest, *Syria (Syria Prote, Syria Deuteria, Syria Euphratēsia)*, II.1712-1713.

¹⁴¹ Hatice Pamir, 'Recent Researches and New Discoveries in the Harbours of Seleucia Pieria', in *Häfen Und Hafenstädte Im Östlichen Mittelmeerraum von Der Antike Bis in Byzantinische Zeit: Neue Entdeckungen Und Aktuelle Forschungsansätze*; Istanbul, 30.05.-01.06.2011. 1 1, ed. Sabine Ladstätter, Felix Pirson, and Thomas Schmidts, vol. 1, BYZAS 19 (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2014), 177-98.

of the city (Figure 13). Pamir gives 300 hectares for the whole city.¹⁴² However, when georeferencing the maps, the lower town appears to have covered 88 hectares. The upper town is less clearly mapped, but appears to be at most 160 hectares in size. 250 hectares seems therefore a more likely (upper) estimate for the walled area. This includes the inner harbour, taking up 13.5 hectares of the inhabitable area, and what is marked as the ‘military area’ on Pamir’s map, around 5.5 hectares, next to the (later) exterior harbour. Additionally, it remains to be seen how densely the slopes of the upper city were actually inhabited; as Pamir describes it, the upper town mainly served as a residential area, with most commercial and monumental structures located in the lower town.¹⁴³ But as with Antioch, the walled area consists mostly of hard to develop, heavily sloped and uneven terrain, with up high the acropolis. As described by Rey-Coquais, we see “Luxurious Roman villas [...] arranged in tiers along the slopes of the upper town.”¹⁴⁴ As such, it is unlikely more than 25% of the upper town was actually built-up. In total, I estimate 130 hectares of actual built-up area in the whole city.

¹⁴² Todt and Vest, *Syria (Syria Prote, Syria Deuteria, Syria Euphratēsia)*, 1717; Pamir, ‘Recent Researches and New Discoveries in the Harbours of Seleucia Pieria’; Hatice Pamir, ‘The Orontes Delta Survey’, in *The Amuq Valley Regional Projects*, ed. K. Aslihan Yener, Stephen Batiuk, and Robert Kriech Ritner, vol. 1 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2005), 67–98; Pamir, Brands, and Nishiyama, ‘Hatay Yüzey Araştırmaları 2007: Antakya, Samandağ, Yayladığı ve Altınözü’.

¹⁴³ Pamir, ‘The Orontes Delta Survey’, 74.

¹⁴⁴ Jörg Wagner, ‘Seleukeia Pieria Hafenstadt von Antiocheia’, in *Der Neue Pauly*, New Pauly Online (Brill, n.d.), 11:355–358, <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com:443/entries/der-neue-pauly/seleukeia-e1107200>; Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, ‘Seleucia Pieria’, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites*, ed. Richard Stillwell and William L. MacDonald (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

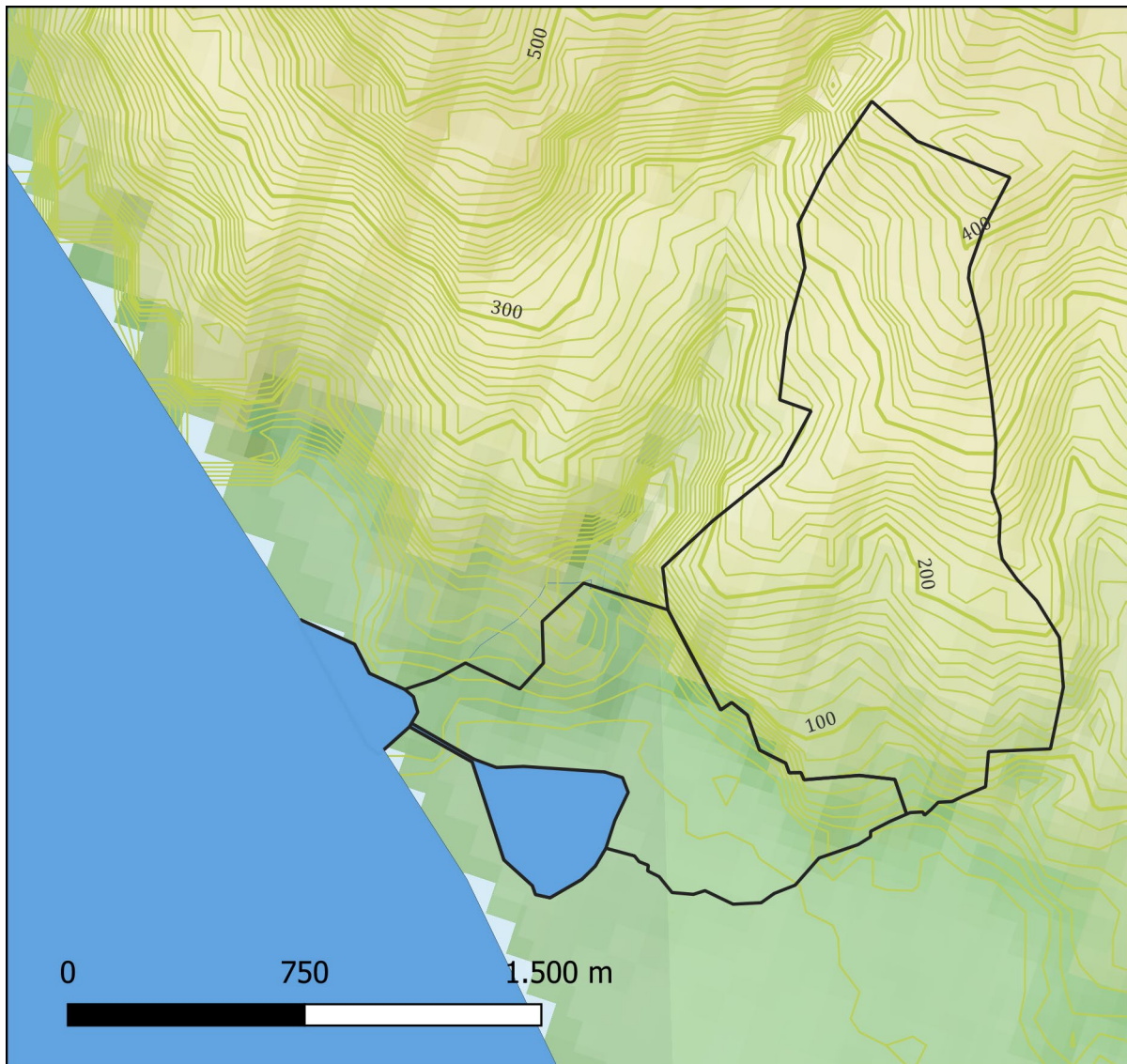


Figure 13 Seleucia Pieria - harbours, lower and upper town

1.2.2 Coastal cities

Our knowledge is very limited where it concerns the northern coastal cities, located mostly within the borders of modern Syria (Figure 14). The names of several places are known from Pliny, Strabo and Ptolemy. Archaeological evidence is poor. Some places have only seen a simple sondage (for example Paltos), while others like Byblos and Tyre have been thoroughly studied, but here we are already looking further south – and in these cases note Gatier's remarks on the

rather less than optimal state of publication of the work done by Maurice Chéhab.¹⁴⁵ As such, south of Latakia, for most of the settlements down to Byblos, information on city sizes is lacking, except perhaps for Arados.

This island city, when fully built up, could have had a size of at most 16 hectares. It had been a very successful city from the Iron Age onwards, and despite some of its dependent settlements gaining independence, by the later Hellenistic period it seems to have reasserted its authority over several places on the mainland.¹⁴⁶ Archaeologically, its continued habitation up to the present greatly limits what can be learned of the ancient city. During the Roman period, written sources are rather silent concerning the city. Strabo does mention that in his time, the city was so populous that the houses were several stories high, and Pomponius Mela mentions that unlike other places, in Arados people were allowed to build their roofs higher than the roofs of their neighbours – the exception makes sense as on this island city, lateral expansion would have been impossible.¹⁴⁷

On the mainland opposite to Arados, the city of Marathos (Amrit) contains a sixth-century B.C.E. temple and a stadium from the third century B.C.E., and various workshops, a second temple and settlement's harbour are known as well.¹⁴⁸ A limited magnetic survey undertaken before the Syrian civil war located a warehouse close to the excavated artisanal quarter, and indicated dense occupation on the tell. Despite it not having been overbuilt, like many other places it has been studied only to a limited degree.¹⁴⁹ Like Arados, it appears to have retained its vitality into the Hellenistic period, but in his study of Arados and its hinterland, Jean Paul Rey-Coquais offers the idea that throughout the Roman period Marathos may have declined in favour of Antarados, modern Tartus.¹⁵⁰ There are good indications that the city was already struggling by the end of the Hellenistic period. Strabo describes Marathos as having lain in ruins.¹⁵¹ Possibly this could be

¹⁴⁵ Pierre-Louis Gatier et al., 'Mission Archéologique de Tyr - Rapport Préliminaire 2008-2009', *Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises* 14 (2010): 140; See for an overview of literature available for the Phoenician cities: Élodie Guillon, 'Les arrière-pays des cités phéniciennes à l'époque hellénistique, IV^e siècle - II^e siècle ap. J.-C. : approches historiques et spatiales d'une aire géoculturelle' (Ph.D., Université Toulouse le Mirail - Toulouse II, 2013), <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00991865/document>; Nicolas Carayon, 'Les Ports Phéniciens et Poniques. Géomorphologie et Infrastructures' (Theses, Université Marc Bloch - Strasbourg II, 2008), <https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-00283210>.

¹⁴⁶ Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 257.

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, *Arados et sa pérée aux époques grecque, romaine et byzantine : recueil des témoignages littéraires anciens, suivi de recherches sur les sites, l'histoire, la civilisation*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique. 852438184 (Paris: PGeuthner, 1974), 56–58; Strab., 16.2.14; Mela, *De Chron.*, n.d., II.7.

¹⁴⁸ Michel Al Maqdissi and Christophe Benech, 'The Spatial Organization of the Phoenician City of Amrith (Syria)', *ArcheoSciences. Revue d'archéométrie*, no. 33 (suppl.) (30 October 2009): 209, <https://doi.org/10.4000/archeosciences.1596>.

¹⁴⁹ Al Maqdissi and Benech, 'The Spatial Organization of the Phoenician City of Amrith (Syria)'.

¹⁵⁰ Rey-Coquais, *Arados et sa pérée aux époques grecque, romaine et byzantine*.

¹⁵¹ Strab., 16.2.14.

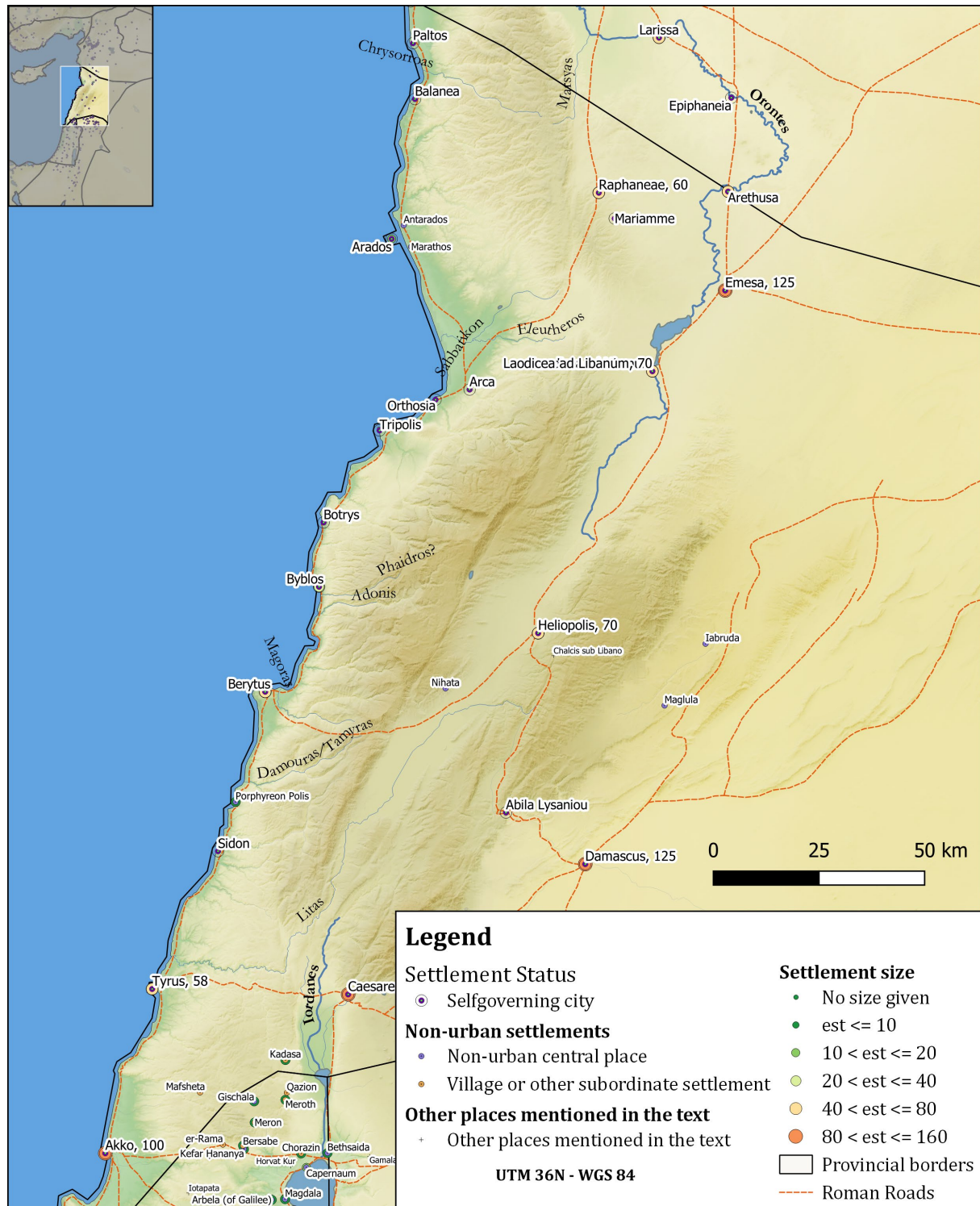


Figure 14 Coastal and inland cities

the result of a struggle between Arados and Marathos in the second century B.C.E., as described by Diodorus Siculus.¹⁵² But, as both Rey-Coquais and Jones indicate, the coinage of the city only ended several decades later, around 90 B.C.E., suggesting a later incident such as the two-year

¹⁵² Diod., n.d., 33.5.

long siege of Arados.¹⁵³ Furthermore, coinage started again in the same century under Roman rule, to end only by the second century C.E., so clearly it recovered from its previous decline. While it is clear that by the sixth century, Antarados was mentioned in the bishoprics lists, while Marathos wasn't, without further archaeological data there is no way to determine the city's trajectory. Antarados is even less well-known, since continuous habitation and numerous sieges and conquests from the Byzantine period onwards have not done the archaeological record much good.

Other coastal places within the former Aradian territory, such as Gabala, Paltos and Balanea, were described as small towns by Strabo, but considering their coinage likely all had urban status. Simyra clearly lost its status, if it remained inhabited at all. Carne, just north of Antarados, likewise is not mentioned anymore in sources after Strabo.¹⁵⁴

On the southern side of the plain of Akkar, the largest coastal plain in this area, the situation is the same. Possibly the main settlement on this side of the plain, lying slightly inland is Arca, also known as Caesarea sub Libano. It received colonial status under Elegabalus as advertised by the city on its coinage.¹⁵⁵ It had been an independent Iturean principality before being annexed into Syria in the middle of the first century C.E. Archaeologically, the well-studied tell site is rich in Bronze Age remains, but offers very little insight into the Roman period.¹⁵⁶ On the coast, Orthosia is another typical small tell-based port town with its placename already mentioned in 19th-18th century B.C.E. sources. It is quite unknown however in the Roman period besides its mention in Strabo, and was never excavated.¹⁵⁷ Nonetheless, we have multiple issues of coinage from the first to third centuries C.E. A little further south along the coast, Tripolis is a similarly old port city with few known remains for the Roman period itself, with mostly earlier finds from the Late Bronze Age and Persian periods, and from late antiquity onwards. The exact location of the three urban cores that made up Tripolis are also still debated.¹⁵⁸ Its continued coinage suggests urban status. And Malalas mentions the restoration in the fifth century by Marcian of its public baths, aqueduct and a building known as the "Phakidion".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 257–58; Rey-Coquais, *Arados et sa pérée aux époques grecque, romaine et byzantine*, 135–41.

¹⁵⁴ Rey-Coquais, *Arados et sa pérée aux époques grecque, romaine et byzantine*, 119.

¹⁵⁵ 'Roman Provincial Coinage', VI 8227 onwards, accessed 5 November 2022, <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>.

¹⁵⁶ Sartre, *The Middle East under Rome*, 77.

¹⁵⁷ Nicolas Carayon, 'Les Ports Phéniciens Du Liban. Milieux Naturels, Organisation Spatiale et Infrastructures', *Archaeology and History in Lebanon* 36 (2012): 4ff.

¹⁵⁸ Ḥassān Salāmē-Sarkis, *Contribution à l'histoire de Tripoli et de sa région à l'époque des Croisades: problèmes d'histoire, d'architecture et de céramique*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique. 852438184 (Paris: Librairie orientale P. Geuthner, 1980); Carayon, 'Les Ports Phéniciens Du Liban. Milieux Naturels, Organisation Spatiale et Infrastructures'.

¹⁵⁹ Malalas, *Chron.*, 14.367.

Further south along the coast, in Sidon, only a very limited area has been excavated. While the excavations, showing a 13th-century B.C.E. temple and a large multi-room building from the Early Bronze Age, are clearly of value in confirming the city's long history, they cannot give any hints towards the size of the city.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, what can be seen today of the Medieval centre suggests a rather compact town of 16 hectares. Aerial pictures from the 1930s show that at that time, the city was not much larger.¹⁶¹ With the Roman baths lying outside the Medieval walls, it is of course quite possible that the Medieval walled city was far more compact than the Classical site, similar to Antioch, where already under Justinian the walled city was quite reduced compared to earlier periods.

Only Berytus, Byblos and Tyre reveal a little more, suggesting that we should not expect the other places to be particularly large. An indication might come from Jiyeh, which the excavators suggest should be identified with Porphyraeon, measuring around or somewhat over 7.7 hectares.¹⁶²

Of the better studied cities, Byblos is a site with spectacular standing remains from several periods, including a wonderful 12th century citadel. Like the other port towns, it has a very long pre-Roman history, and was a major Bronze Age port city (albeit only 5 ha in size).¹⁶³ It was quite thoroughly studied in the 1860s by Ernest Renan, and by Maurice Dunand in the twentieth century.¹⁶⁴ It is hard to determine the extents of the settlement in this period. With Roman period finds and monuments (theatre, temples, a colonnaded street and a nymphaeum) throughout the lower medieval Old Town and the archaeological zone on the tell, we can expect a minimum size of 20 hectares.¹⁶⁵ Depending on whether the Roman city extended beyond those 20 hectares, it is unlikely that it would have extended beyond the necropoleis indicated by

¹⁶⁰ Claude Doumet-Serhal, 'Sidon: British Museum Excavations 1998-2003', *Sidon: British Museum Excavations 1998-2003*, no. 18 (2003): 2–19.

¹⁶¹ Antoine Poidebard, *Sidon, aménagements antiques du port de Saïda : étude aérienne, au sol et sous-marine, 1946-1950* (Beyrouth: Ministère des Travaux Publics, 1951).

¹⁶² Mariusz Gwiazda, 'Economy of Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Settlement in Jiyeh (Porphyreon), Lebanon', *Archeologia* 62, no. 2011–2012 (2014): 34.

¹⁶³ Carayon, 'Les Ports Phéniciens Du Liban. Milieux Naturels, Organisation Spatiale et Infrastructures'.

¹⁶⁴ Ernest Renan, 'Campagne de Byblos', in *Mission de Phénicie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Impr. Impériale, 1864), 153–359; Maurice Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos. T. 1: 1926-1932*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique ; 24. 852438184 (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1937).

¹⁶⁵ Jean Lauffray, 'Une Fouille Au Pied de l'acropole de Byblos', *Bulletin Du Musée de Beyrouth* 4 (1940): 7–36; Jean-Paul Deroin, Rania Bou Kheir, and Chadi Abdallah, 'Geoarchaeological Remote Sensing Survey for Cultural Heritage Management. Case Study from Byblos (Jbail, Lebanon)', *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, Beyond the modern landscape: Earth Observation to see the unseen, 23 (1 March 2017): 37–43, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2016.04.014>.

Renan, putting a firm upper limit of 60 hectares to the city, and 40 hectares as an acceptable estimate.¹⁶⁶

Berytus became a very prominent city in the Roman period. It was one of the few early recipients of colonial status in the region. Initially its territory seems to have stretched well inland, including parts of the Beqaa Valley, until Baalbek was given urban rights of its own. From the third century it became a centre for the study of Roman law.¹⁶⁷ Although, like many of the other places, its modern habitation has limited excavation possibilities, the reconstruction effort after the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990 created opportunities that were taken up relatively successfully – see Perring for an overview, as well as Curvers and Stuart.¹⁶⁸ Everything points to a city endowed with a wide complement of monuments, a city grid and sizeable harbours. Based on the streets and locations of remains, the city may have measured between 50 to 70 hectares in size. As such, it was indeed a rather large city, but overshadowed by the northern and inland cities of the region, including eventually its former dependency, Baalbek.¹⁶⁹

Tyre likewise seems to have fallen within the same size range, about 60 hectares, judging from satellite imagery and site maps. Dependent on how much of the area between the old island and the hippodrome was built up, this could have been as much as 90 hectares. Despite large parts of the city having been excavated, on this point nothing definitive has been written. Also, the finds mostly show the vibrant city of the fourth century C.E., but remain quite unclear for the earlier period.¹⁷⁰

A recent study by Guillon explored the possibilities of defining a hierarchy between the cities using statistical and geographical models. Although set in the centuries leading up to, but not including the Roman period, it nonetheless gives a good overview of the Phoenician coastal zone. Because of the rather limited dataset, her use of statistical methods seems somewhat superfluous, as a structured discussion of the materials would likely have given quite the same insights. The results of her component and hierarchy analyses mainly highlighted differences in the intensity of research at the different locations.¹⁷¹ Similarly, the weights assigned to the settlements for her gravity model are dependent on categories such as the presence of cult

¹⁶⁶ Ernest Renan and Thobois, *Mission de Phénicie* (Paris: Impr. Impériale, 1864), Pl. XIX.

¹⁶⁷ Linda Jones Hall, *Roman Berytus: Beirut in Late Antiquity* (London etc: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶⁸ Dominic Perring, 'Archaeology and the Post-War Reconstruction of Beirut', *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* 11, no. 3–1 (1 November 2009): 296–314, <https://doi.org/10.1179/175355210X12747818485529>; Hans H Curvers and Barbara Stuart, 'The BCD Archaeology Project 2000–2006', *Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises* 9 (2007): 189–222.

