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Introduction: survey of the history of Antioch

The name 'Antioch' can denote three different areas: the walled city; the administrative region, comprising the surrounding countryside and its villages, extending perhaps as far as fifty miles from the city; the ecclesiastical diocese, whose vast extent is shown on the map.[1] This brief introductory survey is confined largely to the city. Succeeding chapters will spread wider to embrace cultural centres elsewhere in the diocese. The administrative region surrounding the city is not directly treated at all.

The geographical location of Antioch was in part the cause of its wealth and importance and was in part the cause of its eclipse. It was built in a fertile, well-watered region which controlled an important network of roads linking east with west and north with south. It was, however, situated on a geological formation which made it prone to severe earthquakes and the eventual southward extension of the city up the slopes of Mount Silpius rendered it dangerously vulnerable to attack from above. The combination of repeated destruction by earthquakes and the skilful use of the higher slopes of the mountain by the Persian invaders in the sixth century A.D. and the Arab invaders in the seventh ensured that despite its great commercial and military importance the rôle of Antioch as the key city of the eastern empire could not survive indefinitely.

The founding of Antioch shortly after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. formed part of a plan to secure north western Syria in the control of Seleucus Nicator, into whose hands this part of Alexander's immense territories fell. Seleucus had obtained Syria by force of arms, defeating Antigonus at Ipsus in 301 B.C. Antigonus had already begun to build a city in a strong position between the River Orontes and the Lake of Antioch, but Seleucus chose a new site about five miles to the south east, between the river and the north western slopes of Mount Silpius, named it after his father Antiochus, and brought to it a population composed of Athenians from the abortive city of Antigonia, some descendants of earlier settlers in the district and a large number of his own Macedonian soldiers with their wives and children. Within a century the male nucleus of the population is said to have comprised 6,000 men.[2] A great attraction of this site was the proximity of Daphne, less than ten miles down river to the south west, an

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area of remarkable natural beauty, endowed with springs and groves of trees and associated in local mythology with Herakles, Apollo, the maiden Daphne and the judgement of Paris. Daphne became a flourishing suburb of Antioch, eventually containing a stadium for Olympic games which rivalled those held in Greece.

Antioch had not originally been intended to be the capital of Syria. It took over this function from Seleucia on the Mediterranean coast at an unknown date and became the administrative and military centre of the region for the remainder of its history, excluding brief periods of disgrace in Roman times when it was stripped of its dignity after particularly bad displays of civil insubordination. Its rapidly-growing importance is indicated by the expansion of the city by Seleucus II during the mid-third century B.C., when it overflowed on to the island in the Orontes. As the river approaches Antioch from the north east it divides to enclose the island, which is rather less than a mile in length and half a mile in width. The river provided a good defensive boundary to the west of the city.

The growing influence of Rome in the eastern Mediterranean during the early second century B.C. was felt in Antioch when it received migrants from Greece, possibly refugees from Roman rule. Antiochus III (223–187 B.C.) supported Hannibal against Rome and paid for his support by being defeated by Roman forces in 190 B.C. and being subjected to the payment of heavy annual tribute. The influx of Greek migrants necessitated further expansion of the city, this time eastwards up the foothills of Mount Silpius. Under the Hellenizing zeal of Antiochus IV, Epiphanes (175–163 B.C.) Antioch began to earn the reputation for luxury and magnificence which later caused Ammianus Marcellinus to call the city 'the fair crown of the Orient'. The eastward extension of the city was given its own name, Epiphania, and was equipped with its own *agora* and public buildings. The first steps were at the same time taken to control the flow of the variable torrent named Parmenius, which in flood rushed down Mount Silpius through the city into the Orontes. Epiphanes built an aqueduct to carry this unpredictable stream through his new district of Epiphania to storage cisterns on the mountainside, before it was allowed to descend to the river. It is probable that the great half-finished Charonion bust carved in the stone of the mountainside was begun and abandoned at this period, possibly during a time of plague. The failure of Epiphanes' policy of Hellenization to integrate the Jews into his scheme to unite the Mediterranean seaboard gave rise to outbreaks of anti-Jewish rioting in Antioch, the earliest recorded instance of a phenomenon that was to persist for the next seven centuries. The increasing dominance of Rome brought with it a corresponding decline in the power of the Seleucid kings, to the point at which Antiochus VII (138–129 B.C.) was defeated by the Parthians on his eastern frontier. There followed a period of intrigue be-

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tween contenders for the throne during which Antioch could only decline further. Although Cicero described the city as renowned and populous and praised its reputation for scholarship and the arts, this cannot have amounted to much in comparison with what was to come during the Christian era. There were commercial links with the west through the port of Delos as an intermediary, but the political instability of the first century B.C. rendered commerce a risky venture. The uncertainties of life at Antioch during this period lends probability to the report that, when Tigranes of Armenia occupied Syria in 83 B.C., he did so at the invitation of Syrians who wanted security. But Tigranes' rule, whether begun peacefully or by force of arms, gradually lost its initial Hellenic character and resembled more and more that of an eastern despot. The removal of Tigranes with Roman help in 69 B.C. and a further brief period of intrigue and disorder in the city opened the way for Rome to take charge of an increasingly troubled region and bring it to order. The Seleucid era ended ignominiously.