¹⁶⁹ Klaus Stefan Freyberger and Friedrich Ragette, 'Stadt des Jupiter Helipolitanus: Baalbek als Kultzentrum in römischer Zeit', in *Baalbek: im Bann römischer Monumentalarchitektur*, by Margarete van Ess, Thomas Weber, and Stefanie Bahe (Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 1999), 45.

¹⁷⁰ Gatier et al., 'Mission Archéologique de Tyr - Rapport Préliminaire 2008-2009'.

¹⁷¹ Guillon, 'Les arrière-pays des cités phéniciennes', 346, 377.

buildings, industrial zones, tableware and amphorae. As became quickly evident during the data collection for her study, these elements are very likely to have been present even at very small and remote settlements, but nonetheless are liable not to be found, identified or published in the first place, thus significantly impacting any analysis dependent upon them.

The main strengths of her study instead lie in highlighting how places like Gabala, Marathos and Dor played important roles in the urban network. They were secondary to the large cities, but relevant in their specific roles, either controlling territory or main routes from the coast inland.¹⁷² Of especial interest is how in the Roman period the main cities remained more or less as stable in their positions, as they had done in all preceding periods, but the fates of these second-order settlements shift. In the south, Dor was entirely overshadowed by its neighbours Caesarea and Akko, and in the north Simyra disappeared, with Arca controlling the plain of Akkar; as discussed, Marathos appears to have lost its role to Antarados.

The larger coastal cities were visibly limited to the wider coastal plains, as is clear for Seleucia, Laodicea, Berytus and Akko, and to a lesser degree Tyre. In the cases of Seleucia, Laodicea and Akko, this plain is also linked to passes connecting the coast to inland areas. The plain of Akkar, the largest coastal plain, interestingly had its major settlements on the edges: Arados to the north, and Tripolis or Arca to the south. Before the Romans came to control it, Arca appears to have become an independent Iturean principality as well. Perhaps the primacy of sites along the edges of the plain was influenced by the favourable conditions for harbours at Tripolis and Arados, especially in comparison with the lack thereof along the plain.¹⁷³ Arados' control over the plain will certainly have contributed to its success in earlier periods.

At the very southern end of the Severan province of Syria Phoenice, we arrive at Akko, also known as Ptolemais. It was an early Roman colony, from Claudius onwards, hinting at its regional importance. In 56 C.E. it became the endpoint of a coastal road constructed by Nero all the way from Antioch. It also served as a Roman military staging point during the first Jewish war.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, little is known of the physical aspects of the city. Magen Broshi estimates its 'later Roman – Byzantine' (in this case meaning around 600 C.E.) size at 100 hectares.¹⁷⁵ This is a considerable size, but it is not unimaginable that the city grew to this extent. In comparison to other mentioned coastal cities, it had a comparatively large and uncontested coastal plain

¹⁷² Guillon, 442–44.

¹⁷³ Carayon, 'Les Ports Phéniciens et Puniques. Géomorphologie et Infrastructures', 253–55.

¹⁷⁴ Fergus Millar, 'The Roman Coloniae of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations', in *Roman Eastern Policy and Other Studies in Roman History*, vol. 8, 1990, 23–30; Nadav Kashtan, 'Akko-Ptolemais: A Maritime Metropolis in Hellenistic and Early Roman Times, 332 BCE — 70 CE, as Seen through the Literary Sources', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 3, no. 1 (1988): 37–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518968808569536>.

¹⁷⁵ Broshi, 'The Population of Western Palestine in the Roman-Byzantine Period'.

around it, and it would be the most directly accessible port servicing the cities of the Decapolis. Beyond a tell size of around 20 hectares, very little else can be said certainly.

1.2.3 The cities on the Orontes

Like the coastal area, the inland areas of the disintegrating Seleucid empire had become a patchwork of various independent cities and principalities by the time Pompey organised the Syrian province. Even the city of Apamea may have been ruled by a local dynast, Dexandros, honoured in an inscription by his great-grandson as the first priest of the province and friend and ally of Rome.¹⁷⁶ Initially, a number of these principalities became client kingdoms, such as the kingdom of Emesa, but over the course of the first century these were all annexed into the Roman province of Syria (Figure 14 and Figure 15).

1.2.3.1 Emesa and the former Emesene kingdom

Not Emesa, but Arethusa was probably the original capital of the kingdom of the Emesenes, founded by Seleukos I Nikator – possibly a rebranding of an existing settlement. After the battle of Actium it appears to have become independent, but perhaps it returned to Emesene control at a later point.¹⁷⁷ While the later foundation of Emesa seems to have grown to considerable prominence after becoming the new capital of the Emesenes, what few sources we have suggest that Arethusa retained its urban status. Pliny mentions the city's destruction, together with Larisa and Chalcis, in a series of otherwise undated wars, but clearly the city survived:¹⁷⁸ we find inscriptions of soldiers from Arethusa (and from Emesa) in an auxiliary cohort (*cohors I Hemesenorum*) stationed in Pannonia from the end of the second century to mid-third century C.E.¹⁷⁹ Later, Arethusa became the seat of a bishopric, and we know from Theodoret that bishop Mark of Arethusa destroyed a large pagan temple in the city and replaced it with a church – Julian ordered the temple either rebuilt or refunded, upon which Mark refused, fled, returned and was killed.¹⁸⁰ Based on a sketch by Sauvaget and compared with Corona imagery, the walled area can be estimated at around 60 hectares.¹⁸¹

Emesa itself does not appear to have been a Seleucid (re)foundation, and it is not quite clear indeed when it was settled. But it certainly was prominent enough by the first century B.C.E. as it became the new capital of the Emesenes.¹⁸² Completely covered by modern habitation, only the

¹⁷⁶ Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC - AD 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 261; Kropp, *Images and Monuments of Near Eastern Dynasts, 100 BC - AD 100*, 13.

¹⁷⁷ Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 92.

¹⁷⁸ Plin., *HN*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 371 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 6.159; Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa*, 101.

¹⁷⁹ John D. Grainger, *Syrian Influences in the Roman Empire to AD 300* (Routledge, 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 380.

¹⁸¹ J. Sauvaget, *Alep : essai sur le développement d'une grande ville syrienne, des origines au milieu du XIXe siècle*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1941), 43.

¹⁸² Grainger, *The Cities of Seleukid Syria*, 106, 178.

layout of the old town of Homs gives a hint at the approximate size of the Roman city, which might have covered around 125 hectares. It started to mint coins from the second century C.E., and became a colony under the Severans.

Laodicea ad Libanum, a similarly sized site to Arethusa (at around 70 hectares walled area), lay south of Emesa at the location of ancient Qedesh, on tell Nebi Mend. A very interesting site for its pre-classical remains, it unfortunately offers little information for the Hellenistic and Roman periods¹⁸³

Another interesting settlement in this area is Ḥamā, “called Amathe by the inhabitants, although the Macedonians named it Epiphania”.¹⁸⁴ As so often, it is mostly overbuilt by modern occupation, but is well-known for its late-Roman noria sited on the Orontes. After its destruction in the 8th century B.C.E., it is not entirely clear if, but quite possible that, the site remained in use until it was resettled in the Hellenistic era. In any case, like Laodicea ad Libanum and Emesa itself, the initial late-third-century B.C.E. Hellenistic settlement was limited to the citadel, indicating similar military considerations as in other Hellenistic foundations, from Apamea to Dura Europos.¹⁸⁵ All indications are that throughout the Hellenistic and Roman era, it grew into a prospering town.

Outside of the cities, it appears that a major reorganisation of the landscape started to take place from the first century C.E. onwards. This included a general settlement orientation away from tell sites, along with the introduction of cadastrations and canalisation.¹⁸⁶

1.2.3.2 Baalbek and the Beqaa

The Orontes springs forth from the Beqaa Valley (or the Massyas plain, as Strabo calls it), between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountain ranges. This valley became part of the territory of Berytus when the city became a colony.¹⁸⁷ Before that, the area had been part of the Iturean principality, ruled for ten years by Zenodorus (after his predecessor, Lysanias, had been

¹⁸³ Peter J. Parr, *Excavations at Tell Nebi Mend, Syria. Vol. 1: Excavations at Tell Nebi Mend, Syria : Volume 1, Levant Supplementary Series ; Vol. 16 270753168* (Oxford and Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015); Sauvaget, *Alep*, 43; Note that in his sketch of the urban outlines, Kevin Butcher appears to have made an error in the scale of the drawing, drawing it at about the same size as Resafa. In fact, its north to south dimensions are over twice that of Resafa. See Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 104.

¹⁸⁴ Jos., *Ant.*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library 242, 1930, I.6.2; John Lund, ‘Ḥamā in the early Hellenistic period. A review of the archaeological evidence’, *Topoi. Orient-Occident* 4, no. 1 (2003): 253–68.

¹⁸⁵ Lund, ‘Ḥamā in the early Hellenistic period. A review of the archaeological evidence’, 262–63; Gunhild Ploug and Fondation Carlsberg, *Hama : Fouilles et Recherches, 1931-1938. III, 1: The Graeco-Roman Town*, Nationalmuseets Skrifter. Større Beretninger ; 9 044930704 (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 1985); Grainger, *The Cities of Seleukid Syria*, 106.

¹⁸⁶ Graham Philip and Jennie Bradbury, ‘Settlement in the Upper Orontes Valley from the Neolithic to the Islamic Period: An Instance of Punctuated Equilibrium’, *Syria. Archéologie, Art et Histoire*, no. IV (1 December 2016): 377–95, <https://doi.org/10.4000/syria.4966>.

¹⁸⁷ Freyberger and Ragette, ‘Stadt des Jupiter Helipolitanus’, 45–67.

killed at Cleopatra's behest); this kingdom also included the Trachonitis. His banditry in the region led to a Roman military response. Upon Zenodorus' death, Josephus writes, his territory was granted to Herod.¹⁸⁸ Whether (parts of) the Beqaa already became Roman territory at that point, or only five years later, when the Berytian colony was created, is unclear: in either case there is much to say for Butcher's idea that this was done with the aim of policing this apparently restless area. As he points out, some twenty years later, as also shown in the famous census inscription from Apamea, military actions were still being undertaken against Itureans in the Lebanon mountains.¹⁸⁹

The Iturean tetrarchy was ruled from a place also called Chalcis, 'the acropolis of Massyas' according to Strabo – usually defined as Chalcis sub Libano.¹⁹⁰ It is not quite certainly identified, a potential candidate being Anjar on the southern side of the Beqaa. This has been associated with Gerra, a large late-antique fort and early Islamic city.¹⁹¹ Lacking archaeological finds, Roman coinage and later mentions in historical sources, Chalcis is considered to have lost relevance in the Roman period. It is possible that the territory of the former tetrarchy became an imperial estate, the *saltus Goinaiticus* mentioned in the bishopric lists.¹⁹²

In any case, two centuries after Roman annexation, the main city in the area was without a doubt Heliopolis. Even today, the standing remains of the temples of this city do not fail to impress, with an enormous main temple dedicated to Jupiter Heliopolitanus. Construction on the complex seems to have begun around the creation of the colony of Berytus, but work on the complex may well have continued for two centuries. Perhaps somewhat earlier, what is now called the temple of the Muses was built – which could, however, also have been dedicated to the Tyche of the city or a local water deity.¹⁹³ An interesting question remains open: whether the building program

¹⁸⁸ Jos., *Ant.*, XV.10; Simone Paturel, 'Landscapes of Conversion: Baalbek-Heliopolis from 100 Bc to 400 Ad' (Ph.D., University of Newcastle Upon Tyne (United Kingdom), 2014), 86, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1780289373/>; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 34–35.

¹⁸⁹ Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 35; Julien Aliquot, *La vie religieuse au Liban sous l'Empire romain*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique ; t. 189. 852438184 (Beyrouth: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2009), <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/1411>; To make matters more interesting, (a part of?) the kingdom of Chalkis was granted around 43 C.E. to Herod V (of Chalkis), the brother of the Herodian Agrippa I, and subsequently to Agrippa II, who traded it back to Rome in 53 C.E. for parts of the Abilene. Only after his passing around 93 did the whole of the region definitely fall under Roman control Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 272–73.

¹⁹⁰ Strab., 16.2.10–11; 18.

¹⁹¹ Ernest Will, 'Un Vieux Problème de La Topographie de La Beqā' Antique: Chalcis Du Liban', *Zeitschrift Des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* (1953-) 99 (1983): 141–46; René Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique (Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 1927), 399–400, <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3692>; Aliquot, *La Vie religieuse au Liban*, 39–69 note 104; Jean-Paul Rey-Coquais, 'Les Frontières d'Héliopolis ; Quelques Remarques', in *La Géographie Administrative et Politique d'Alexandre à Mahomet. Actes Du Colloque de Strasbourg 14-16 Juin 1979* (Brill, 1981), 169–75.

¹⁹² Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 283; Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 515.

¹⁹³ Paturel, 'Landscapes of Conversion', 116, 120–21.

was initiated and/or funded by Iturean, Emesene or even Herodian potentates, as suggested by for instance Freyberger and Ragette.¹⁹⁴ But what is clear is that in design the early temples are heavily influenced by styles common in Italy and Gaul, rather than in the East.¹⁹⁵ With all later expansions and additions of new temples, the temple grounds would come to cover 6 hectares in a city of about 75 hectares – a ratio perhaps only matched in the Roman Near East by Hatra (admittedly only under Roman rule for about 4 years).¹⁹⁶

As was already stressed by other authors such as Aliquot, the Roman scale and style of Heliopolis, and the number of temples built in that period both in the surrounding countryside and the mountains, form a break with the pre-Roman past.¹⁹⁷ This break is matched by other developments particular to this region in the Roman period. In the first place, Heliopolis is one of the few 'new' Roman cities: as a developing religious centre it had still been part of the (rather large) territory of Berytus, but was granted independent urban status under the Severans – likely as a punishment for Berytus when the city sided against Septimius Severus with Pescennius Niger.¹⁹⁸ Before this elevation in status, it was one of the few clear examples of a functional city, that was urban in every aspect but name. By that time, it already had a size and monumental repertoire to match those of its mother city.

Its path to urbanity can be explained easily: considering both the size of the territory of Berytus, and the very physical barrier of the Lebanon mountain between the Beqaa Valley and the ruling city, the development of a new centre in the valley was to be expected. After the area was finally pacified, the region could flourish. Besides its central location in the valley, the new sanctuary at Baalbek gave it an edge over other possible settlements: it enhanced its centrality locally, as people would likely visit it for religious purposes. Considering the magnitude of the sanctuary, it probably attracted religious tourism and thus also enhanced its economic potential.

Secondly, Berytus' (former) territory stands out for the high number of Latin inscriptions. Among them, a considerable number of inscriptions come from veterans settled in the central Beqaa Valley – they were already being settled here in the years leading up to the actual foundation of the colony of Berytus, and may have been veterans from Actium.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Paturel, 201–6; Freyberger and Ragette, 'Stadt des Jupiter Helipolitanus', 58.

¹⁹⁵ Paturel, 'Landscapes of Conversion', 122.

¹⁹⁶ Freyberger and Ragette, 'Stadt des Jupiter Helipolitanus'.

¹⁹⁷ Julien Aliquot, 'Sanctuaries And Villages On Mt Hermon During The Roman Period', in *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East*, by Ted Kaizer (Brill, 2008), 95–96, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004167353.i-396.21>.

¹⁹⁸ Millar, 'The Roman Coloniae of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations', 31–32; Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 646 note 46: the exact date is still somewhat debated.

¹⁹⁹ Millar, 'The Roman Coloniae of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations'.



Figure 15 From Cyrrhus to the south

While elsewhere in the East, Greek remained the main language, or became so again over time, here we still find Latin being used in inscriptions two centuries later, only to be surpassed by Greek after the third century.²⁰⁰ The degree to which Latin was more than only an official language used by those in power remains an open discussion. It is clear that in this area the Aramean language, which had been gaining ground over Phoenician from the 7th century B.C.E. onwards, remained in use at least for personal names. Whether it was also a spoken language is unclear, but should be considered likely.²⁰¹ In any case, the region is quite unique in the Near East for its strong Latin presence.²⁰²

1.2.4 Cyrrhus and other Seleucid garrison towns

On a lower order of magnitude than the four cities of the Tetrapolis, a number of moderately sized Seleucid foundations were also established in the Syrian province (Figure 15). Some of these have been studied in recent decades before the Syrian Civil War broke out, such as Larissa and Cyrrhus. The latter was investigated between the 1950s and 1990s by a French mission headed by Edmond Frézouls, and from 2006 to 2011 by a Syrian-Lebanese mission. In 2012, based on the notes of Frézouls, a volume was published on the second century theatre and on the general history of Cyrrhus. The city appears to initially have had a strongly military character. While not mentioned among the military foundations of Seleukos Nikator, it clearly provided troops at a later date, as by 221/220 B.C.E., 6000 soldiers from the region of Cyrrhus mutinied against Antiochos III. It seems at first to have continued this role throughout the Roman period; in the beginning of the first century C.E., a large number of inscriptions show the presence of the Legio X Fretensis, possibly moved there in relation to the annexation of Commagene in that period. Early in the second century, the town may also have served as a staging point for Trajan's invasion of Armenia.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Paturel, 'Landscapes of Conversion', 188.

²⁰¹ Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 877–80; Julien Aliquot, 'Les Ituréens et la présence arabe au Liban du II^e siècle a.C. au IV^e siècle p.C.', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph - Beyrouth* 56 (1999): 188–89; Lidewijde de Jong, 'Narratives of Roman Syria: A Historiography of Syria as a Province of Rome', Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics, 2007.

²⁰² Millar, 'The Roman Coloniae of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations'.

²⁰³ Edmond Frézouls, 'Cyrrhus et La Cyrrestique Jusqu'à La Fin Du Haut-Empire', *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt* II, no. 8 (1977): 164–97; Jeanine Abdul-Massih, *Le théâtre de Cyrrhus: d'après les archives d'Edmond Frézouls* (Beyrouth: Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2012); Jeanine Abdul-Massih, Christophe Benech, and Mathilde Gelin, 'First results on the city planning of Cyrrhus (Syria)', *ArcheoSciences. Revue d'archéométrie* n° 33 (supp), no. 1 (1 March 2009): 201–3; Shaker Al Shbib, 'Les Fortifications de La Ville de Cyrrhus', in *Territoires, Architecture et Matériel Au Levant: Doctoriales d'archéologie Syrienne. Paris-Nanterre, 8-9 Décembre 2011*, ed. A. Le Bihan et al. (Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2012); Todt and Vest, *Syria (Syria Prote, Syria Deuteria, Syria Euphratēsia)*, 1412–21; Nigel D. Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria* (Ann Arbor (Mich.): University of Michigan Pr., 2000), 261–62.

In line with what Cumont had suggested in 1917, Frézouls assumed that with Septimius Severus, the shifting border with Persia and the new road to the east by Hierapolis, the military function of the city declined, and with it, the fortunes of the city as a whole.²⁰⁴ If that is the case, at least the family living in a third century house uncovered in 2008 still did quite well for themselves, judging by the quality of the mosaics in their domicile.²⁰⁵ Like Zeugma, it was also captured by Shapur in 253 C.E., but unlike Zeugma, it clearly recovered: several inhabitants of the city are known from the following centuries, amongst them two curials known from Libanius' letters – in which the city is described as once great, but now small – and several bishops and religious figures are linked to the city, among them the well-known Theodoret of Cyrrhus.²⁰⁶ By the sixth century, the city was definitely surrounded by a city wall, encompassing around 65 hectares, with the walls partly built over older, Hellenistic city walls. But for the many centuries in between, it is unclear if any defensive structures were maintained.²⁰⁷

Its location, like so many cities in the Levant, also shows military considerations: the city is positioned around a defensible, natural hill overlooking the Afrin valley, and flanked by a deep gorge through which runs a tributary of the Afrin River. A little to the south lie two Roman bridges, one over the Sabun Suyu and one over the Afrin itself.²⁰⁸ The remains of the hilltop citadel are Byzantine, probably from the sixth century, but remained in use until the twelfth century.²⁰⁹ As a whole, rather little can be said about the urban development of the city. But it seems to stand in contrast to the urban metropoleis in the region: a somewhat remote bridge town, a resilient community despite its dwindling strategic importance, adorned with a sizeable theatre and a colonnaded street, but its old walls unmaintained.

On the road towards Apamea in the south, roughly following the border of the Syrian steppe, the cities of Beroia (modern Aleppo) and Chalcis ad Belum also offer only limited information, but show some similarities to Cyrrhus. Both cities are Seleucid garrison towns based around old tell sites dating at least to the Middle Bronze Age, and for a short while in the first century B.C.E. Beroia was an independent principality.²¹⁰ In the case of Beroia, the tell is the location of a

²⁰⁴ Franz Valéry Marie Cumont, *Études Syriennes* (Paris : Picard, 1917), 225, <http://archive.org/details/tudessyriennes00cumouoft>.

²⁰⁵ Jeanine Abdul-Massih, 'La fortification polygonale et les mosaïques d'une maison romaine à Cyrrhus (Nebi Houri) - Notes préliminaires', *Syria. Archéologie, art et histoire*, no. 86 (1 November 2009): 289–306.

²⁰⁶ Todt and Vest, *Syria (Syria Prote, Syria Deuteria, Syria Euphratësia)*, 1414.

²⁰⁷ Al Shbib, 'Les Fortifications de La Ville de Cyrrhus'.

²⁰⁸ Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, 236–37.

²⁰⁹ Al Shbib, 'Les Fortifications de La Ville de Cyrrhus'; Abdul-Massih, 'La fortification polygonale et les mosaïques d'une maison romaine à Cyrrhus (Nebi Houri) - Notes préliminaires'.

²¹⁰ Giulia Annalinda Neglia, 'An Interpretation of the Urban Fabric: The Structure of Pre-Islamic Aleppo', *Urban Morphology* 11, no. 1 (2007): 43; Marie-Odile Rousset, 'Chalcis/Qinnasrin: From Hellenistic City to the Jund Capital of North Syria', in *Proceedings of the 7th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East. 12 April - 16 April 2010, the British Museum and UCL, London*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden:

Medieval citadel (in a similar fashion to Apamea); Sauvaget suggests that the foundations predate the early Islamic period.²¹¹ At Chalcis, later Qinnasrin, the tell appears to have been fortified during the Classical period, and a citadel from the sixth and later centuries was located on the top of the mountain next to city. The city was investigated by ground survey between 2008 and 2010, and interestingly shows a shift in occupied area between the Hellenistic and Roman and late Roman periods. For the former periods, the tell and the area to the southwest show most signs of habitation, but by the Byzantine period, an area of 75 hectares to the north of the tell was surrounded by city walls.²¹² Like Cyrrhus, the few literary mentions of these towns do not suggest any urban grandeur, with at least Beroia (together with Bambyke and Herakleia) described by Strabo as a small town (polichnion). Pliny calls the Chalcidene the most fertile area of Syria, but despite this, as Rousset mentions, the city is almost entirely absent in historical sources for the Hellenistic and Roman periods.²¹³

Further south, along the Orontes just between Apamea and the former Emesene cities, lies Larissa (also known by its older names Sizara and Shayzar). What is known of this town neatly fits the image of the three towns above. Once again this was an early Seleucid foundation (or, according to Grainger, it was founded by Alexander himself) with this time a colony of Thessalians.²¹⁴ The city was already mentioned in Egyptian sources going back to the 15th century B.C.E. – and as Matthias Grawehr suggests, like most Seleucid foundations, the fact that the old name survived next to the new Greek name may indicate that the Greek ‘foundation’ involved only the installation of a group of settlers into an already existing settlement.²¹⁵

The settlement hill, measuring a considerable 24 hectares, was surrounded by a Roman period lower city, making a city of about 45 hectares total in size.²¹⁶ Located at a crossing over the Orontes, and at the southern entrance to the Ghab Valley, its strategic value is also comparable to that of Cyrrhus. Unsurprisingly, the higher natural plateau on the eastern side of the tell was also the site of a large citadel in the Medieval period.²¹⁷ The tell was fortified in the twelfth

Harrasowitz Verlag, 2012); Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa*, 143–45, 153–54.

²¹¹ Sauvaget, *Alep*.

²¹² Rousset, ‘Chalcis/Qinnasrin: From Hellenistic City to the Jund Capital of North Syria’, 552, 556.

²¹³ Strab., 16.2.7; Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa*, 154; Plin., *HN*, 5.19.81.

²¹⁴ Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa*, 118; Grainger, *The Cities of Seleukid Syria*, 39–40.

²¹⁵ Matthias Grawehr, ‘Putting Larissa on the Map’, in *New Prospecting in the Orontes Region : first results of archaeological fieldwork*, ed. Karin Bartl and Michel al-Maqdissi, *Orient-Archäologie* 30 (Rahden, Westf: VML Vlg Marie Leidorf, 2014), 132.

²¹⁶ Matthias Grawehr, Jamal Ramadan, and Hijazi Majd, ‘Syrisch-Deutsche Arbeiten in Shayzar/Larissa: Erster Vorbericht’, *Zeitschrift Für Orient-Archäologie* 2 (2009).

²¹⁷ Cristina Tonghini, *Shayzar I : The Fortification of the Citadel*, 1st ed. (Leiden: BRILL, 2011), 411–13, while pottery finds suggest human activity during the Roman period, nothing further can be stated with any degree of certainty about the type of occupation on the tell in the classical period.

century C.E. and the lower town appears to have been walled as well; at least, the local antiquities service seems to have indicated that part of the fortifications has been found to the south of the tell. While the outer wall is not yet dated, its hypothetical position matches the ceramic surveys in the area, and corresponds to the Hellenistic and Roman finds.²¹⁸ A semi-circular depression in the north western part of the town is potentially the site of a theatre, but there is no further proof for this yet. In several spots there are indications of local production of glass and pottery.²¹⁹

For none of these cities do we have a conclusive overview of what they looked like or how they functioned, but together they form an image of moderately-sized towns located in positions that were strategically relevant throughout history. For the mid-Roman period, their military importance seems limited; this may explain why in none of the cases it can be said with certainty if the cities were fortified. Only Cyrrhus retained a military function, but possibly only in relation to specific campaigns. On an urbanistic level, they seem to mostly adhere to a Hippodamian plan, but lack the spectacular monumental complexes found in the Tetrapolis or even some of the coastal cities.

In comparison, if we move just forty kilometres further south (inland, not along the Orontes), the next town is Raphanea. This town is not a Seleucid foundation, nor does it have any further history before the Roman period. In fact, this is one of the few Roman military bases in the east of which it can be stated that it was not connected to an existing city at its foundation – Markus Gschwind mentions that at the time of the installation of the fort, nearby Emesa was still an independent (or client-) kingdom, explaining the logic of positioning a military base at what would in later years seem to be just a secondary route.²²⁰

While research at the site has been limited to several seasons of geophysical surveys, it appears that the urban morphology of the later town developed as one would expect from examples of cities from the north-west of the Roman Empire developing from military bases. There is a clear distinction between the orientation of streets and buildings of the original base and the adjoining *canabae*, with the civilian settlement fanning out from the base. There are (so far) no indications of a Hippodamian plan, colonnaded streets and the like. While the camp itself clearly

²¹⁸ Grawehr, Ramadan, and Majd, 'Syrisch-Deutsche Arbeiten in Shayzar/Larissa: Erster Vorbericht', 222–24.

²¹⁹ Grawehr, Ramadan, and Majd, 225.

²²⁰ Markus Gschwind, 'Raphaneae, Syrien: Die Arbeiten der Jahre 2013 und 2013', *e-Forschungsberichte des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, no. 2 (2014): 106–10; Markus Gschwind and Haytham Hasan, 'The Legionary Fortress and Roman City Raphaneae: Topographical, Archaeological and Geophysical Survey Work conducted in 2005-2007', in *New Prospecting in the Orontes Region : first results of archaeological fieldwork*, ed. Karin Bartl and Michel al-Maqdissi, *Orient-Archäologie* 30 (Rahden, Westf: VML Vlg Marie Leidorf, 2014), 119–30.

had been walled (although the material of the wall was likely reused for building construction in Late Antiquity), the researchers do not suggest a wall existed around the civilian settlement. Perhaps what Raphanea has most in common with the other towns is that the nearby mountaintop became the site of a later Crusader fort.²²¹ It appears that settlement had just started minting coins (under Caracalla or Elegabalus), suggesting it was also recognized as a self-governing city at that time.

1.2.5 Zeugma, the Commagene and the Euphrates cities

To the north of the Antiochene, between the Euphrates and the Taurus mountains, we find the territory of what in the first century C.E. was still the client kingdom of Commagene. This area, treated in more detail in the recent book on Asia Minor by Rinse Willet, should be briefly discussed here.²²² The early history of the kingdom is quite obscure, but as a regional name Kummuhu seems to go back to the Neo-Assyrian period, and it was an Assyrian vassal from at least the 9th century B.C.E.²²³ In the Hellenistic period, it seems to have come under the dominion of the Seleucids at the latest under Antiochos III, although it may have retained some degree of autonomy. By 163-162 B.C.E. the first ruler of Commagene, Ptolemaios, declared independence. His successors appeared quite capable at maintaining balanced relations with its changing powerful neighbours, from the Seleucids to Armenia and later the Romans. After Pompey gained the upper hand against Pontus and Armenia, Commagene declared allegiance to Pompey, and became a client kingdom, in return for which it acquired the city of Zeugma.²²⁴

Only in a few instances did the kingdom fail to judge the political situation correctly, resulting for example in a Roman invasion in 37 B.C.E., after Commagene apparently aided the Parthians during the invasion of 40-37 B.C.E.²²⁵ The Roman invasion seems to have failed after the unsuccessful siege of Samosata. Another misstep was siding with Mark Antony at Actium – although the kingdom seems to have established a reasonable relationship with Augustus. He did intervene in Commagene politics shortly after, when he had the brother of king Mithridates II tried and executed. According to Cassius Dio, the brother had been quarrelling with the king, and had murdered an ambassador Mithridates II had sent to Rome.²²⁶

²²¹ Gschwind, 'Raphaneae, Syrien'.

²²² Rinse Willet, *The Geography of Urbanism in Roman Asia Minor* (Equinox publishing; Sheffield and Bristol, 2020), <https://lirias.kuleuven.be/2952190>.

²²³ Hartmut Kühne, 'Kommagene', in *Der Neue Pauly* (Brill, 1 October 2006), https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/der-neue-pauly/*-e619060?lang=en.

²²⁴ Maurice Sartre, 'Les Nomades Dans l'Empire Romain', *L'Itinérance de l'Antiquité à l'époque Moderne*, 2009, 424–28; William Aylward, 'The Rescue Excavations at Zeugma in 2000', in *Excavations at Zeugma*, ed. William Aylward, vol. 1 (Los Altos, California, 2013), 11.

²²⁵ Margherita Facella, *La dinastia degli Orontidi nella Commagene ellenistico-romana*, Studi ellenistici ; 17 (Pisa: Giardini, 2006), 244.

²²⁶ Facella, 299–300.

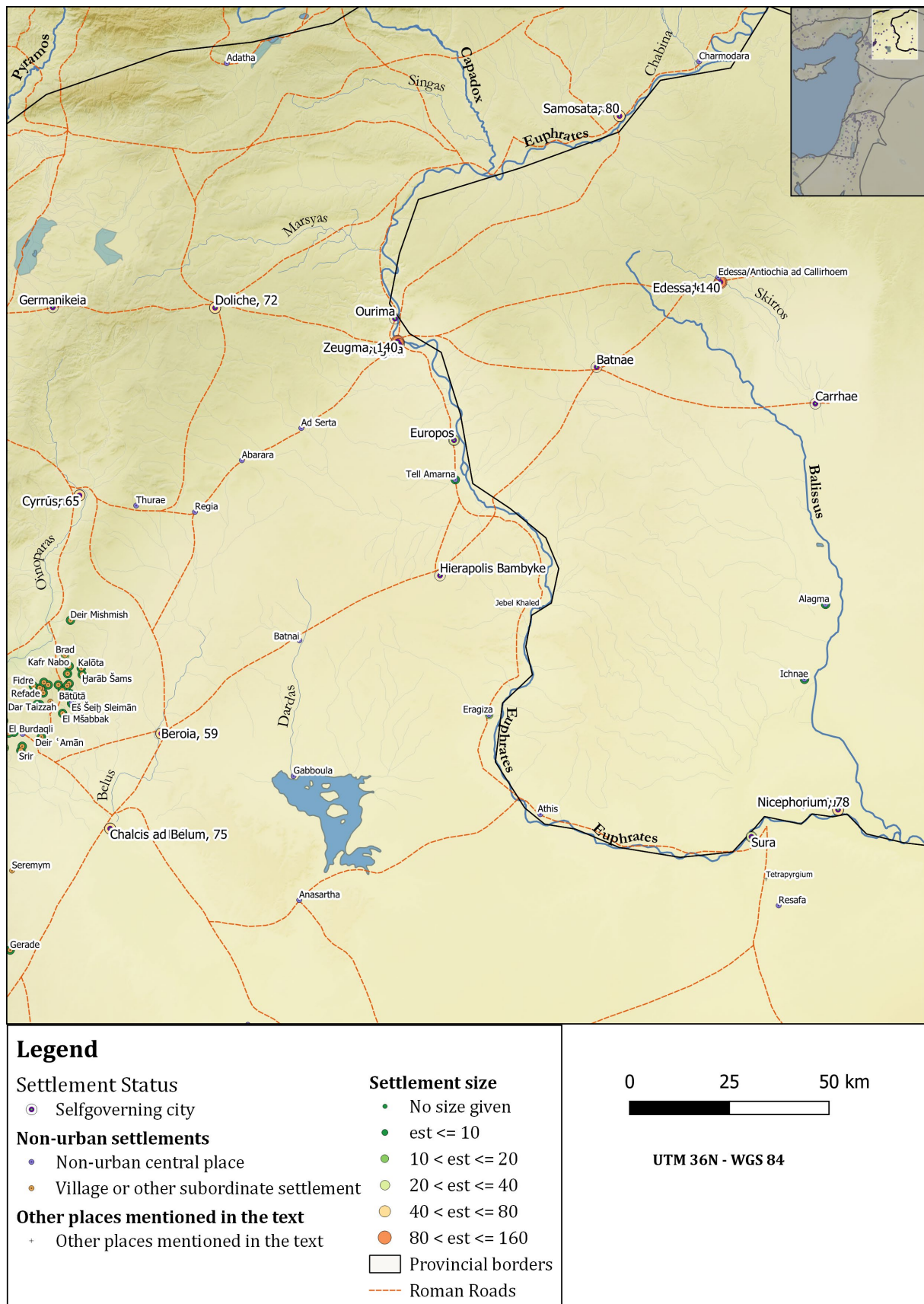


Figure 16 Zeugma and the Euphrates cities

As Sartre posits, Commagene appears to have been powerful enough and in control of a strategic (buffer) position towards Parthia and Armenia, so that Rome maintained it as a client rather than a conquest. The royal house certainly created several very tangible expressions of its power, a prime example being the enormous sanctuary on Nemrud Dağ. Here, large statues and reliefs of gods and rulers show an attempt to trace the lineage of the Commagene royal house back to both Alexander and Darius via the Orontids of Armenia – perhaps following the example of Mithridates of Pontus. At the same time, similar reliefs with ruler portraits were set up throughout various cities of the kingdom, including Zeugma.²²⁷ Even so, as most other clients, it was eventually annexed to the province of Syria. Initially, this situation lasted only two decades from 17 C.E. until Caligula restored the kingdom. Under the pretext that the kingdom was once again plotting with the Parthians, it was annexed again – and for good – in 72 C.E..²²⁸

An interesting aspect of the Commagene kingdom is the foundation of several cities. As with any urban foundation, these may not all been foundations *ex nihilo*, but simply new names for existing settlements. Arsameia and the capital Samosata were likely named after (supposed) members of the royal family, from the third century B.C.E., although Samosata clearly went back far longer, with the site showing evidence for almost continuous habitation from the Neolithic period.²²⁹ The later foundation of Caesarea Germanikeia was clearly named in honour of Caligula or Claudius.²³⁰ Whatever the details, with cities bearing dynastic names and minting local coinage, there is the suggestion that they mirrored at least some regional urban traditions.

On the basis of limited information, the cities of Commagene appear to have remained relevant throughout the Roman period, and were still the four main centres of the area as mentioned in the Late Roman lists of bishoprics.²³¹ Jones suggests that before Roman rule, the area was organised into toparchies, based on a phrase in the funerary inscription of Antiochus III, which states that the royal family should be celebrated throughout the cities and villages of the kingdom. Jones' suggestion is that this means they ruled directly over the villages of Commagene, but this seems rather far-fetched – especially considering that this was a Ptolemaic, rather than Seleucid practice.

²²⁷ Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 500, 503; Charles Brian Rose, 'A New Relief of Antiochus I of Commagene and Other Stone Sculpture from Zeugma', in *Excavations at Zeugma*, ed. William Aylward, vol. 1 (Los Altos, California, 2013), 220–31; Facella, *La dinastia degli Orontidi nella Commagene ellenistico-romana*, 294–97; M. J. Versluys, *Visual Style and Constructing Identity in the Hellenistic World: Nemrud Dağ and Commagene under Antiochos I*, 1st ed., Greek Culture in the Roman World (Cambridge: University Press, 2017).

²²⁸ Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 502–4.

²²⁹ Sartre, 427; Kühne, 'Kommagene'.

²³⁰ Jörg Wagner, 'Germanikeia', in *Der Neue Pauly* (Brill, 1 October 2006), <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/der-neue-pauly/germanikeia-e422530>.

²³¹ Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 266.

Samosata remained the main city of Commagene. It became the base of a legion (or, consecutively, three legions), and as Haensch shows, saw the occasional presence of the Syrian governor holding assizes.²³² Based on Corona imagery and a survey undertaken before the area of Samosata was flooded by a dam, its fortified area can be estimated at around 120 hectares during the Roman period, with the later Umayyad inner wall only surrounding 70 hectares.²³³ Its frontier position, its large and defensible acropolis and, apparently, an easy crossing across the river made it a strategically important site. Its walls were renewed by Justinian, and in later periods the city remained strong as well, until a Mongolian sack in 1243.²³⁴ Of the other cities, it seems that Zeugma and Melitene also received a legion, making this stretch of the Euphrates the most densely militarised part of the region.

From Samosata south along the Euphrates lies Zeugma (the name meaning 'bridge'), originally known as Seleucia on the Euphrates. It is located on the slope of a hill, Belkis Tepe, running down towards the river. Of the cities in this region Zeugma is the best researched due to the rescue excavations undertaken in the years leading up to 2000, when a hydroelectric dam was built on the river. The subsequent rise in the water level covered an estimated 30% of the ancient city, and the entirety of Apamea on the Euphrates on the other side of the river. Before the area was flooded, French, Turkish and English teams excavated several portions of the city. They uncovered considerable parts of a residential quarter; by 2004, around 20 residences were excavated, albeit most of these only partially.²³⁵ However, no good evidence was found for city walls (except for the Hellenistic walls of the acropolis and the fortifications of the military base), monumental architecture beyond a bathhouse, or the course of the streets. Aylward suggests that because of the challenging terrain it was unlikely to have had a typical Hippodamian plan. One known street turned into a staircase onto Belkis Tepe. There is still no clear idea of the extent of the city, beyond Kennedy's estimate of 140 hectares surrounded by the necropoleis of the city.²³⁶

²³² Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 479; Rudolf Haensch, *Capita provinciarum : Statthaltersitze und Provinzialverwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1997), 255–56; Jörg Fl Wagner, *Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris*, Antike Welt. Sondernummer ; 1985. 850810698 (Feldmeilen: Raggi-Verlag, 1985), 46.

²³³ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 108 fig. 14; Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies, University of Arkansas/U.S. Geological Survey, 'Corona Atlas of the Middle East', fig. CORONA Mission 1107-2138 Aft (August 1 1969).

²³⁴ Cohen, *The Hellenistic Settlements in Syria, the Red Sea Basin, and North Africa*, 187–88; Michael Blömer, 'Samosata', in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah14269>.

²³⁵ Catherine Abadie-Reynal, 'Acculturation et Habitat à Zeugma à l'époque Romaine', *Bollettino Di Archeologia on Line* 1, no. Volume Speciale G / G9 / 3 (2010): 15–24.

²³⁶ Aylward, 'The Rescue Excavations at Zeugma', 14–16.

A Seleucid foundation under Nicator III, Zeugma seems not to have been of much significance until the first century C.E.. It mainly existed as a bridgehead and sanctuary, while initially the main city was rather Apamea on the Euphrates, on the opposite side of the river. Zeugma already fell under Roman control before the final annexation of Commagene, either from the earlier annexation in 17-18 C.E. Alternatively, as Millar and Wagner state, it may already have been taken from the Commagene kingdom by Augustus as a punishment for having sided with Mark Antony, since the coins of the city count their dating from 31 B.C.E. Sartre suggests that it fell under Roman control already ten years after the original grant to Commagene, as the senate revoked Pompey's decision.²³⁷ The idea of a twin-town on two sides of the river should be discarded: the rise of Zeugma seems to be mirrored in the decline of Apamea on the Euphrates. It consisted of a 45 hectare fortified flat-land city overlooking the river. Geophysics and sondages reveal a very regular street grid, which seems to have been organised as such from its foundation; the walled area may possibly never have been fully built-up. At the same time, Zeugma seems not to have been anything more than a large village.²³⁸ While the exact cause of the decline of Apamea is unclear – perhaps issues with the river, troubles with Parthians or Commagene, or other events of the period – it seems that it was abandoned at the end of the second or beginning of the first century B.C.E., about two centuries after its foundation. From that point on, or perhaps some decades earlier already, it seems that Zeugma started to grow considerably.²³⁹

By 66 C.E. at the latest the Legio IIII Scythica had arrived in Zeugma, at which time new Roman houses were being constructed in the city as well. It seems a reasonable interpretation that the presence of the legion was linked to the annexation of the Commagene kingdom six years later.²⁴⁰ It is clear that the legion remained stationed at the city, and played an important role controlling the Euphrates border. The exact relation between city and the actual military installation seems to be somewhat complex. Swiss investigations between 2001 and 2006 were not able to discover a permanent fort that could have been used by the legion. Two overlying forts of 11 hectares might be the temporary camps used by Tiberius and/or Claudius, but these

²³⁷ Wagner, *Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris*, 30 note 60; Aylward, 'The Rescue Excavations at Zeugma'; Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 471; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 29–30.

²³⁸ Catherine Abadie-Reynal, 'Séleucie-Zeugma et Apamée sur l'Euphrate : étude d'un cas de villes jumelles dans l'Antiquité', *Histoire urbaine*, no. 3 (2001): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.3917/rhu.003.0007>.

²³⁹ Aylward, 'The Rescue Excavations at Zeugma', 22–23; Abadie-Reynal, 'Séleucie-Zeugma et Apamée sur l'Euphrate', 20; Catherine Abadie-Reynal, 'Les Fouilles de Sauvetage de Zeugma: Un Bilan Des Résultats', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 28 (January 2015): 824–25, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759415003207>.

²⁴⁰ Aylward, 'The Rescue Excavations at Zeugma', 11.

were not permanent installations.²⁴¹ On the other hand, a fortified camp on the At Meydanı plateau, on the southern side of the city, served a military purpose for a longer period: it contained numerous items of military equipment from the first to third centuries, workshops, a regular street grid, a 1 hectare fortified complex, thus likely a small fort. Inscriptions and tile stamps highlight the presence of the fourth legion, in addition to the presence of detachments of a number of other legions, mostly from the Danube frontier.²⁴²

As Hugh Elton points out, one would expect a base of around 18 to 20 hectares for the headquarters of a legion. While he is correct in stating that the small 1-hectare fort did not suffice to house the legion, the plateau as a whole could have done so, and Hartmann and Speidel clearly state that all studied parts of the At Meydanı plateau show indications of Roman military presence.²⁴³ However, they do suggest that the area, split over several terraces, was impractical as a permanent base. Furthermore, all units besides the fourth legion are known to have been in the region in relation to specific military campaigns. The Swiss therefore suggest that this area served as a staging post for forces assigned to campaigns into Persia, and was therefore of especial significance as up to 195 C.E. this was directly on the frontier of the empire. The legion's own headquarters should then be sought somewhere else within the territory of Zeugma.²⁴⁴

Judging by the houses, the city seems to have retained its vitality after the Roman Empire had expanded towards the east. And for the six decades following the shift of the border, the inhabitants of Zeugma, or at least those living on the waterfront, continued to prosper. British researchers suggest that perhaps there was somewhat of a 'decline' or change in function of structures just before the Sassanian sack, due to Roman troops quartered in the civilian parts of the town. This is, however, doubted by the French archaeologists. Similarly, it is disputed whether the city was or was not abandoned before the sack.²⁴⁵ As a side note, the presence of military finds throughout the city itself likely highlights the quartering of troops in the city during its final moments before the sack in 253 by Shapur I, similar to what is seen in Dura Europos. However, Zeugma may have been abandoned entirely at this time, as there are no

²⁴¹ M. Hartmann and M. A. Speidel, 'Military Installations at Zeugma: An Overview of the Swiss Archaeological Investigations, 2001–2003', in *Excavations at Zeugma*, ed. William Aylward, vol. 3 (Los Altos, California, 2013), 381–92.

²⁴² Hartmann and Speidel; M. G. Drahor et al., 'Magnetic and Electrical Resistivity Tomography Investigations in a Roman Legionary Camp Site (Legio IV Scythica) in Zeugma, Southeastern Anatolia, Turkey', *Archaeological Prospection* 15, no. 3 (2008): 159–86, <https://doi.org/10.1002/arp.332> There seems to be a particular tie with Brigetio, the garrison of Legio I adiutrix.

²⁴³ Hugh Elton, 'Zeugma's Military History in Light of the Rescue Excavations', in *Excavations at Zeugma*, ed. William Aylward, vol. 3 (Los Altos, California, 2013), 376.

²⁴⁴ Hartmann and Speidel, 'Zeugma's Military History', 390.

²⁴⁵ Abadie-Reynal, 'Les Fouilles de Sauvetage de Zeugma', 830.

indications of combat having taken place in the city itself.²⁴⁶ What is certain, is that the city never recovered after Shapur's campaign. Only in the fourth century was the site inhabited again, and the finds suggest a mostly rural character.²⁴⁷

Abadie-Reynal posits that the ceramics found at Zeugma make it fit quite well into a Syrian context: the Packard Humanities Institute team suggested that with the near absence of Western imports, the city was rather isolated from the Mediterranean, and mostly focussed on Mesopotamia. Abadie-Reynal points out that imports from the West were rather limited in Roman Syria in general. In the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., vast amounts of Eastern sigillata A were used in Zeugma, as elsewhere throughout the Levant. Sometime before Zeugma's fall, African wares started to be imported in the Syrian province, and these are also found in the city. Parthian wares are only present in very limited numbers, up to 1%, in contrast to Dura Europos and Jebel Khalid which seem to have been more oriented towards the East. Similarly, before the annexation of Mesopotamia, coin finds in the city were dominated by those from Antioch; only under Severus Alexander did issues from Edessa in Mesopotamia become prominent.²⁴⁸

The rest of the Euphrates border is rather poorly known before the later Roman fortifications. The city of Europos, on the site of ancient Carchemish – not to be confused with Dura Europos – offers very few insights, despite it being a moderately sized city of around 40 hectares. The research focus of past excavations lay with earlier phases of the city, so that little has been published on the Classical town. A publication on the inner town indicates that after its destruction in the seventh century B.C.E. it did see some Achaemenid activity, before a major reconstruction phase in the Hellenistic period.²⁴⁹ More recently, Paul Newson indicates the presence of colonnaded streets, an agora and a second- or third-century C.E. temple for the Roman period. Clustering of Roman roof tiles also suggests some low-density suburban development on the edges of the city core, but habitation probably only peaked in the later Roman period.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ Elton, 'Zeugma's Military History', 377; Although this reading of the material is somewhat doubted by Abadie-Reynal: Abadie-Reynal, 'Les Fouilles de Sauvetage de Zeugma', 828–30.

²⁴⁷ Abadie-Reynal, 'Les Fouilles de Sauvetage de Zeugma', 831.

²⁴⁸ Abadie-Reynal, 839–40.

²⁴⁹ Nicolò Marchetti, 'Karkemish on the Euphrates: Excavating a City's History', *Near Eastern Archaeology* 75, no. 3 (1 September 2012): 132–47; Tony J. Wilkinson et al., *Carchemish in Context: The Land of Carchemish Project, 2006-2010*, Themes from the Ancient Near East BANEA Publication Series ; Vol. 4 329892673 (Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2016), 188–89; Federico Zaina, *Excavations at Karkemish I. The Stratigraphic Sequence of Area G in the Inner Town OrientLab, Series Maior, III*, OrientLab Series Maior 3 (Bologna: Ante Quem, 2018).

²⁵⁰ Paul Newson, 'The Carchemish Region between the Hellenistic and Early Islamic Periods', in *Carchemish in Context: The Land of Carchemish Project, 2006-2010*, ed. Tony J. Wilkinson et al., Themes from the Ancient Near East BANEA Publication Series ; Vol. 4 329892673 (Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2016), 184–202.

There was an auxiliary cavalry unit stationed in Europos between the late first and early second century. Newson suggests that the period saw a 'militarisation of the river zone' at this time, with units also present at Amarna, a small 6-hectare settlement 9.6 km to the south²⁵¹, and a tombstone of a soldier found 20 km further along the river. The site of Europos clearly remained of strategic importance, and was the site of a large battle in the second century C.E.²⁵²

Another place in the vicinity, Bersiba, is only known for its rich pre-Classical past – reaching its greatest extent, 50 hectares, in the Neo-Assyrian period. For the Classical period, besides its name mentioned by Ptolemy and the presence of a small Hellenistic sanctuary, nothing is known.²⁵³

A small settlement of about 12 hectares, probably Eragiza, was researched by a Swiss team in the 1970s. There are indications of an auxiliary garrison (inscriptions mentioning a *cohors secunda pia fidelis*, but without giving an origin) present here in the first to second century. A street, dated from coin finds to the first to fourth centuries, led through a large gate on the fortified acropolis. The fortifications are suggested to have been built in the early Byzantine period.²⁵⁴

Along the Euphrates, some minor settlements that became important fortified towns from the later third and fourth centuries onwards are for instance Circesium towards the south-east (the capture of which by Shapur in 253 was already mentioned, long before the fortifications constructed by Diocletian), Zenobia, Sura and Dibsi Faraj.²⁵⁵ Of these, Sura was already mentioned by Pliny, and there was a road connecting it to Palmyra in 75CE.²⁵⁶ It was destroyed first by Shapur I in 253 C.E., and three centuries later by Chosroes I in 540 C.E..²⁵⁷ Kennedy suggests it was already garrisoned by the Flavian period, but certainly under the Severans with troops of the Legio XVI Flavia Firma.²⁵⁸ In total, the site measures about 75 hectares in size,

²⁵¹ Tony J. Wilkinson et al., 'Archaeology in the Land of Carchemish: Landscape Surveys in the Area of Jerablus Tahtani, 2006', *Levant* 39, no. 1 (June 2007): 225, 235, <https://doi.org/10.1179/lev.2007.39.1.213>.

²⁵² Newson, 'The Carchemish Region between the Hellenistic and Early Islamic Periods'.

²⁵³ Peter M. M. G. Akkermans and Glenn M. Schwartz, *The Archaeology of Syria: From Complex Hunter-Gatherers to Early Urban Societies (c.16,000-300 BC)* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 382; Trevor Bryce, 'Tell Ahmar', in *The Routledge Handbook of the Peoples and Places of Ancient Western Asia: The near East from the Early Bronze Age to the Fall of the Persian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁵⁴ Rolf A. Stucky, 'Schweizerische archäologische Ausgrabungen auf Tell el Hajj (Syrien)', *Museum Helveticum* 29, no. 3 (1972): 228–31.

²⁵⁵ Hamish Cameron, 'Constructing a Borderland: Roman Imperial Geographic Writers on Mesopotamia from the 1st to the 4th Centuries CE' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2014), 384, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1629829235/?pq-origsite=primo>.

²⁵⁶ Plin., *HN*, 5.87; Cameron, 'Constructing a Borderland', 321; Ali Othman, 'Sura (Raqqā)', in *A History of Syria in One Hundred Sites*, ed. Youssef Kanjou and Akira Tsuneki, Archaeopress Archaeology (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2016), 414–16.

²⁵⁷ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 295.

²⁵⁸ David Kennedy, *Rome's Desert Frontier: From the Air* (London: Batsford, 1990), 111, 116–17.

consisting of a north-eastern and south-western section, walled separately, and a castle in the middle. Ali Othman indicates that the north-eastern section, which measures around 20 to 25 hectares on satellite imagery, has an adobe wall and contains earlier Roman era finds. The far larger south-western part, with a dressed stone wall with numerous towers and two gates, only yields finds from a later period.²⁵⁹ It is not entirely clear if Sura should be considered a city. However, even as a relatively small settlement, it nonetheless played a central role locally, especially considering that it was located at the edge of the Roman (military) sphere of influence before expansion towards Dura Europos and Kifrin, and as Nigel Pollard indicates, again after loss of that territory.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ Othman, 'Sura (Raqqā)'.

²⁶⁰ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 295–96.

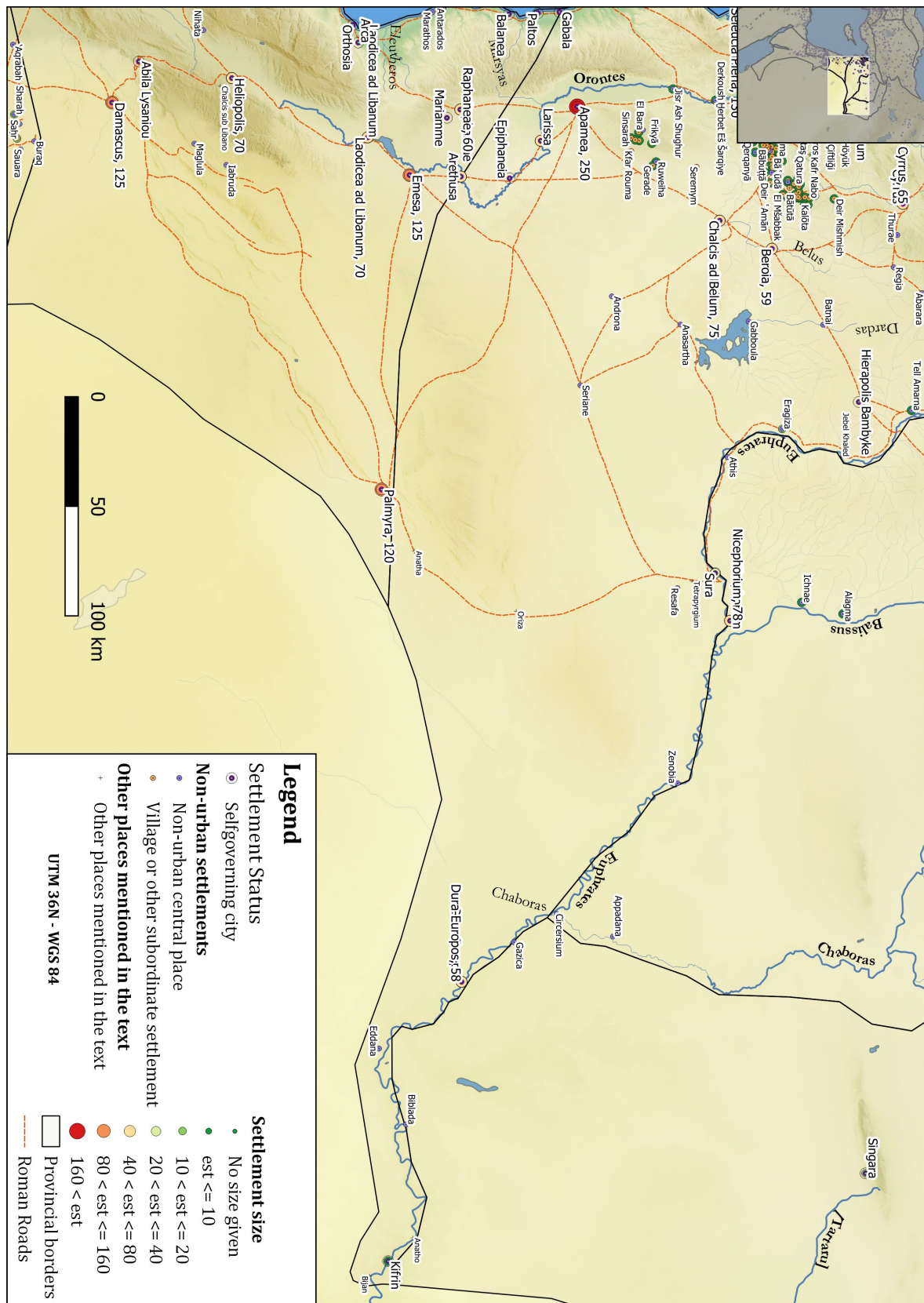


Figure 17 Damascus, Palmyra and Dura Europos

1.2.6 Palmyra

Of the cities in the Levant, Palmyra (or Tadmor) certainly counts as one of the most famous, although nowadays sadly marked by the events of the Syrian civil war. In many ways the city stands out, perhaps most notably in its location as an oasis city on the edge of the Syrian desert. The city has a long history of research: it was already made famous by travellers such as Pietro de la Valle in the seventeenth century, saw the first major publication on its inscriptions in 1870, and the first archaeological studies in 1902.²⁶¹ It speaks to the imagination as a meeting point between East and West and as a centre of the caravan trade, with authors naming the city a port of the desert or a 'Venise des sables'. Furthermore, it was the birthplace of queen Zenobia and her short-lived Palmyrene empire, adding to its fame.²⁶² On another level, it has a corpus of inscriptions which exceeds that of most other cities in the Levant, both in Greek and in its local variety of Aramaic, Palmyrene.²⁶³

While Palmyra was not strictly speaking a 'desert' city, rainfall conditions were still rather poor with an annual average of 125 mm per year, making rainfed agriculture of either barley or wheat only possible in particularly wet years, and thus extremely unreliable. That said, other forms of dryland agriculture could have been practiced, such as irrigation using the water from springs around the oasis or the catchment of winter rains or floodwater in the wadi beds. And indeed, there are many indications for alternative forms of dryland agriculture. In the mountainous area north of Palmyra, a number of small settlements were mapped by a Syrian-Norwegian project in the years before the war. In relation to these, some cisterns and cross-wadi walls point to possible run-off farming. Additionally, analysis of pollen and faecal matter enclosed in mudbrick from a tell site to the northwest of Palmyra also indicate the cultivation of barley, albeit from a Byzantine to Early Islamic context.²⁶⁴ This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.2.4.1.

²⁶¹ Michael Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze: Palmyra, Edessa, Dura-Europos, Hatra, Oriens et Occidens* 9 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005), 139; Eivind Heldaas Seland, *Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea: Palmyra in the World Trade of the First Three Centuries CE*, 1st ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, O, 2016), 1–2.

²⁶² Fergus Millar, 'Caravan Cities: The Roman Near East and Long-Distance Trade by Land', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 42, no. S71 (1 February 1998): 119–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-5370.1998.tb01697.x>; Ernest Will, *Les Palmyréniens: la Venise des sables (Ier siècle avant - IIIème après J.-C.)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992); Javier Teixidor, *Un port romain du désert: Palmyre et son commerce d'Auguste à Caracalla*, *Semitica* ; 34. 840960611 (Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1984).

²⁶³ Jean-Baptiste Yon, *Les notables de Palmyre*, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique (Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2002), <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3763>.

²⁶⁴ Joan Campmany Jiménez et al., 'Food Security in Roman Palmyra (Syria) in Light of Paleoclimatological Evidence and Its Historical Implications', *PLOS ONE* 17, no. 9 (21 September 2022): e0273241, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0273241>; Meyer, 'City and Hinterland. Villages and Estates North of Palmyra. New Perspectives', 271; Knut Krzywinski and Jonatan Krzywinski, 'Agriculture in Byzantine Palmyrena', in *Palmyrena: City, Hinterland and Caravan Trade between Orient and Occident*, ed. Jørgen Christian Meyer, Eivind Heldaas Seland, and Nils Anfinset (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2016), 171–83.

The oasis appears to have seen its first permanent settlement from the end of the third millennium B.C.E. In second and first millennium texts there are a few indications of Tadmoreans (Palmyrenes) as nomads, but no mention is made of a settlement.²⁶⁵ The first indications of the Classical settlement can be traced to the third century B.C.E. There was probably a precursor to the temple of Bel from that period, and several houses are dated to the third century B.C.E. as well.²⁶⁶ Exactly at what point the settlement should be considered to have developed into a city is unclear. Construction seems to have intensified in the first century B.C.E. (the earliest indications of the temple of Allat), and Palmyrene inscriptions start halfway through that century as well.²⁶⁷ Appian mentions that in 41 B.C.E. the city was raided by the troops of Mark Antony, but as Hekster and Kaizer show, the passage is not without problems.²⁶⁸ In year 32 C.E. the cella of the new temple of Bel was constructed on the old tell overlooking the city. The same century also saw the construction of the agora.²⁶⁹ In any case, by the last quarter of the first century C.E. there are unambiguous inscriptions mentioning the council and the people of the city.²⁷⁰ As in many other places, most monumental construction is dated to the second century, with notably the theatre, colonnaded streets, the tetrapylon, the oval plaza and more temples (including also an expansion of the temple of Allat). Inscriptions furthermore mention the existence of a 'garden of the gods'.²⁷¹

The city also had several lines of fortification. Best visible are the 'walls of Diocletian', surrounding an area of 118 hectares. In fact, it consists of multiple construction phases, but all are definitely Late Roman, with parts only built under Justinian. It is clear, in any case, that the city had been larger in earlier centuries, including as well the area of (at least) 20 hectares that made up the 'Hellenistic city' surveyed by Schmidt-Colinet's team. Despite the name, this was certainly also in use throughout the Roman period.²⁷² There are also earlier walls, dating to the first or perhaps second centuries C.E. The walls protected more than the city proper, including

²⁶⁵ Ball, *Rome in the East*, 74; Teixidor, *Un port romain du désert*, 8; Michael Sommer, 'Der Löwe von Tadmor. Palmyra und der unwahrscheinliche Aufstieg des Septimius Odaenathus', *Historische Zeitschrift* 287, no. 2 (2009): 281–318, <https://doi.org/10.1524/hzhz.2008.0043>.

²⁶⁶ Andreas Schmidt-Colinet and Waleed Al-As'ad, eds., *Palmyras Reichtum durch weltweiten Handel. archäologische Untersuchungen im Bereich der hellenistischen Stadt / Band 1, Architektur und ihre Ausstattung*, vol. 1 (Place of publication not identified Holzhausen der Verlag, 2013); Christine Ertel and R. Ployer, 'A Roman Residential House in the "Hellenistic" Town of Palmyra:: Archaeology, Function and Urban Aspects - Vessel Glass', 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxrq0dc.14>.

²⁶⁷ Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 320.

²⁶⁸ Olivier Hekster and Ted Kaizer, 'Mark Antony and the Raid on Palmyra : Reflections on Appian, "Bella Civilia" V, 9', *Latomus* 63, no. 1 (2004): 70–80.

²⁶⁹ Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*, 140; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 323.

²⁷⁰ Teixidor, *Un port romain du désert*, 9.

²⁷¹ Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*, 139–48.

²⁷² Sommer, 148; Schmidt-Colinet and Al-As'ad, *Palmyras Reichtum durch weltweiten Handel. archäologische Untersuchungen im Bereich der hellenistischen Stadt / Band 1, Architektur und ihre Ausstattung*, 1:75, 88.

necropoleis and agricultural land as well. An inscription that states that the wall was the point where taxation of camels took place, gives some merit to the commonly used designation 'customs wall'.²⁷³ It should be pointed out that these outer walls appear to exist out of three sections, not connected to each other, and lack towers. Gawlikowski states that the slopes to the west and northwest fulfilled the functions of the walls toward that direction, and only on the eastern side walls should still be found. The suggestion is that – if they had a defensive function – the walls mostly protected the gardens and water sources of the city against mounted troops, but would not be of any use in a siege.²⁷⁴

Besides the raid in 41 B.C.E., the first indications of Roman influence in the region come from 11 or 12 C.E., when a Roman *propraetorian* legate determined the borders of the Palmyrene territory.²⁷⁵ It is usually argued that full Roman annexation of the city took place only a few years later under Tiberius, while Germanicus was in Syria, based on an inscription that indicates that a statue group of Germanicus, Tiberius and Drusus was set up in the temple of Bel. Furthermore, the earliest parts of the tariff law (discussed below) were originally accepted by Germanicus, a further indication of considerable Roman influence at that time.²⁷⁶ Peter Edwell nonetheless prefers to interpret the city as a client state at that time. He argues that Germanicus' visit also dealt with other clients, such as Armenia and the Nabateans, which remained independent afterwards. Furthermore, this suggestion would agree with Pliny's statement that in the time of Vespasian the city had "a destiny of its own between the two empires of Rome and Parthia", which scholars often regard as anachronistic.²⁷⁷ As Edwell shows, Pliny mentions as his sources for the region two governors also known from the tariff inscription, suggesting his information was up to date.²⁷⁸ There were, furthermore, Palmyrenes serving as Roman auxiliaries from the beginning of the second century. An auxiliary unit may also have been formed in Palmyra under Trajan – but does not seem to have been stationed in the city. The first evidence of Roman military presence in Palmyra itself only dates to the second half of the second century, at the latest from 167 C.E. Edwell's idea therefore is that the city was only incorporated into the Roman provincial structure during or after the campaigns of Lucius Verus, in parallel to Dura Europos. At the very latest, Palmyra may have been incorporated when it was granted

²⁷³ Michał Gawlikowski, 'Palmyra as a Trading Centre', *Iraq* 56 (1 January 1994): 28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4200382>.

²⁷⁴ Michał Gawlikowski, 'Les Défenses de Palmyre', *Syria*, 1974, 231–42; Karol Juchniewicz, 'Late Roman Fortifications in Palmyra', *Studia Palmyreńskie*, no. XII (2013): 193–202.

²⁷⁵ Teixidor, *Un port romain du désert*, 10.

²⁷⁶ Seland, *Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea*, 12; Teixidor, *Un port romain du désert*, 10; Peter M. Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra under Roman Control* (London etc: Routledge, 2008), 39.

²⁷⁷ Plin., *HN*, 5.21.2.

²⁷⁸ Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia*, 44.

colonial status by Septimius Severus or Caracalla.²⁷⁹ Either way, whether as a client or fully incorporated into the empire, from the first century C.E. Palmyra clearly fell within the Roman sphere of influence.

While strictly speaking beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting how a century later, the city became the heart of an uprising against Rome. In the middle of the third century, 'Udaynath, better known as Odaenathus, had become a powerful figure in Palmyra; perhaps as the governor of Syria Phoenike, although this is entirely unclear.²⁸⁰ After the defeat of emperor Valerian in 260 against the Sassanids, 'Udaynath managed to lead a successful campaign, first suppressing several usurpers and then retaking lost territories from the Persians, maybe even attacking Ctesiphon. With his actions he won the gratitude of the new emperor and was granted elevated titles, or perhaps Gallienus was too occupied in Italy and on the Danube and simply had to accept this powerful player in the east.²⁸¹ 'Udaynath and one of his sons were however murdered in 267 or 268. Upon this, his wife Zenobia took power as regent for their under-age son Wahballath. In the following five years, until her defeat and capture by Aurelian, her troops had managed to take much of Syria, Arabia and Egypt as well as parts of Asia Minor.²⁸²

Generally, in modern scholarship the actions of Zenobia are interpreted as a typical bid for imperial power. Certainly by 270 Zenobia and Wahballath had assumed the imperial title of *Augustus* (as well as the Iranian title of King of Kings), and their campaigns mirror those of Vespasian in the first century. Interpretations as a bid to create an independent Palmyrene or even Arab empire are mostly discarded.²⁸³ Sommer nonetheless adds a layer of complexity to the issue, seeing the rise of Odaenathus as the result of monarchical tendencies and the importance of charismatic individuals for the city from the second century onwards, and at the same time as the result of a power vacuum due to the weakening of the empire.²⁸⁴

What is evident is that this was a city of considerable size, monumental splendour, and over time, military strength; going beyond what one would expect of a somewhat remote town with relatively poor agricultural land. Palmyra's reputation as a city of trade suggests the explanation should be sought in commerce. Of course, as others have stated, it was still a reasonable site for a town or city, even if there had been less trade, as it had access to a considerable hinterland and

²⁷⁹ Edwell, 52–61; Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 972.

²⁸⁰ Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 178–81.

²⁸¹ Ball, *Rome in the East*, 77–79; Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 976–77.

²⁸² Ball, *Rome in the East*, 77–83.

²⁸³ Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, 980–82; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 335.

²⁸⁴ Sommer, 'Der Löwe von Tadmor. Palmyra und der unwahrscheinliche Aufstieg des Septimius Odaenathus', 316–17.

offered control over the neighbouring steppe and desert.²⁸⁵ Furthermore, Seland highlights the important point that the development of this oasis city into a commercial centre was certainly not predetermined: there were several other cities on the border between the Parthian and the Roman spheres of influence, in more favourable locations or on potentially better trade routes.²⁸⁶

1.2.7 Dura Europos

Dura Europos was a late addition to the Roman empire, only conquered in 166 C.E. during Lucius Verus' campaign, and destroyed a century later in a Sassanid siege. Andreas Luther suggests the possibility that Dura was not even annexed until the campaigns of Septimius. His argument rests on the continued use of Parthian court-titles up to 180 C.E and the lack of evidence for the settlement belonging to one of the Roman provinces before becoming part of Syria Phoenice.²⁸⁷ Despite its relatively short time as a part of the empire, and not being a particularly large city, it is like Palmyra exceptionally well-known, even though it is hardly mentioned in literary sources. As the site remained (mostly) abandoned after the sack, it was well placed for archaeological excavations in the 1920s and 30s and from the 1980s onwards, including a rich papyrological corpus.²⁸⁸

The city itself is positioned on a defensible plateau bordered by two wadis on the western bank of the Euphrates. Fertile soils in the surrounding area and the possibility of irrigation using water from the river more than make up for low rainfall. Even with such a location, unlike many other places discussed, there is no archaeological evidence for a settlement existing before the foundation by Seleukos Nikator; it may thus be a rare example of an actual *Neugründung*.²⁸⁹ Its fortifications and urban grid clearly date to Seleucid rule, but are nowadays considered to reflect a second urbanisation phase in the middle of the second century B.C.E., rather than having been created at its foundation. The walls were built with expansion in mind, as the Hellenistic city in

²⁸⁵ John Grout, 'The Role of Palmyrene Temples in Long-Distance Trade in the Roman Near East' (Ph.D., London, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016), 57; As Kaizer indicates, this also remains an hypothesis. Equally, there is the possibility of potential Palmyrene influence over Dura Europos. Whether partially or fully incorporated into the Roman Empire, this would place Dura within the Roman sphere of influence as well. Ted Kaizer, 'Empire, Community, and Culture on the Middle Euphrates. Durenes, Palmyrenes, Villagers, and Soldiers', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 60, no. 1 (2017): 68–73.

²⁸⁶ Seland, *Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea*.

²⁸⁷ Andreas Luther, 'Dura-Europos Zwischen Palmyra Und Den Parthern. Der Politische Status Der Region Am Mittleren Euphrat Im 2. Jh. n. Chr. Und Die Organisation Des Palmyrenischen Fernhandels', in *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction*, ed. Robert Rollinger et al., *Oriens et Occidens* 6 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004), 333–35.

²⁸⁸ Kaizer, 'Empire, Community, and Culture on the Middle Euphrates. Durenes, Palmyrenes, Villagers, and Soldiers', 74.

²⁸⁹ Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*, 270–72.

no way filled up the entire 58 hectares they enclosed, although it did by the time of its destruction.

A citadel was constructed in the Hellenistic period, on the higher ground next to the river, which in the Parthian period was replaced with a palatial structure: the city appears to have played a role as a local governance and commerce centre at that time.²⁹⁰ An additional building from the Hellenistic period is sometimes called a 'redoubt palace', or identified as a *strategeion*, may be nothing more than a particularly large and monumental residential building.²⁹¹ Further finds from that period show the city possessed an agora, although it would be partly filled in with construction over time, and possibly two temples.²⁹² On a monumental level, the city would never become very spectacular. Besides a small odeion, perhaps used as a bouleuterion, several new temples were constructed throughout the Parthian and Roman periods, including also a Palmyrene temple, evidence of a Palmyrene community in the city. A small synagogue and a Christian building give additional evidence of religious diversity in this town at the beginning of the third century.²⁹³

An interesting aspect is that a section in the west of the city seems to have been repurposed for military use from the early third century onwards.²⁹⁴ A number of barracks appear to have been formed by converting civilian houses, while several facilities are thought to have served military purposes – including baths and a mithraeum. One house has been suggested to have functioned as the residence of the legionary commander. Furthermore, a mudbrick wall seems to divide this part of town from the 'civilian' part of the city; while it is not entirely clear how large the area was, it measured somewhere between 8 and 12 hectares.²⁹⁵ A military presence was to be expected in the city, as it would have been one of the easternmost Roman outposts on the Euphrates, until troops were stationed under the Severans around Kifrin, further down the route towards Hit.²⁹⁶ Indeed, auxiliary troops from Palmyra appear to have served in the city immediately after the annexation. Inscriptions, graffiti and papyri found in the city further attest

²⁹⁰ Simon James, *The Roman Military Base at Dura-Europos, Syria: An Archaeological Visualization* (Oxford: University Press, Incorporated, 2019), 51.

²⁹¹ J. A. Baird, *The Inner Lives of Ancient Houses: An Archaeology of Dura-Europos* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 251–52, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199687657.001.0001>.

²⁹² Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia*, 100; Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*, 273.

²⁹³ Lucinda Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos: A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World ; Vol. 138. 095017933 (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 1999); Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia*, 102–12.

²⁹⁴ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 46; J. A. Baird, 'The Roman Military Presence in the Houses of Dura-Europos', in *The Inner Lives of Ancient Houses: An Archaeology of Dura-Europos*, 2014, 111–54, <https://academic.oup.com/book/32786/chapter/274388850>.

²⁹⁵ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 48–50, 56; See now also for an up to date overview James, *The Roman Military Base at Dura-Europos, Syria*.

²⁹⁶ Carlo Lippolis, 'Kifrin, avant-poste sur l'Euphrate', in *Studia Euphratica: le moyen Euphrate iraquien révélé par les fouilles préventives de Haditha*, ed. Christine Kepinski, Olivier Lecomte, and Aline Tenu, Travaux de la Maison René-Ginouvès 3 (Paris: De Boccard, 2006), 368.

to the presence of troops from the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* and vexillations of the *IV Scythica* and *III Cyrenaica* legions. The military quarters however, seem to date mostly from Caracalla at the earliest, up to the sack of the city. It is possible that, but unclear, if the area described above was already used for military purposes in the first decades of Roman control. If not, it is not obvious where troops might have been quartered instead.

As mentioned before, there seems to have been a permanent Palmyrene community in Dura Europos, possibly extending beyond that of Palmyrene troops, probably a community of traders. With the likelihood that Palmyrene traders did not travel by Dura Europos but took an inland route towards Hit for their trade along the Euphrates, Dura is now considered less important in Palmyra's trade network than has been thought before. Even so, it would still have been an important local market, or played a role in regional food production.²⁹⁷

Archaeological finds and the Dura papyri give some further insight into the organisation of the surrounding territory. There were several outposts further along the river.²⁹⁸

The above-mentioned outpost at Kifrin was a fortified citadel constructed under Septimius Severus in a small existing walled city that dated back at least to the Neo-Assyrian period. It has been identified as the Becchufrayn (Βηχχουφρείν) mentioned in the Dura Papyri (*P. Dura* 100, 101 and 182), and saw a garrison of 91 soldiers from the Palmyrene Cohors XX in 219 C.E. The researchers suggest it served as a local headquarters for a handful of forts constructed in the surroundings at the same period, at 'Ana, Anqa, Ertaje Bijan and Telbis. It only lasted for several decades, with the last finds dating to Gordian III.²⁹⁹ Its location is now covered by the Haditha Dam Lake.

Papyri dating to around 245 C.E. from the middle Euphrates region show evidence of the lower order settlement hierarchy. Four villagers from Beth Phouraia (unlocated, but somewhere on the Euphrates), described their village as falling under the jurisdiction of Appadana. They went to Antioch, where their case was initially not heard; they had to wait until the governor travelled next to hold an assize at Appadana itself. They asked him to have the procurator in Appadana make sure that their land, taken by violence, was restored to them until their case was heard.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos*; Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia*, 111; Eivind Heldaas Seland and Jørgen Christian Meyer, 'Palmyra and the Trade Route to the Euphrates', *ARAM Periodical* 28, no. 1–2 (1 January 2016),

https://www.academia.edu/35407568/Palmyra_and_the_trade_route_to_the_Euphrates; Kaizer, 'Empire, Community, and Culture on the Middle Euphrates. Durenes, Palmyrenes, Villagers, and Soldiers', 85.

²⁹⁸ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 57 Pollard states that Roman control may have extended as far as Mesene.

²⁹⁹ Lippolis, 'Kifrin, avant-poste sur l'Euphrate'.

³⁰⁰ Denis Feissel and Jacques Gascou, 'Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate (IIIe s. après J-C) [I. Les pétitions (T. Euphr. 1 à 5)]', *Journal des Savants* 1, no. 1 (1995): 65–119,

The village is described as an imperial village (*kome kyriake*), which indicates that Appadana was the centre of an imperial domain. Little else is known about Appadana. In P.Dura 60B the garrison commanders of Gazica, Appadana, Dura, Eddana and Biblada are instructed to offer hospitality to a Parthian envoy on his way to Septimius Severus and Caracalla. This suggests that Appadana lay in line with these settlements, around the confluence of the Khabur and the Euphrates, or at least not too far up the Khabur. Note that besides Dura, the locations of the other sites remain tentative as well.³⁰¹ The Dura papyri further show that in 219 C.E. 63 soldiers were stationed there. In P.Euphr. 3 and 4, dated to 252 and 256 C.E., Appadana is called Neapolis, suggesting that somewhere between 245 and 252 it was elevated to urban status – meaning that only a few years earlier, it seems to have acted as an assize centre without even being a city officially. Haensch however argues that it was not so much an assize centre, but that the governor, Iulius Priscus, simply intended to visit Appadana in preparation for the reconquest of Mesopotamia.³⁰² Thus, while from a military perspective Dura seems to have played a central role as the headquarters of the Cohors XX Palmyrenorum, in matters of jurisdiction it seems the city did not necessarily fill an intermediate level between sites like Appadana and Antioch itself.

1.2.8 Damascus and Hierapolis

From the other cities along the Syrian steppe, Damascus and Hierapolis appear to be of a rather different kind than for instance the Seleucid garrison towns in the north. There is quite some distance – 360 km - between them and they lie at the opposite ends of modern Syria, more or less equidistant from Palmyra. Climatically, they appear to share some similarities, and as far as can be determined, both seem to have been moderately large regional centres. On the other hand, as with many other cities of the Levant, their rich post-Roman history and continued habitation up to the present day obscure much of their older archaeological past.

In Damascus' case, remains of the old city wall and Umayyad mosque retain features of the Roman period, showing that it was likely a rather large city (110 to 115 hectares). The walls may either have been Augustan, or date to the second century C.E., depending on how one of the gates is dated.³⁰³ The city boasted an enormous sanctuary to Zeus from the first century, of which the outer enclosure would have measured about 11 hectares. This would make it one of

<https://doi.org/10.3406/jds.1995.1584>. Note that interestingly, the document suggests that in Antioch jurisdiction took place at the baths of Hadrian.

³⁰¹ Feissel and Gasco, 104; Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia*, 70; M. L. Chaumont, 'Un Document Méconnu Concernant l'envoi d'un Ambassadeur Parthe Vers Septime Sévère (P. Dura 60 B.)', *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 36, no. 4 (1987): 422–47.

³⁰² Haensch, *Capita provinciarum*, 254–55.

³⁰³ Hammam Saad and Christophe Benech, 'Nouvelles Données Sur Le Plan Antique de Damas', in *Archéologie de l'espace Urbain* (Composition(s) urbaine(s), Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2013), 6–8.

the largest sanctuaries of the empire.³⁰⁴ Beyond that, a clear history of the development of the city cannot be given. It occurs in written sources as early as the third millennium B.C.E., but only gained importance as an Aramean city from the beginning of the first millennium B.C.E. Already at this time, a temple to Hadad seems to have existed on the spot where the later temple to Zeus would be built.³⁰⁵ Damascus retained some regional importance under subsequent Assyrian, Babylonian and Achaemenid rule – but see Ernest Will's warnings that next to nothing is known for certain. Only judging by its apparent wealth at the time of Alexander's conquest, it seems to have done reasonably well under the Achaemenids.³⁰⁶

As a Hellenistic city – first Ptolemaic, and from the end of the third century B.C.E., Seleucid – Damascus is suggested to have had at least a large temple and agora. Only under Roman rule was the sanctuary apparently enhanced to its colossal dimensions and the city organised along a rectangular grid, adorned with colonnaded streets and surrounded with walls.³⁰⁷ Josephus writes that Herod constructed a theatre and a gymnasium in the city, in line with other projects he funded outside of his own kingdom.³⁰⁸ An elevation to metropolitan status by Hadrian (assumed on the basis of the coinage of the city) indicates the growing relevance of the city, putting it – at least in status – on the same level as a select group of cities that mostly included provincial capitals.³⁰⁹

While the site lacks the defensive benefits of a prominent natural or manmade elevation, it benefitted from the agriculturally rich plains of the Ghouta oasis. Despite rainfall being too little for reliable rainfed agriculture (220 mm per annum) as the city lies in the rain shadow of the Anti-Lebanon, the water from the river Barada and with runoff water from the mountains provides enough to sustain a productive hinterland. This appears to have been aided especially by canalisation that may date back to the city's Aramean past.³¹⁰ Thomas Weber lists the numerous literary sources that show that the Damascene was a territory that produced wine and a great number of different cash crops, such dates, plums, terebinth and olives.³¹¹

Contrary to Palmyra, there is perhaps no need to look beyond its agricultural potential to explain the apparent 'success' of a somewhat marginal site which did not seem to hold any political or

³⁰⁴ Ross Burns, *Damascus: A History* (Abingdon etc: Routledge, 2005), 64, 75; Ernest Will, 'Damas Antique', *Syria* 71, no. 1/2 (1994): 40; Ball, *Rome in the East*, 184; Ball, 184.

³⁰⁵ But note Millar's remarks on the rather flimsy basis for the identification of Hadad as a deity in Damascus: Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 315.

³⁰⁶ Ball, *Rome in the East*, 184–85; Burns, *Damascus*, 14–17; Will, 'Damas Antique', 8 note 19.

³⁰⁷ Will, 'Damas Antique'.

³⁰⁸ Jos., *Bell. Jud.*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library 203, 1927, I.422; Burns, *Damascus*, 54.

³⁰⁹ Ball, *Rome in the East*, 184.

³¹⁰ Burns, *Damascus*, xvi–xix, 13.

³¹¹ Thomas Weber, 'ΔΑΜΑΣΚΗΝΑ: Landwirtschaftliche Produkte Aus Der Oase von Damaskus Im Spiegel Griechischer Und Lateinischer Schriftquellen', *Zeitschrift Des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* (1953-) 105 (1989): 151–65; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 312.

military significance. No troops seem to have been stationed here, although by the time of Diocletian the city contained an armoury.³¹² Even so, although there is no way to ascertain this, its enormous temple may mean that its urban economy was connected to religious functions. Furthermore, Grout suggests that the easiest explanation for the origins of the wealth of the elites that funded the city's building projects is that it came from the caravan trade.³¹³ If commercial considerations played a role, perhaps its location at the northern end of the Decapolis was of some importance, as there is a route between Mount Hermon and the Anti-Lebanon towards the Beqaa valley, and from there onwards to the coast at Berytus and towards Emesa in the north. There were, however, far more direct ways from Damascus to the sea, for instance by Caesarea Paneas towards Tyre, or either past Lake Tiberias or Scythopolis towards Acco. Of course, if Palmyra shows anything, it is that a city's location, or its accessibility, do not need to be optimal for it to benefit from trade.

For 'the holy city' of Hierapolis or Bambyke, nowadays Manbij, despite Cumont's suggestion that it was a city most deserving of investigation by archaeologists of the twentieth century, there has only been little actual research in the city. The 'destructive' results he witnessed, of new occupation after 'centuries of abandonment' that had for so long preserved the remains of the old city, continued.³¹⁴ Essentially, what is known now is what was known then, and mostly comes down to the details about the temple mentioned in Lucian's *De Dea Syria*, a mention by Ammianus of the city's gates and colonnaded streets in the time of Julian, and Procopius writing that the walls were reconstructed (around a smaller area) by Justinian.³¹⁵ In his 1999 survey, made difficult by not in fact being able to acquire a map of the city, Alejandro Egea Vivancos identified a theatre, studied water infrastructure and the necropolis, and suggested a likely location for the sanctuary of Atargatis.³¹⁶

This too was a city that at least by the fourth century CE seems to have been the main centre within its region, called Εὐφρατησία, according to the later bishopric's lists and Procopius.³¹⁷ The Roman road passing it – taken by Julian's forces in the fourth century, leads from Antioch by way of Beroia and Batnai towards the river, and appears to date to Septimius Severus.³¹⁸ Despite limited rainfall, Hierapolis appears to have received considerable water from a spring, emptying

³¹² Burns, *Damascus*, 85.

³¹³ Grout, 'The Role of Palmyrene Temples in Long-Distance Trade in the Roman Near East', 57.

³¹⁴ Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, 36–40.

³¹⁵ Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, trans. John Garstang, 1913, 30–36; Amm. Marc., trans. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library 300, 1950, 23.2.6–7; Proc., *De Aedif.*, trans. H. B. Dewing and Glanville Downey, Loeb Classical Library 343, 1940, II.9.12; Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, 25; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 243.

³¹⁶ Alejandro Egea Vivancos, 'Poblamiento romano en el Alto Éufrates Sirio' (Ph.D., Murcia, Universidad de Murcia, 2002), 320–59.

³¹⁷ Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 532 table 34; Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, 226.

³¹⁸ Cumont, *Études Syriennes*, 16–17.

into a (sacred) pond as Procopius writes, which still existed a century ago.³¹⁹ The area also received water from a southern tributary stream of the Sajur, itself emptying into the Euphrates. No written sources suggest agricultural abundance, as existed at Damascus, but in Islamic times, the land around wadis and rivers in the area was irrigated, and Manbij apparently exported raisins.³²⁰ There is only one indication of what may have been the cause of the city's importance: while knowing that such a statement should not be taken at face value, it is nonetheless telling that Lucian writes that for Hierapolis the temple was the main source of income for the city, with money and valuables ("which are exchanged for silver and gold") being brought in by visitors from all parts of the Levant.³²¹

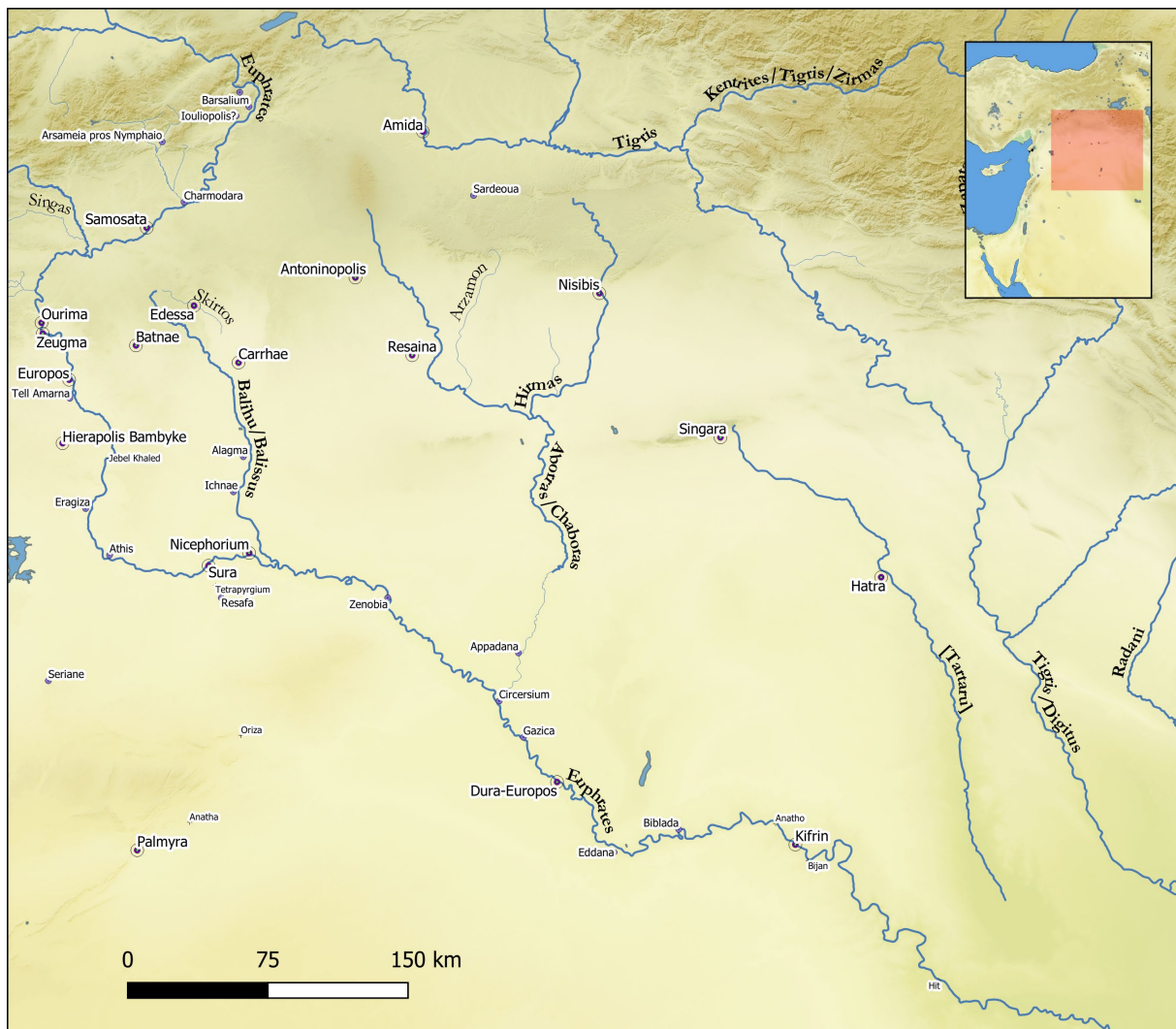


Figure 18 Roman cities in Mesopotamia

³¹⁹ Cumont, *Études Syriennes*.

³²⁰ A. Asa Eger, *The Islamic-Byzantine Frontier: Interaction and Exchange Among Muslim and Christian Communities* (I.B.Tauris, 2015), 70–71.

³²¹ Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, 10.

1.2.9 Mesopotamian conquests and a look to the East

As David and Joan Oates remarked in 1959, while the Romans held on to eastern Mesopotamia for around 170 years (and several centuries longer to western Mesopotamia), Roman occupation seemed to have hardly left a mark on its cities.³²² While this is quite an overstatement, it remains a fact that almost all of the Mesopotamian cities were overbuilt in later periods. Modern urban expansion in fact only became more intensive since the article by Oates and Oates, leaving any Roman or Parthian finds firmly out of reach. One exception is Hatra, but this city probably only saw the presence of Roman troops for several years and could therefore hardly be understood as a Roman city. The limitations common to studying cities in the Roman East – a limited archaeological record, few written sources and to some degree a different scholarly focus on earlier periods, are thus even more present in this region.

The available evidence suggests that the handful of cities of this region were sizeable strongholds controlling considerable areas around them. These mostly lay on two parallel lines; from Zeugma to Nisibis and from Zeugma to Singara. The Roman conquest of the region seems to have focused on these cities, with at least in the Severan period evidence of smaller military installations or forts along the roads between them (e.g. at Ain Sinu and Tell Brak). This increased fortification also coincides with the building of desert forts in Arabia at several oases, as discussed in the following chapter.³²³

Mesopotamia was conquered in the 140s B.C.E. from the Seleucids by the Parthian Mithridates II, essentially changing the Euphrates into a border for the first time in two centuries. While to the west the Roman empire was increasing and expanding its control, Mesopotamia remained within the Parthian sphere of influence. Besides Armenian inroads into the region during the Mithridatic wars, some attempts at expansion beyond the Euphrates were made by both Romans and Parthians in the first century B.C.E., such as Crassus' failed campaign in 53 B.C.E. and the short-lived Parthian invasion in 40/39 B.C.E. After that Mesopotamia remained relatively calm, with the Roman-Parthian conflict mostly focussed on Armenia (note in that context that Adiabene was occupied for some time in the 50s C.E. by Armenian troops).³²⁴

Only from 114 to 117 C.E. did Trajan's campaign bring warfare into Mesopotamia itself, with his armies reaching beyond the Parthian capital of Ctesiphon and down to the Persian Gulf. The

³²² David Oates and Joan Oates, 'Ain Sinu: A Roman Frontier Post in Northern Iraq', *IRAQ* 21, no. 2 (October 1959): 207–42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4199660>.

³²³ Oates and Oates; Kennedy, *Rome's Desert Frontier*; Lidewijde de Jong and Rocco Palermo, 'Living on the Edge: The Roman Empire in the North Mesopotamian Steppe', in *The Archaeology of Imperial Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Empires in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean World*, ed. Bleda S. Düring and Tesse D. Stek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 251.

³²⁴ Wagner, *Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris*, 36–40.

ruler of Edessa changed his allegiance to Rome rather than resisting. The cities of the newly conquered region, including Edessa, appear to have revolted within a year, however, during which Trajan failed to (re?) conquer Hatra, while Edessa did fall to Roman troops. Hadrian withdrew the Roman forces and ceded all occupied territory after Trajan died, although in part this may only have been a shift from direct to indirect control. It took several decades before the armies of Lucius Verus would attempt to retake the region again between 163 and 166 C.E.³²⁵ Direct rule was expanded at least as far as Nisibis, but it is not entirely clear to what extent influence was maintained in the region over the next 40 years. Septimius Severus was the next to undertake a large-scale Parthian war, consolidating Rome's position in the region.³²⁶

With Roman control established this late, it is apparent that its influence on the urban network was even less effective in Mesopotamia than in the west. Most cities appear to have been Hellenistic foundations, but as in the Syrian provinces, generally dated back further. Edessa is an exception, since the town may have been little more than a waystation before Alexander's conquest (if it existed at all), but still had become a powerful regional centre by the time Rome began interfering in its affairs.³²⁷ Rome made no attempts at new foundations, but garrisons were placed in existing settlements.

For Hatra and Edessa it is clear that under the Parthians they were ruled by semi-autonomous dynasties, somewhat similar to the client kingdoms Rome had maintained in the region as well. Edessa was still an independent principality at the beginning of the third century CE, albeit allegiant to Rome, with most of its former territory now falling under direct Roman control. An inscription from a nearby village to the northwest mentions the border between the Roman province of Osrhoene and the Edessene kingdom. It was fully annexed by Caracalla into the Roman province.³²⁸ The exact ways other cities were governed, or within which kingdoms they fell, is unclear. Before the Roman incursions the Osrhoene kingdom appears to have covered large parts of northern Mesopotamia, perhaps the whole area between the Euphrates and the Khabur, although nearby Batnae seems to have been the centre of a small principality called Anthemusia – as Ross writes, at least until Trajan's invasion.³²⁹ Other parts of eastern Mesopotamia may have been part of the Parthian Adiabene kingdom, with Arbela as its capital

³²⁵ Charles R. Whittaker, 'Frontiers', in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume 11: The High Empire, A.D. 70-192*, ed. Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Dominic Rathbone, 2nd ed., vol. 11, The Cambridge Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 309–12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521302005.013>.

³²⁶ Wagner, *Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris*; Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*.

³²⁷ Steven K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Eastern Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114-242 CE* (London etc: Routledge, 2001), 7.

³²⁸ Ross, 51; Wagner, *Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris*.

³²⁹ Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 23, 26–28; J. B. Segal, 'Abgar', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abgar-dynasty-of-edessa-2nd-century-bc-to-3rd-century-ad>.

(modern Erbil, east of the Tigris). The core of the Adiabene, however, lay on the east bank of the Tigris.³³⁰

Even in the case of Nisibis, for which there is relatively much information, the account is quite muddled. It was held by the Armenians for several decades, except for a brief time after it was conquered by Lucullus in 68 B.C.E. It then returned to Armenian hands, before being taken over by the Parthians again. It was granted to one Izates around 36 C.E. who governed it for two decades and was succeeded by his older brother.³³¹ What exactly happened until the conquest of the city by Trajan's forces, or afterwards, until its conquest by Lucius Verus remains unclear – perhaps it was part of the Adiabene or Osrhoene, perhaps it remained a semi-independent vassal. After Verus' campaign, it seems to have stayed Roman, as Cassius Dio mentions a joint attack on the city by Adiabene and Osrhoene during the conflict between Septimius Severus and Pescennius Niger.³³²

Albert de Jong argues the important point that the 'independence' of the western parts of the Parthian empire has been overstated, or at least not defined properly.³³³ He makes a reasonable case that in loanwords, cultural expression and emulation the reach of the Parthian 'orbit' is very present, extending also into Armenia and Georgia. The evidence for independence amounts in his view to no more than the knowledge that the various regions had their own dynasties, sometimes related to the Arsacid rulers, sometimes not. To what degree the 'King of Kings' had or did not have influence over them remains open, but a short story by Josephus' about Izates of Adiabene suggests that privileges could both be granted (and taken away), not dissimilar to how under the Seleucids local autonomy was little more than the privilege to pass local laws.³³⁴ Of course, Edessa changing allegiance to Trajan suggests that in a sense Parthian control was limited on the outskirts of the empire. Still, as Peter Edwell also indicates, Edessa's hand was forced by the Roman capture of Nisibis and Batnae.³³⁵ At the point that Lucius Verus installed a

³³⁰ Michał Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 366–69.

³³¹ Karlheinz Kessler, 'Nisibis', in *Der Neue Pauly* (Brill, 1 October 2006), <https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/der-neue-pauly/nisibis-e823870>; Jos., *Ant.*, XX.92.

³³² Cassius Dio, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, Loeb Classical Library 32, 1914, 75; Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 48.

³³³ Albert de Jong, 'Hatra and the Parthian Commonwealth', in *Hatra: Politics, Culture and Religion between Parthia and Rome*, ed. Lucinda Dirven, 1st ed. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 143–60.

³³⁴ de Jong, 150; After Laurent Capdetrey, *Le Pouvoir Séleucide: Territoire, Administration, Finances d'un Royaume Hellénistique (312-129 Avant J.-C.)*, Collection Histoire (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007).

³³⁵ Peter M. Edwell, 'Osrhoene and Mesopotamia between Rome and Arsacid Parthia', in *Arsacids, Romans and Local Elites: Cross-Cultural Interactions of the Parthian Empire*, ed. Jason Schulde and Benjamin Reubin (Havertown, UNITED STATES: Oxbow Books, 2017), 114–16, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kb/detail.action?docID=4830376>.

pro-Roman ruler, a member of the dynasty who had lived in Roman territory, Edessa fit firmly into the template of a Roman client state.

In his study on visual culture in Hatra, Björn Anderson shows strong Roman influences, but even then firmly states, after De Jong, that “there can be no question that Hatra was, politically, a fully Parthian city during the second century C.E..”³³⁶ Hatra’s shift towards Rome in 230 can only be seen as a local reaction to the rise of the Sassanids and their far more centralised approach to rule in comparison to the Arsacids. Where in the case of Dura and Palmyra imperial (Roman) influence is being downplayed or at least pushed towards a later date by scholars like Peter Edwell and Andreas Luther, further into Mesopotamia recent scholarship seems to argue for a larger role of (the Parthian) empire.

At the beginning of the third century, Carrhae, Edessa, Resaina, Nisibis and Singara had received the status of colony and metropolis. In some cases this may have been already granted under Lucius Verus, but most were certainly granted that (again) by Septimius, or in the case of Edessa, Caracalla or Elagabalus.³³⁷ Septimius Severus created the new province of Mesopotamia in 199 and made Nisibis its capital.³³⁸ At least Nisibis, Singara and Resaina seem to have received a garrison, and Cassius Dio mentions that Nisibis already had major fortifications and a citadel when Lucullus besieged and captured it in the first century B.C.E.³³⁹ However, archaeological finds from the city are limited to five columns and part of a fourth century church.³⁴⁰ Although it was taken at least twice by the Parthians during the third century, it was reconquered each time, and was able to withstand three sieges in the middle of the fourth century. Only with the death of Julian in 363 was the city ceded to the Persians together with Singara.³⁴¹

For the town of Batnae we know little more than that it struck its own coins, if coins with the legend Anthemusia do indeed refer to this town.³⁴² Other than that, Ammianus Marcellinus writes that the town held a rich annual fair, including goods from India and China.³⁴³ Carrhae, or Harran, had already been an important fortified town in the second millennium B.C.E., and was

³³⁶ Björn Anderson, ‘Beyond Rome/Parthia: Intersections of Local and Imperial Traditions in the Visual Record of Hatra’, in *Arsacids, Romans and Local Elites: Cross-Cultural Interactions of the Parthian Empire*, ed. Jason Schulde and Benjamin Reubin (Havertown, UNITED STATES: Oxbow Books, 2017), 141, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kb/detail.action?docID=4830376>.

³³⁷ Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 221–22; Millar, ‘The Roman Coloniae of the Near East: A Study of Cultural Relations’, 38–39, 46.

³³⁸ Rocco Palermo, ‘Nisibis, Capital of the Province of Mesopotamia: Some Historical and Archaeological Perspectives’, *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 27 (January 2014): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759414001354>.

³³⁹ Palermo, 463; Cassius Dio, 36.6–7.

³⁴⁰ Palermo, ‘Nisibis, Capital of the Province of Mesopotamia’, 465–66.

³⁴¹ Palermo, 462.

³⁴² But compare Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 442, 505.

³⁴³ Amm. Marc., 1.4.3.3.

in the Roman-Imperial period famous for the defeat of Crassus in 53 B.C.E. and the assassination of Caracalla. Like Nisibis and Batnae, the city however reveals little about its urban nature for the Roman period. The remaining city walls, castle and other finds date to later periods. At least we know that the later Roman period walled area covered 107 hectares.³⁴⁴

For Singara, Oates argues that the walls likely date to the fourth century, for which period Ammianus describes the destruction of a recently repaired tower by a battering ram during the final siege by Shapur III in 360 C.E.³⁴⁵ They furthermore bear a resemblance to those of Amida, from the same period. As Rome's most forward post towards the Parthians, and being taken by both empires multiple times during the third and fourth centuries, it seems likely that Singara was a fortified position in that period as well. Again, any finds from the city date no earlier than the fourth century. The protected urban area only measures around 20 hectares, putting it on a similar level to for instance Kifrin (on the Euphrates), another fortified town on the edge of Parthian territory.³⁴⁶

For Edessa, archaeology tells us virtually nothing; only later fortifications have been identified, protecting an area of around 140 hectares. The Chronicle of Edessa, a fifth to sixth century Syriac source, gives a description of a flood that took place in 201 C.E., during the reign of Septimius Severus (in Edessa, that of Abgar VIII). As Ross highlights, the text attests to the presence of a palace complex with porticoes and courtyards, city walls, and a colonnade with shops ("And King Abgar ordered that all those who resided in the portico and carried out their occupation opposite the river should not pass the night in their booths".³⁴⁷) A Christian church, also mentioned, may be a later interpolation into the text.³⁴⁸ The emerging picture is that of a monumentalised royal city with similar adornments found in the capitals of Rome's client kingdoms to the west, such as Petra and Jerusalem. Without actual archaeological evidence, questions related to the expression of local power through architectural urban programs and the emulation of imperial styles cannot be answered.

With the Roman capture of Nisibis and Singara, the kingdom of Hatra became the frontier of the Persian empire. If Cassius Dio is reliable, the city was a rather insignificant place by the time of Trajan's failed siege, but had become a major city 60 years later, when Septimius Severus failed

³⁴⁴ Seton Lloyd, William Brice, and C. J. Gadd, 'Harran', *Anatolian Studies* 1 (December 1951): 77–111, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3642359>; Lidewijde de Jong, 'Mallowan's Marshes: The Archaeology of the Balikh Valley under Roman and Byzantine Rule', *Zeitschrift Für Orient-Archäologie (ZORA)* 4 (2011): 269.

³⁴⁵ Amm. Marc., 20.6.3–7.

³⁴⁶ David Oates, *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq* (London [etc.]: The Oxford University Press, 1968), 103.

³⁴⁷ *Chron. Min.*, trans. J. B. Segal, 1970.

³⁴⁸ Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 107–8.

to take it.³⁴⁹ The remains of the city show it as it was when the city fell after a three-year Sassanian siege, in 240. At that point, it was a vast city, its almost perfectly circular inner-city wall which had been constructed in 151-152 C.E, surrounding an area of 310 hectares – finds do suggest that a smaller wall had existed before. Moreover, aerial imagery and surveys strongly suggest that the entire area within the inner wall was built up. At its centre, a considerable part was taken up by its temple district measuring no less than 14 hectares. The earthen outer wall may have found its origins in one of the Roman or Sassanian sieges, or perhaps served to protect outlying areas from raiders.³⁵⁰

With agricultural conditions even poorer than in Palmyra, it is hard to imagine how such a large community could have maintained itself. As mentioned before, there are always several possibilities for dry-land farming, and huge cisterns throughout the city suggest that water catchment may have played an important role. Diversion and catchment of water from the wadi Tarthar, lying at 3 kilometres distance, may also have occurred, although evidence is lacking. However, do note Enrico Foietta's studies showing that the direct surroundings of the city in fact are far more water rich than supposed: within the plain of Hatra, specific conditions lead to consistent availability of ground water, close to the surface. Numerous wells show that this water was indeed accessed in ancient times as well.³⁵¹

Sommer argues that like Palmyra, Hatra's economy was based on commerce. The city lacks any inscriptions that show evidence for trade. However, the colossal sanctuary was unlikely to have been funded by external rulers, instead being funded by local investment. Neither agriculture nor husbandry would have provided enough wealth to finance this, leaving trade as the only likely explanation.³⁵² The argument that there would be no Arsacid imperial investment in the city, does of course depend on the idea that the city fell outside of the Arsacid sphere of influence. But, even if imperial influence was greater than Sommer allows for, one could still wonder what would drive state authorities to invest in a temple complex in a somewhat remote stronghold. Furthermore, the city flourished exactly at the time when its position became more liminal, not dissimilar to Palmyra's position between the empires – a position that could very

³⁴⁹ Cassius Dio, 68.31, 72.11-12; Lucinda Dirven, 'Hatra, Stad van de Zonnegod - Sociale Achtergronden van Een Heilige Plaats', *Tijdschrift Voor Geschiedenis* 126, no. 1 (1 March 2013): 4-15, <https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGESCH2013.1.DIRV>.

³⁵⁰ Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*, 358.

³⁵¹ Enrico Foietta, 'The Kingdom of Hatra during the Second and Third Centuries AD: Frontiers, Ecological Limits, Settlements and Landmarks', in *Imperial Connections. Interactions and Expansion from Assyria to the Roman Period. Volume 2. Proceedings of the 5th "Broadening Horizons" Conference (Udine 5-8 June 2017)*, ed. Katia Gavagnin and Rocco Palermo (Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2020), 303-4, <http://hdl.handle.net/10077/31112>.

³⁵² Sommer, *Roms Orientalische Steppengrenze*, 387.

well have benefitted a Hatrene trade community. On the other hand, this position would also allow for the city to claim a sizeable territory.³⁵³

At the northern end of Mesopotamia, north of Osrhoene, we enter the region of the former kingdom of Sophene. The subregion south of the Tigris, called Ingilene, may have come to lie under direct Roman control. There are some indications of Roman military presence just after the peace treaty of 63 C.E., but even then, the exact status of this region remains somewhat unclear. In this region, we find the city of Amida. Its location, lying on a defensible position at the crossroads from Melitene to Tigranokerta and from Melitene to Nisibis, meant it was a strategically important site.³⁵⁴ The Medieval walls, for which an inscription places the latest modifications around 1067 C.E., surrounded an area of around 165 hectares. It is suggested that these walls match the layout of the Roman circuit.³⁵⁵ However, these fortifications were clearly a Late Roman development. As mentioned earlier, their similarity to those of Singara suggests a 4th century construction date. Marcellinus describes this place as having been a small city when it was (first?) fortified by Constantius II in the early fourth century. By no standard would a 165-hectare city be considered small at that time. We lack good archaeological sources for the city, but it seems that within our period of study, it probably only played a secondary role.³⁵⁶ Even so, on the Roman side of the Tigris the closest major urban settlements such as Samosata, Edessa and Nisibis, were over a hundred kilometres away. The same beyond the Tigris: the closest Armenian major cities, Arsamosata and Tigranokerta (later Roman Martyropolis) lay at a similar distance. On a lower order of size, Antoninopolis (also called Tela) which lay 80 km towards the south in northern Osrhoene, had only been raised to urban status at the end of the second century. Only Armenian Karkathiokerta was nearby, 40 km across the Tigris to the north. It seems therefore that before the Roman-Sassanian wars, this would remain a rather remote area without the levels of urbanisation seen in Syria.

We get some additional insight into how the settlement pattern may have developed by looking back to the south, outside of the larger cities. Here, additional information is available from surveys and excavations along the Balikh (between Edessa and Nicephorium) and the upper Khabur valleys (southeast of Nisibis). Recently Lidewijde de Jong and Rocco Palermo published overviews of these areas. In the Balikh valley, these settlements mostly averaged around 1.5 hectares. A few were slightly larger, up to 4 hectares, while the largest, Tell es Sadde (perhaps

³⁵³ Foietta, 'The Kingdom of Hatra during the Second and Third Centuries AD: Frontiers, Ecological Limits, Settlements and Landmarks'.

³⁵⁴ Michał Marciak, 'The Cultural Landscape of Sophene from Hellenistic to Early Byzantine Times', *Göttinger Forum Für Altertumswissenschaft* 17 (2014): 36.

³⁵⁵ Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 290; Pollard, fig. 10.

³⁵⁶ Marciak, 'The Cultural Landscape of Sophene from Hellenistic to Early Byzantine Times', 36.

ancient Ichnae), declined from 9 hectares in the Parthian period, to 5 in the Roman period.³⁵⁷ As De Jong and Palermo show, between the second century B.C.E. and the first C.E., in both the Balikh and upper Khabur valleys, settlement was relatively stable or even increased. Finds suggest only a limited interaction with either the Parthian or Roman empires, and conflicts between the empires do not seem to have been reflected at this level in any way. The following three centuries – a finer time resolution was not possible to achieve – suggest a population shift away from older settlements, and quite possibly a decline in the number and size of settlements in both regions. Data for this period are poor, however, and many proposed dates remain insecure. Their suggestion is that while the large urban centres may have done well, the Roman empire failed to integrate these remote rural areas, with locals perhaps turning to less sedentary lifestyles.³⁵⁸

1.3 General discussion

1.3.1 Public buildings

Table 1 shows the known public buildings for the northern provinces. The most monumental places closely match those in the upper tiers of the settlement size spectrum. This is, however, heavily influenced by both a research focus on such places, as well as a focus on written sources, mostly discussing major rather than minor cities. Compare the cases of Antioch, for which we would have a reasonable idea about its monumental features even if the archaeological data were to be completely disregarded, with the still sizeable city of Cyrrhus, of which we can say little more than that a legion was based there, as mentioned in the written sources. Therefore, it would likely have been adorned with at least the infrastructure related to entertainment, bathing and religion. Overall, structures related to commercial infrastructure are the most prevalent. Furthermore, it is evident that military structures are far less prominent in Syria Phoenice than in Coele and Mesopotamia.

On the other end of the spectrum, places with only a temple or sanctuary tend to be little more than larger villages. For this area, most of these are known from the study of Tchalenko in the limestone massifs. It would stand to reason that the number of known religious buildings would be vastly higher if other rural regions had a similar level of standing remains. Only in the case of Daphne does its monumental complement lend a rather urban aspect to the settlement. This place, however, as will be discussed in 4.2 below, is a rather extraordinary secondary settlement

³⁵⁷ de Jong, 'Mallowan's Marshes: The Archaeology of the Balikh Valley under Roman and Byzantine Rule', 266.

³⁵⁸ de Jong and Palermo, 'Living on the Edge: The Roman Empire in the North Mesopotamian Steppe', 258–59.

in the Antiochene. As the excavations of the 1930s indicated, this was a settlement of rather spread-out elite residences, perhaps home of the rich and famous of the great city. At least according to the *Historia Augusta*, Lucius Verus, co-emperor of Marcus Aurelius, spent his summers there.³⁵⁹

Unlike in the Southern Levant, it is not possible in the north to really indicate specific construction phases. In the first place, a large number of these buildings still have very wide date ranges, whereas in the south there is a somewhat larger number of buildings more narrowly dated to the reign of specific emperors, showing at least two somewhat more narrowly defined clusters of construction: one in the middle of the second century, and one under the Severi. On the other hand, it is known that after the great earthquake of 115 C.E. a considerable (re)construction effort was undertaken in the northern Syrian cities, but only in a limited number of cases can a (re-) construction be linked to this event – for example, the construction of the colonnade and the repairs of a nymphaeum in Apamea.

³⁵⁹ *SHA*, trans. David Magie and David Rohrbacher, Loeb Classical Library 139, 2022, Verus VII, 1-10; Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, 101.

Table 1 Public buildings in cities the northern provinces

	Baths and Water provision	Commercial infrastructure	Elite buildings	Entertainment	Military	Sanctuary & Temple	Status buildings	Grand Total
<i>Coele Syria</i>	14	31	6	11	18	12	2	94
<i>Dura-Europos</i>		3	3	1	2	6		15
<i>Antioch</i>	5	4	1	3	1		1	15
<i>Apamea</i>	3	4	1	1	2	2		13
<i>Seleucia Pieria</i>	2	4	1	1	2	1		11
<i>Beroia</i>	1	3			1	1		6
<i>Cyrrus</i>		3		1	2			6
<i>Laodicea ad Mare</i>	1	2		1	1		1	6
<i>Zeugma</i>		1		1	2			4
<i>Larissa</i>		1		1	1			3
<i>Hierapolis Bambyke</i>	1	1				1		3
<i>Gabala</i>		2		1				3
<i>Europos</i>		2				1		3
<i>Chalcis ad Belum</i>		1			1			2
<i>Kifrin</i>					2			2
<i>Epiphaneia</i>	1							1
<i>Sura</i>					1			1
<i>Syria-Phoenice</i>	18	22	1	18	6	15	6	86
<i>Palmyra</i>	3	4		2	0	6	3	18
<i>Damascus</i>	2	3		4	3	1	2	15
<i>Berytus</i>	3	3		3		1		10
<i>Tyrus</i>	1	3		3			1	8
<i>Heliopolis</i>	2	1		1	1	3		8
<i>Caesarea Paneas</i>	2	2	1	1		1		7
<i>Byblos</i>	1	2		1		1		5
<i>Akko</i>	2	1		1				4
<i>Arados</i>		1			1	1		3
<i>Tripolis</i>	2	1						3
<i>Sidon</i>		1		1				2
<i>Arethusa</i>						1		1

<i>Raphaneae</i>				1			1
<i>Botrys</i>			1				1
<i>Mesopotamia</i>	1	1		3	1		6
<i>Nisibis</i>	1	1		2	1		5
<i>Singara</i>				1			1
<i>Osrhoena</i>	1			1	1		3
<i>Edessa</i>	1			1			2
<i>Carrhae</i>					1		1
<i>Grand Total</i>	34	54	7	29	28	29	189

Table 2 Known public buildings in non-urban central places

	Baths and Water provision	Commercial infrastructure	Elite buildings	Entertainment	Military	Sanctuary & Temple	<i>Grand Total</i>
<i>Syria-Coele</i>	4	5	1	2	2	3	17
<i>Daphne</i>	2		1	2			5
<i>Mogiza</i>	1	1				1	3
<i>Eragiza</i>					2		2
<i>Derkoush</i>		2					2
<i>Meleagrum</i>		1					1
<i>Jebel Sheikh Barakat</i>						1	1
<i>Gephyra</i>		1					1
<i>Ad Dana</i>	1						1
<i>Bāqirḥā</i>						1	1
<i>Syria-Phoenice</i>		1		1		1	3
<i>Marathos</i>		1		1		1	3
<i>Grand Total</i>	4	6	1	3	2	4	20

1.3.2 Regional conclusions

1.3.2.1 *Geographical factors*

One of the main factors in determining the shape of the urban system in Syria lies in its geography. As anywhere, the presence of vital resources can make one location preferable over another, while physical obstacles such as mountain ranges can create hard to overcome limits to the growth potential of a settlement. As also indicated in the Introduction, a very obvious example of that interplay between resources and space can be found along the coastal zone of Syria Coele and Syria Phoenice. Here, the presence of a coastal mountain range caused some of the highest levels of precipitation within the Roman-controlled Levant, and were the source of a number of both smaller and larger rivers like the Eleutheros and the Litas. In combination with good soils, this meant that the coastal plains were well-suited for rainfed agriculture. Coupled with access to the sea for fishing and trade, a number of reasonable harbour sites and an abundance of wood, this made it an attractive region for settlement. And indeed, the coast was dotted with settlements, many of which can be traced back to the Early Bronze Age at least. At the same time, these settlements were locked in between the sea and the mountains, competing for the limited space. The largest were located in the areas where the width of the coastal plains was at its widest, such as Berytus and Akko in the south, and Laodicea to the north. While on the narrower strips of land, even though information is sparse, small towns like Porphyreon competed amongst themselves for space.

In that same vein, inland we find Heliopolis in a similar but sizeable strip of land, hemmed in between the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon, perhaps growing as large as it did for lack of competition. Antioch and Apamea, the largest cities of the region – and to a lesser degree Emesa – lay on the edge of large and well-watered inland plains on the other side of the coastal mountain range. The plain of Antioch is wide, but still finds its limit in the Limestone Massif. Only the agricultural zones of Apamea and Emesa to the south were not closed in, eventually opening up to the Syrian Desert. Perhaps western Syria can thus be best described as fertile strips of agricultural plains, both inviting and limiting settlement, with the largest strips housing the largest towns.

Of course, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, these are merely the broad strokes to paint a picture. On the one hand, it is clear that settlement was not limited to ‘optimal’ locations. In the south, Mount Hermon saw a high density of cult sites and villages, and up north the entirety of the Limestone Massif was at some point covered with villages. On the other hand, limited agricultural capabilities did not always limit settlement size. The prime example for this is Seleucia Pieria: its walls enclosed one of the largest settlements of the region. The city’s territory contained a decent coastal plain in comparison to some other coastal towns, but it was

still enclosed by difficult terrain, bordered by Antioch, and nowhere near large enough to sustain a city of 250 hectares. The city did however exist, and flourish.

When we turn to the interior zone of the northern Roman Levant, Rocco Palermo gives a good summary of what becomes a core geographic determinant: “[...] it is clear that water was one of the crucial issues upon which imperial control depended in antiquity. Military movement, the sustainability of civilian settlement, and the capacity of empires to cope with the conditions imposed by the climate, along with political confrontation, all were governed by access to water.”³⁶⁰ Everything was influenced by water; even the layout of the road network was determined by the availability of water points, and as such the most suitable routes were determined long before the Romans came along.³⁶¹

As indicated in the Introduction, from the Damascene territory in the southwest up to Nisibis and Singara in the northeast, the major settlements lie on the edge of the preferential zone for reliable rain-fed agriculture. In fact, the 250 mm isohiyet was a major border of the sedentary world, before truly entering the Syrian steppe zone. Still, even with more than 250 mm rain per year, considerable swathes of land should already be considered part of the semi-arid zone.

The northern end of Syria Coele, with the cities of the Commagene and Zeugma, as well as the north of the Mesopotamian province towards Armenia, still sit firmly within the optimal zone for dry-land farming, and show similar benefits found in the coastal zones, such as high rainfall and additional water sources from rivers and mountain run-off. But for the remaining area, as seen above, for each city a specific explanation is given as to how that particular location was (or was adapted to be) suitable for long term settlement.

1.3.2.2 *Historical trajectories*

The second major aspect of the Syrian makeup of the settlement pattern is strong continuity from the Hellenistic period, and we can see that path dependency played a large role in the development of the Roman urban system. Concerning the location of cities, we find very little change throughout the centuries of Roman rule. Only three new major cities are formed in this period: Heliopolis and Emesa, both lying on the Orontes, and the nearby garrison town Raphanea. A few cities still present in the Hellenistic period declined before or during the Roman period, such as Chalcis sub Libano. In the latter's case the 'void' it left was filled by the new city founded in its vicinity: Heliopolis. And even then, decline does not necessarily mean complete disappearance – sources simply stopped mentioning Chalcis, but there is no conclusive evidence

³⁶⁰ Rocco Palermo, *On the Edge of Empires: North Mesopotamia During the Roman Period (2nd - 4th C. CE)* (Florence, UNITED STATES: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 16, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kb/detail.action?docID=5702795>.

³⁶¹ Palermo, 20.

that people no longer lived there. The prominence of Emesa seems to have come at the cost of that of Arethusa, the original capital of the Emesene kingdom. Even so, Arethusa remained a city in its own right throughout the Roman period, even if it was eclipsed by its neighbour. And while the Emesenes remained a semi-independent people, this gave the Romans reason to establish a permanent military base nearby at Raphanea, which in turn led to the development of a civilian settlement.

For most cities we see that their development trajectory found its starting impulse in the Hellenistic period. In his *Cities of Seleucid Syria*, John Grainger states that, at the time of Alexander's conquests, there were "only faint sparks of urban life in Syria."³⁶² In his view, the Assyrian conquests had brought destruction for most of the cities in the region, and by the time the Macedonians showed up, there was little more in the region than poor villages. He is entirely right that the Assyrian, and later Babylonian and Achaemenid rule of the region went hand in hand with violent destruction and deportations. In many cases, however, this was followed by reconstruction and/or resettlement, possibly with people deported from other parts of the empires. These were periods that also saw economic development and urban evolution in the cities in their own right.³⁶³ The idea that there were no cities after the Assyrian conquest should thus be considered an overstatement, as there was a good number of cities that survived or were revived. Take for example a number of Assyrian provincial capitals, such as Tell Ta'yinat, Tell Rif'at (Arpad) and Hamā (as well as Megiddo, Ashkelon and Ekron in the southern Levant).³⁶⁴ However, surviving the Assyrian conquest did not mean surviving up to the Roman period: Megiddo and Carchemish for instance were destroyed in the early 7th century B.C.E. in Egyptian assaults. And throughout the Achaemenid period, the final two centuries before Hellenistic conquest, sources for the region are very limited indeed. Some cities are well known, such as the Phoenician cities, but in most cases we have little to go on.³⁶⁵

Mostly, we find that Hellenistic settlements filled the same geographical niches as earlier cities, even in cases where it is clear that there had been no instalment of a Greek community into an existing city. Antioch itself is the obvious example, situated on the edge of the 'Amuq valley. Previous occupation for Antioch itself cannot be ascertained, but the plain had certainly been attractive in earlier periods as well, and saw major Bronze Age settlements at Tell Ta'yinat and

³⁶² Grainger, *The Cities of Seleucid Syria*, 23.

³⁶³ Benjamin W. Porter, 'Assembling the Iron Age Levant: The Archaeology of Communities, Politics, and Imperial Peripheries', *Journal of Archaeological Research* 24, no. 4 (1 December 2016): 397, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10814-016-9093-8>.

³⁶⁴ Michael C. Astour, review of *Review of The Cities of Seleucid Syria*, by John D. Grainger, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 2 (1994): 267–70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/605837>; Porter, 'Assembling the Iron Age Levant', 399.

³⁶⁵ Josette Elayi, 'Achaemenid Persia and the Levant', *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant*, 1 November 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199212972.013.008>.

Tell Atchana. On the other hand, Larissa is a good example of a city already known by that name in Egyptian sources, 'refounded' by the Seleucids – suggesting little more than the settlement of veterans.

Essentially, whether taking over existing settlements or identifying and filling the same niches that had served earlier settlements, the towns that received urban status in the Hellenistic period were the same that would serve as the administrative urban centres of the Roman period. In that sense, the Hellenistic period gave an initial shape to the urban fabric of Syria that would reverberate for centuries into the Roman period and beyond.

In this context we must also consider Pierre Briant's suggestion of the continuation, from the Achaemenid into the Hellenistic period, of self-governing village communities and villages as independent fiscal units.³⁶⁶ Like Syria Palaestina in the south, for the north there are some indications that this system also continued into the Roman period: at the end of Pliny's lists of Syria we find references to known towns and villages, such as the Gindareni, likely referring to the people of Gindaros, a large village which would probably come to fall under the territory of Antioch. The *Natural History* also mentions several named and unnamed tetrarchies, peoples and races that do not suggest an urban settlement.³⁶⁷ Most of these places are lumped together by Pliny without any clearer reference to their location, apart from the statement that they were located inland; some of these may have been villages and communities in other parts of Roman Syria.³⁶⁸

Unlike the provinces to the south, very few of these communities reappear in the bishopric lists several centuries later. Other regions do see new villages, towns and non-sedentary peoples appear in the bishopric lists, such as Iabruda and Maglula east of the Anti-Lebanon, scenarchiai ('rule of tents') and a number of village groups aptly named tricomia, tetracomia, pentacomia and the like, suggesting strongly that the practice of granting self-government to non-urban communities continued on the fringes of the urban world.³⁶⁹ In western Syria, however, only an imperial estate formed out of the former tetrarchy of Chalcis, the 'saltus Gonaiticus', hints at a non-urban controlled unit.

Looking eastwards, for the cities in the interior their fate was strongly influenced by the changes in (imperial) control, be it Achaemenid, Seleucid, Roman, Arsacid or Sassanid, or any of the

³⁶⁶ Pierre Briant, 'Villages Et Communautés Villageoises D'Asie Achéménide Et Hellénistique', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18, no. 1 (1 January 1975): 165–88, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852075X00092>.

³⁶⁷ Plin., *HN*, 5.19 For instance the two tetrarchies "quae granucomatitae vocantur" suggesting that these were, or had been, village communities (if indeed we read come for coma and assume it derives from the Greek kome).

³⁶⁸ Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 264.

³⁶⁹ Jones, 290.

independent, semi-independent or dependent kingdoms in between. For example, the initial urbanisation of Palmyra in the first century was perhaps sparked by the disappearance of imperial control with the disintegration of the Seleucids, and its third-century rise to power again the result of a power vacuum. But on the other hand the permanent destruction of Dura Europos in the third century was very clearly the direct result of the power struggles in this region. And while the proliferation of forts and fortified cities in the Roman East only followed in later centuries, the role of cities as military strongholds and staging points is already quite visible.

In that vein, the presumed role of the Euphrates as a hard border is now considered in quite a different light.³⁷⁰ But even with the shifts between various configurations of direct and indirect Roman rule beyond the river, it is clear that a number of settlements along the river were provided with garrisons at various points in the period under study – even if that does not match the more intensified military developments under Diocletian. Under the Severans, the installation of garrisons reached as far down the river as Kifrin. And while the Strata Diocletiana (a road from Palmyra to Sura that would be lined with forts under Diocletian) was not fortified in its entirety yet, the area around Sura and Resafa did see the establishment of military posts from the 70s C.E. onwards.³⁷¹

Still, as in the West there is a lot of continuity with previous periods. From Zeugma to Dura Europos, military considerations are quite visible in Seleucid foundations, controlling strategic points on defensible locations, usually with a hilltop citadel. And the subsequent establishment of Roman military posts in cities seems to favour those locations that also received garrisons in the Seleucid period. In comparison to this period however, the impact of the military on civilian settlements appears far greater from the later third and fourth centuries onwards. At that point, villages and small towns were raised to fortified cities, like Amida in Mesopotamia, and Circesium, Zenobia, Callinicum (former Nicephorion) and Neocaesarea (former Athis) on the Euphrates.³⁷² In a sense, this later Roman phase of military settlement, fortification and the spread of urban status, has a clear resemblance to early Seleucid settlement trajectories in Syria.

Considering the longer-term historical pattern, most of the Hellenistic settlements were founded in the same locations as earlier Bronze Age settlements. Preference for a settlement location should, however, not be mistaken for uninterrupted continuity of a site. While Europos lay on

³⁷⁰ See for an older view for instance Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third* (Baltimore [etc.]: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

³⁷¹ Whittaker, 'Frontiers', 310; Michaela Konrad, 'Research on the Roman and Early Byzantine Frontier in North Syria', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 12 (January 1999): 392–410, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759400018122>.

³⁷² Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, 78, 290–95.

the same site as Carchemish, there is a considerable break in occupation after its destruction in the 7th century B.C.E, with several phases of limited occupation before the Hellenistic settlement. In other cases, such Samosata and Damascus, such continuity for at least several centuries is better attested. Additionally, while the Hellenistic settlement policy could be a strong impulse for later Roman urban development, this was not a given. Jebel Khalid (possibly identified as Amphipolis), a typical strategically placed fortified city at a crossing over the Euphrates, was abandoned by 74 B.C.E. and stripped of useful materials.³⁷³

1.3.2.3 *The urban system*

The continued use of this Hellenistic blueprint for the urban network of Syria did not mean that the cities remained unchanged after two centuries of being part of the Roman world. Most obviously, whereas the four cities of the Syrian Tetrapolis were probably still relatively similar in many respects in the Hellenistic era, Antioch had become far more politically, economically and demographically dominant over the others. In part, this development can be seen as a result of the geographical limitations. The few population sizes available for Hellenistic era settlements in this region suggest that most of their populations did not come anywhere near the ceiling of agricultural production in their territories (see 3.2.2 for a discussion on production), while by the second century C.E., a number of cities had expanded considerably. Note that this only holds true for this part of the former Seleucid empire: no Roman city in Syria would for instance ever come close to matching Hellenistic Seleucia on the Tigris in size, not even Antioch. In the second century C.E., most of the cities of western Syria Coele and Phoenice had come a lot closer to their maximum agricultural production, making the size and fertility of their respective territories more relevant, and causing stronger differentiation between these cities. Again, the impact of Hellenistic choices on which settlements were elevated to urban status had consequences into the Roman period, as the choice of sites directly relates to the amount of land available around those cities in the long run. Interestingly though, there is basically only a divide in available arable land between the coastal cities and the inland cities, the former having roughly a third to half the land available compared to the latter. And ignoring the primate cities among them, coastal settlement sizes reach a maximum that lies around half the maximum of the non-primate inland cities. Additionally, due to their spacing, the available arable territory for inland cities comes close to everything that can be reached from each city within three hours' walking, while the coastal cities were more? limited by the sea and coastal mountain ranges (which of course do

³⁷³ Nicholas L. Wright, 'The Last Days of a Seleucid City: Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates and Its Temple', in *Seleucid Dissolution: The Sinking of the Anchor*, ed. Kyle Erickson and Gillian Ramsey, Philippika : Marburger Altertumskundliche Abhandlungen, ISSN 1613-5628 50 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 117–32.

offer additional valuable resources and foodstuffs not found inland), as well as more numerous other cities competing for space.

On the other hand, while most of the western Syrian towns fit into their geographic niche well enough to consider them self-sufficient units, enough cities break this geographic mould to such a degree that overall, very little correlation can be found indeed between territory size and city size. Antioch of course came to control a vast territory with numerous secondary population centres – such as earlier mentioned Gindaros – spread both throughout the valley and surrounding plateaux, vastly increasing the possibility to redirect surplus food towards the urban centre. In the case of Seleucia Pieria, on the other hand, there was hardly any land available at all. Laodicea was also a large city with a relatively large territory, but this consisted mostly of mountainous areas. Although, as Strabo writes, these could still be put to good use:

It is a city most beautifully built, has a good harbour, and has territory which, besides its other good crops, abounds in wine. Now this city furnishes most of the wine to the Alexandrians, since the whole of the mountain that lies above the city and is possessed by it is covered with vines almost as far as the summits. And while the summits are at a considerable distance from Laodiceia, sloping up gently and gradually from it, they tower above Apameia, extending up to a perpendicular height.³⁷⁴

Only for Apamea was there enough additional land to the north, up to and including secondary centres like El-Bara and Sergilla, in addition to the open plains to the east, to explain its primacy purely from the perspective of agricultural production.

For Seleucia, its role as a major commercial and military port cannot be overstated. It served as the main port of Antioch and it was the base of the *Classis Syriaca*. To get an idea of the role this city played in the distribution networks of the Roman East, it is enough to look at the spread of ESA tableware. Regardless of whether the production centres of this late Hellenistic and Early Roman tableware were situated around the bay of Issos or in or around the Antiochene, it is clear from the distribution of this ware throughout the entire Levant that Seleucia played a major part as a distribution hub, even if only to reach Antioch and the cities of the northern Levantine interior.³⁷⁵ And while for the larger part the Orontes was not navigable, access over water was at least possible from Seleucia up to Antioch by way of the canal dug by Verus. Further upstream, towards the border with the Apamean territory, an inscription of a boat maker was found at Darkush (possibly ancient Platanos). By itself this is a clear indication that at

³⁷⁴ Strab., 16.2.9.

³⁷⁵ Philip Bes, *Once upon a Time in the East: The Chronological and Geographical Distribution of Terra Sigillata and Red Slip Ware in the Roman East*, Roman and Late Antique Mediterranean Pottery 6 (Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 2015), 12–16.

this point the river was navigable.³⁷⁶ In the direction of Emesa, canal-like features detected in the Ghab Valley suggest that “the marsh was drained and the river made navigable at that time.”³⁷⁷ Either way, the road alongside the river will still have been the main artery from the sea to access the northern cities along the Orontes, and with it, Seleucia was the main point of access.

Similarly, besides reaping the benefits of its vast territory, for Antioch itself the city’s influence throughout the region can be read through its coinage. While many local mints existed throughout the Levant (for lower value coins), provincial and imperial coinage, both bronze and silver, was struck in Antioch. Considered the most prolific imperial mint, we find coins struck in Antioch throughout the entire Levant. For sites in the northern Levant, Antiochene coins, even including civic coins, make up just over a quarter of coins found on average in this period. In the first century C.E., as well as the third to fifth centuries, this rises to well over half the coins found.³⁷⁸ To the east, an increase in the spread of Antiochene coins follows Roman military expansion, as discussed in the following chapter. And while in the southern Levant the spread of Antiochene coinage only picks up at the end of the second century, the few Antiochene coins found at almost all sites are still indicative of military, commercial and administrative links with the metropolis. As Neumann states: “Indeed, the fact that they appear at all testifies to their importance in the north and provides growing support as to their use by the Roman bureaucracy.”³⁷⁹ On the other hand, Neumann points out that at least based on coinage, Antioch should not be seen as the political capital of Syria. Other cities retained a high degree of autonomy, and competed for it, including striking their own coins. Even the city of Antioch itself seems to have embraced its own municipal identity distinct from the imperial authorities, though these were generally based *in* Antioch. In a way, this speaks against a fully integrated network. Only by the fourth century does this appear to have shifted into a reality where the city becomes, as a capital, the actual top of an integrated urban system.³⁸⁰

Locally, we see some degree of multi-tier hierarchical systems: Antioch, most obviously, with centres like Daphne, Gindaros and Meleagrum falling within its territory, which would probably in other parts of the province have been independent settlements. For Apamea, Strabo describes how for instance neighbouring Larissa (among a number of other, unlocated places) had been a

³⁷⁶ Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 133.

³⁷⁷ Casana, ‘From Alalakh to Antioch’, 299.

³⁷⁸ Jack A. Nurpetlian, ‘Coinage in Late Hellenistic and Roman Syria : The Orontes Valley (1st Century BC-3rd Century AD)’ (Ph.D., University of Warwick, 2013), <http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/record=b2685696~S1>; Kristina M. Neumann, ‘Mapping the Transformation of Roman Antioch: The Coin Evidence’ (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015), 230, 298, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1739017585/?pq-origsite=primo>.

³⁷⁹ Neumann, ‘Mapping the Transformation of Roman Antioch’, 321.

³⁸⁰ Neumann, 388–400.

dependency of the city in the Hellenistic period, although this settlement had obtained independence by the Roman period.³⁸¹ Some of the larger towns in and along the Limestone Massif clearly did remain subordinate settlements. Among the coastal cities, where for instance Marathos and Antarados had been dependencies of Arados, by the Roman period most of these settlements appear to be independent administrative units. There is no evidence, however, that these cities played any sort of role in a hierarchical system that extended beyond their own territories.

If anything, with the disintegration of the Seleucid kingdom, a trend away from an integrated network seems to have set in, which continued for at least one and a half centuries under Roman rule. Only the four largest centres retained (most of) their regional influence, increasing their already existing competitive advantage. That two of these cities were port cities furthermore matches the expectation that port cities would play an important role in the Roman period. With that, they would remain the focus of everything that could make a city grow beyond its constraints in an agricultural society: local and imperial elite inhabitants with their spending, cultural and religious prominence, military power, economic advantages, and non-agricultural labour opportunities.

The interior and frontier zones of Roman Syria share a number of historical and geographic patterns that are different from the coastal and Orontes zones. That does not quite make this group of cities a single unit. Within the Severan province of Coele Syria it would not be surprising if the cities of the former Commagene kingdom functioned as an integrated system on both an economic and a political level, even with Germanikeia lying in another province. But it is quite another issue to expect the same of, for instance, Palmyra. Rather, like the cities on the coast and the Orontes, we find a number of distinct units drawn along the lines of older principalities or urban territories, with only superficial layers of integration.

For instance, judging by the military records found there, the earlier examples of Dura Europos and the town of Appadana show that on a military level these settlements were connected, both garrisoning troops of the same unit, while clearly a number of administrative functions were performed at Dura. However, there was local jurisdiction at Appadana, and for appeals, the villagers went straight to the governor at Antioch. The same was the case for appeals from villagers northeast of Palmyra at Dumayr, as described by Millar.³⁸² So while on a military level we see a regionally integrated, multi-tier system, this does not parallel the urban system, which was formed of mutually independent units.

³⁸¹ Strab., 16.2.10.

³⁸² Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 317–18.

Palmyra on the other hand gives us the best example of commercial connectivity, as will be discussed in detail in section 3.2.4.1. There are good indications that despite its disadvantageous location from an agricultural perspective, local food production played a larger role in the city than generally assumed, through dryland farming and cultivating the nearby mountains. But there can be no doubt that it was commercial activity that formed the foundation of elite wealth, and quite probably this is what elevated it from a backwater oasis settlement to a powerful Roman client state – explaining the presence of a city with a size similar to large regional centres in more fertile parts of the Levant.

Here we see a level of economic integration we can for instance expect in major port cities. But part of Palmyra's economic connections was clearly with settlements well outside of its zone of political influence: down along the Euphrates into the Parthian empire. And even with gradually increasing Roman rule in the city, there is nothing to suggest any political interdependence with its surrounding cities, other than perhaps Antioch and Rome itself. The municipal tax laws for instance show that Roman officials were involved in local matters, but at the same time show that this taxation was a locally, not provincially determined affair.

Damascus can also be seen in the light of its location: in a way it lies at the crossroads between several different systems: with access to Palmyra to the northeast, Emesa and the Orontes cities north along the anti-Lebanon, Heliopolis and the Beqaa valley through the pass along Abila Lysaniou, and by that route also to Berytus and the northern coast. Towards the southeast, by way of Caesarea Paneas it had access to Tyrus, the southern coast and Syria Palaestina. And due south, it could be seen as the northern limit of the Decapolis. It is not hard to see that this centrality would in later centuries see its rise to become the capital of the Umayyad caliphate. In the Roman era however, despite its crossroads location, it seems to have remained a regular regional centre – perhaps rather than connecting all those systems, it was merely peripheral to them.

As stated above, the prominence of the larger cities of Commagene and Mesopotamia, such as Samosata, Edessa and Hatra, should be seen in light of their role as capitals of their respective (former) kingdoms – central points with vast territories, little urban competition and controlling the few available routes for trade (and troop movement). Whether still independent, vassals of or integrated into the Roman or Persian empires, their role as focal points in this region remained unchanged.

As also mentioned above, in the later third and fourth centuries we find a number of villages being enlarged, fortified and elevated to urban status, like Zenobia and Callinicum. Without their later period prominence, we would possibly not have been aware of the existence in earlier

periods when these were still small settlements. Apart from these larger villages, another handful of villages and towns is known through surveys and the Dura Papyri. But it remains an open question how the rural settlement landscape developed, and how many more of these small settlements could have dotted the landscape between the cities described above. The few windows offered for instance by the Land of Carchemish Project (along the Sajur, Amarna and middle Euphrates rivers) and the surveys in the Balikh and Khabur valleys, give contrasting pictures. Around Europos we see a dispersal and intensification of settlements away from tell sites, comparable to what happened in the Antiochene. This also includes expansion of settlement into previously less densely or entirely unsettled regions. As settlement took an additional upswing from the late second to early third centuries, the total settled area more than doubled. The authors explain this as the result of increased security in the region as the frontier was pushed further east.³⁸³ This differs considerably from the waning villages along the Khabur and Balikh rivers – a clear indication that there are always more factors in play in settlement pattern development than agricultural feasibility alone. The urban and non-urban worlds, furthermore, did not necessarily follow the same path.

³⁸³ Newson, 'The Carchemish Region between the Hellenistic and Early Islamic Periods', 193-194, 199.

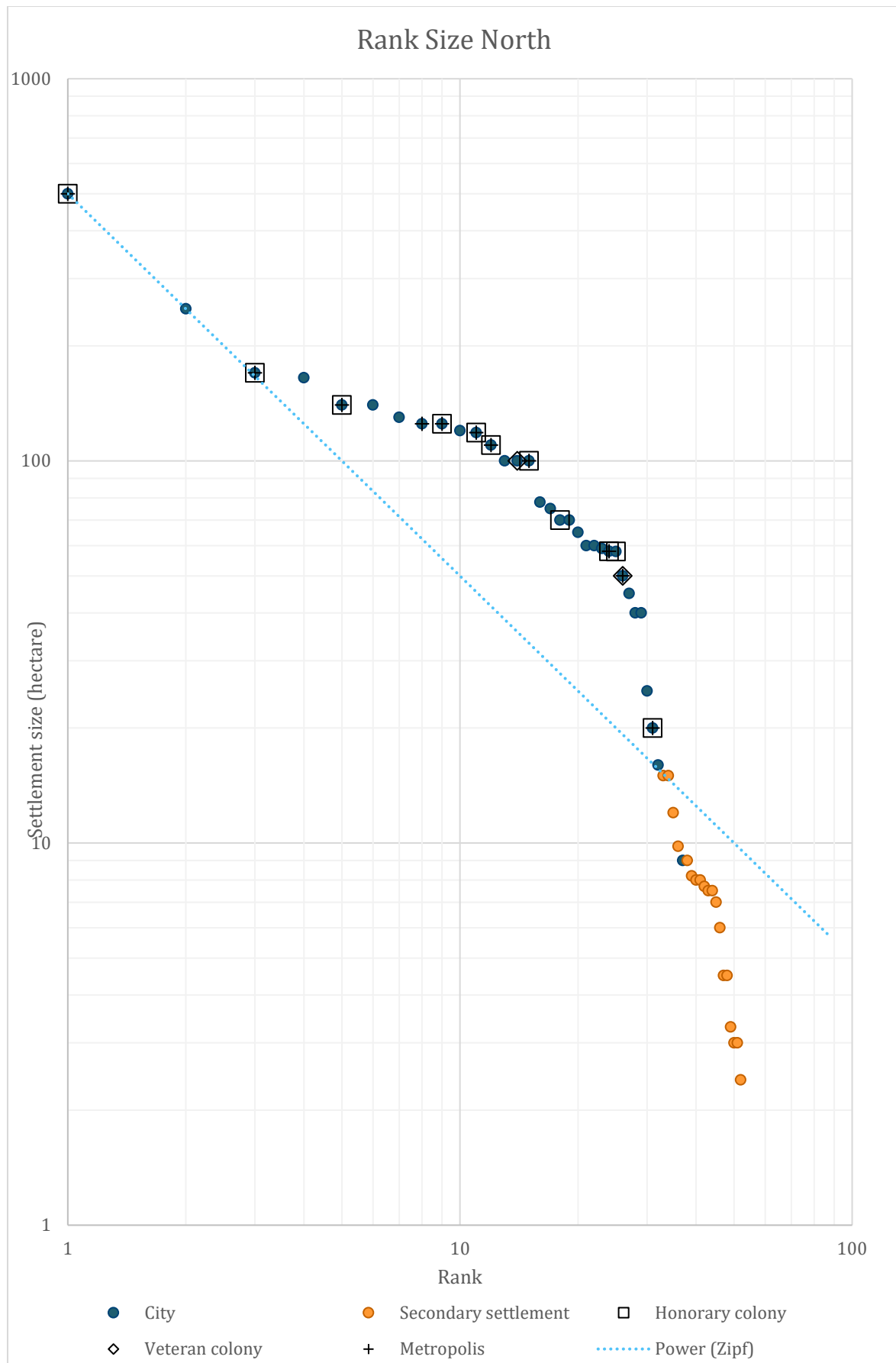


Figure 19 Rank-Size graph northern provinces

1.3.3 Settlement-size distribution

Figure 19 shows the rank-size distribution for the cities of the provinces of Syria Phoenice, Syria Coele and Mesopotamia combined. It shows both those settlements identified in the sections above as self-governing communities, as well as settlements lacking urban status but likely still performing some of the functions of a central place. As discussed in the introduction, because such settlements have only been identified to a limited degree within the Levant, the latter are mostly limited to the Antiochene and those parts of the Decapolis falling within Syria Coele, more on which will be provided in chapter 2.3 below.

Some initial remarks can be made just on the basis of this rank-size plot. In the first place, we see a clearly concave distribution with a high representation among the 40 to 100 hectare size range. The upper tail of the distribution is relatively flat, and consists of the cities of the Tetrapolis and some of the larger regional centres of the three provinces. Note that the very large centre of Hatra is kept out of this distribution, as it should be considered a Parthian rather than a Roman city. In addition, as we use the Severan provincial borders, we also find a city like Caesarea Paneas in this set, which will be discussed in the next chapter both as a Hasmonean foundation and a Decapolitan city.

When taking status into account, the distribution furthermore gives insight into the urban hierarchy of the region. There is a clear divide with self-governing cities encompassing the upper size-range of the distribution (everything above 15 hectares) and secondary agglomerations the lower range, the exception being the city of Kifrin at 9 hectares. Cities with colonial status, both honorary and veteran colonies, are found throughout the whole range of self-governing cities from Singara at 20 hectares upwards. Those cities bearing the title of *metropolis* mostly had colonial status as well, and are therefore also found throughout the entire range of cities. While it was to be expected, it is also worthwhile to point out the absence of the type of large 'secondary' agglomerations as can be found for instance in Gaul that could be considered as cities in most aspects but name.³⁸⁴ In that sense, the rank-size graph does a good job in describing the hierarchy of the settlements studied, with a small upper tail of large regional centres, the bulge of middling sized self-governing cities, and a lower tail of secondary agglomerations.

Clearly, the distribution displayed in Figure 19 strongly departs from Zipf's law, a log linear distribution with a (close to) -1 coefficient often seen in modern period settlement distributions. From the vast literature dealing with the subject, it appears that Zipf's law (and deviations from

³⁸⁴ Pellegrino, 'The Urbanization of the North-Western Provinces of the Roman Empire', 102–6, 179, 230.

it) remains open to quite different interpretations.³⁸⁵ Put more strikingly by Paul Krugman, that “the rank-size rule is a major embarrassment for economic theory: one of the strongest statistical relationships we know, lacking any clear basis in theory”³⁸⁶ Adherence to Zipf’s law might indicate a high level of economic integration, or a society’s level of industrialisation, or the effect of random growth, or the result of perfect mobility, etc.³⁸⁷ A settlement distribution departing from that might then be caused by the inverse of any of those explanations (or, in the case of industrialisation, also by evolving into a post-industrial society), but just as often additional factors are suggested such as the under- or overinclusion of settlements (due to incomplete datasets as in for instance archaeology especially the smallest settlements are harder to detect, and therefore underrepresented, or because of inappropriate delimitation of study areas, either being too small or too large).³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Glenn R. Carroll, ‘National City-Size Distributions: What Do We Know after 67 Years of Research?’, *Progress in Human Geography* 6, no. 1 (1 March 1982): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913258200600101>; Jeff Luckstead and Stephen Devadoss, ‘Do the World’s Largest Cities Follow Zipf’s and Gibrat’s Laws?’, *Economics Letters* 125, no. 2 (November 2014): 182–86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2014.09.005>.

³⁸⁶ Paul R. Krugman, *Development, Geography, and Economic Theory* (MIT Press, 1997), 44.

³⁸⁷ George Kingsley. Zipf, *Human Behavior and the Principle of Least Effort: An Introd. to Human Ecology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pr., 1949); Fujita, Krugman, and Mori, ‘On the Evolution of Hierarchical Urban Systems’; Jan Eeckhout, ‘Gibrat’s Law for (All) Cities’, *The American Economic Review* 94, no. 5 (2004): 1429–51; Stephen H. Savage, ‘Assessing Departures from Log-Normality in the Rank-Size Rule’, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 24, no. 3 (March 1997): 233–44, <https://doi.org/10.1006/jasc.1996.0106>; Lena Sanders, ‘Regards scientifiques croisés sur la hiérarchie des systèmes de peuplement: De l’empirie aux systèmes complexes’, *Hiérarchies et croissances urbaines: Nouveaux regards sur les lois de Zipf et de Gibrat pour les villes*, 2013, 127.

³⁸⁸ Alessio Palmisano, ‘Confronting Scales of Settlement Hierarchy in State-Level Societies: Upper Mesopotamia and Central Anatolia in the Middle Bronze Age’, *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 14 (1 August 2017): 220–40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2017.05.029>.

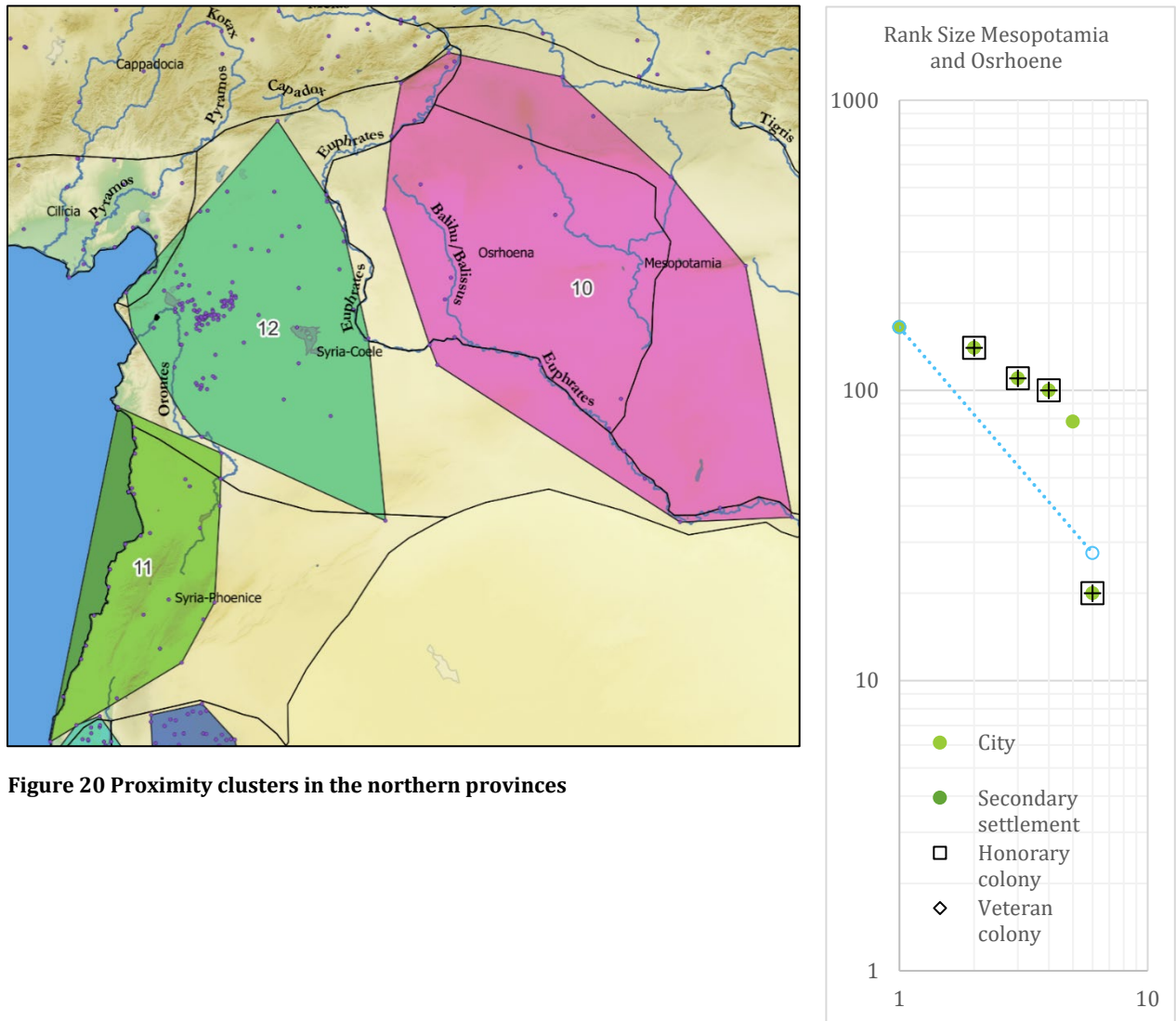
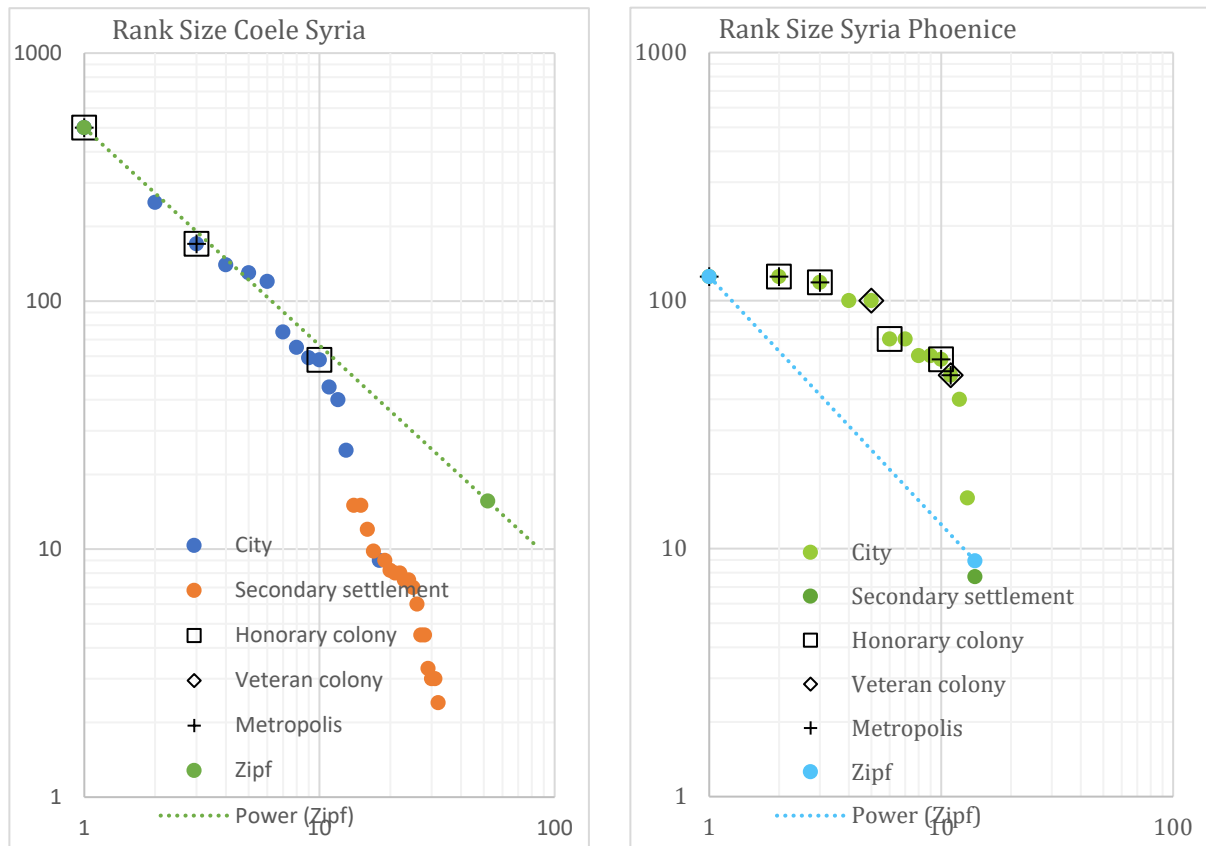


Figure 20 Proximity clusters in the northern provinces

For Roman Syria it is most certainly the case that the lower tail of the distribution is underpopulated. As indicated in the introduction, this is further complicated by the issue that modern application of Rank-Size analysis is based on population figures, while we have to make do with the physical extent of a settlement as a proxy for population size. Furthermore, logically, there is certainly a case to be made for system pooling, as we have combined the cities of several provinces. We get interesting results if we follow the example of Palmisano, and generate proximity clusters for the study area. Taking the best fit number of clusters using an elbow plot, we arrive at three clusters. In Figure 20, we can see that clusters 11 and 12 almost perfectly fit Syria Coele and Phoenice. Cluster 10 covers the settlements of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia. As such, in the following three rank-size plots we have split the region back down to its underlying provinces.³⁸⁹ In the first place, it is obvious that Mesopotamia and Osrhoene, even if taken together, have too few settlements with known sizes to allow for any meaningful insight into

³⁸⁹ See chapter 3.2.2.3 for the (only slightly different) distributions based on the proximity clusters rather than the provincial boundaries.

their distribution. Syria Phoenice remains strongly concave, and at this level we cannot interpret this as system pooling anymore. Perhaps it is a reflection of a lower level of integration due to



the high mountain ranges or the geographic distribution of arable land. However, Coele Syria shows a near-perfect fit to Zipf's law for its upper tail. If indeed adherence to this distribution says anything about economic integration, it would be here that we see it in practice. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 we will take a more detailed look in order to test this idea.