Pompey entered Antioch in 64 B.C., taking Syria under Roman control while leaving to the Syrian cities a certain measure of freedom in their internal affairs. The council building at Antioch was repaired to fulfil this purpose, and the land held by the sacred grove at Daphne was extended. Taking advantage of the proximity of the Mediterranean seaport of Seleucia, of the network of great roads at the centre of which Antioch stood, and of the position of the city midway between east and west, Roman commercial activity soon flourished. The province of Syria was placed under the control of a proconsul. Antioch had not yet attained the immense military importance that it was to enjoy, but was already strong enough to withstand a siege in 51 B.C. by the Parthians, who had followed up a successful engagement with Roman forces three years earlier and had invaded Syria. The city supported Caesar against Pompey in 48 B.C. and was rewarded by notable additions to its public buildings, including the Kaisarion basilica at its centre. Caesar's aim was the Romanization of Antioch to succeed the older Hellenistic culture upon which the city had been founded. Symbolic of this was the erection of statues depicting the Fortune of Rome and Caesar himself. After Caesar's murder and the assumption of power by the triumvirate, Antony resided for a time in Syria with the object of raising money, and during his absence at Alexandria in 40 B.C., Syria was over-run by the Parthians, perhaps not with too great difficulty, for the Syrians welcomed Parthian rule as being more generous than that to which they had been accustomed. Antioch surrendered to the invaders and remained under their control for a year, until Antony's forces again gained the upper hand in Syria. Parthia continued to be a stumbling block to Antony's ambition to emulate the conquests of Alexander. After his marriage to Cleopatra, which probably took place in Antioch, Antony followed Alexander's footsteps eastwards, to be defeated by the Parthians in 39 B.C.

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The collapse of Antony's rule in the east and his suicide in 30 B.C. opened up new possibilities of prosperity in Antioch, as in the rest of the Roman world, now entering upon the *Pax Romana* of Augustus. During this period, Syria became an imperial province under a legate and a procurator resident in Antioch, with two or three legions stationed at this strategically-important point. The gift of new buildings, begun by Augustus and continued by Agrippa and Tiberius, proclaimed the dignity and magnificence of the city as one of the greatest in the empire. A main street running through the centre of Antioch, approximately from south west to north east, was constructed during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, adorned richly with colonnades and vaulted mosaic coverings over the crossings. Temples were built or restored, new theatres, baths and gates were provided, new statues set up, and works taken in hand to protect the city further from the Parmenius torrent descending Mount Silpius. In addition to this lavish expenditure on enriching the buildings of the city, Augustus instituted the Olympic games at Antioch, endowed to be held every four years, though this interval would vary in years to follow. At times the games would lapse altogether, as in A.D. 41, when financial maladministration caused their closure, until Claudius permitted their reinstatement thirteen years later. By the opening of the Christian era, Antioch was not only a city of architectural splendour and the major military centre of the eastern empire, but also the hub of the diplomatic balance which, throughout the Augustan age, maintained peaceful relations with Armenia and Parthia and with Rome's tributary states in the east. The effect of close contact with the east upon the religious and cultural life of the city will be noticed in later chapters.

Like every ancient city, Antioch was subject to severe damage by fire. During the period of Tiberius' enrichment of the city, great destruction was caused by fire in the district of Epiphania. In addition, Antioch suffered from frequent earthquakes. After such visitations the rebuilding was carried out at imperial expense, as in A.D. 37 when rebuilding was ordered by Caligula. On this occasion the opportunity was taken not merely to replace from public funds what had been destroyed but to improve on it. There was another earthquake of unknown date during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41–54), in which the great colonnade of the main street fell and three temples were destroyed. The frequency of such disasters played a considerable part in the irregularity of the Olympic games at Antioch.

During the reign of Nero (A.D. 54–68), the peace of Antioch was disturbed by anti-Jewish activity occasioned partly by long-standing gentile resentment at privileges accorded to Jews, such as exemption from military service and from worship of the emperor, and partly by widespread Jewish disaffection and eventually open revolt. Internal dissension among the Jews led to violence in Palestine, with massacres of Jews in Caesarea and Jeru-

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salem. In A.D. 66, Nero appointed Vespasian to govern Judaea, with large forces to enable him to maintain order. The effects of Jewish disorder were felt strongly in Antioch, where there was a large Jewish population, and an outbreak of arson in A.D. 70 endangered the whole city.

Trajan's policy of expansion, towards the end of his reign (A.D. 98–117), brought him to Antioch to plan his oriental campaigns. The city was his headquarters during his occupation of Armenia and Mesopotamia in A.D. 114/5, and it was during his residence in Antioch following these campaigns that the city suffered very severe earthquake shocks which caused great loss of life and destruction of buildings. The shocks were attributed to the anger of the gods against the influence of Christians in the city and gave rise to the outburst of persecution in which the bishop, Ignatius, was sent to his death in Rome and other Christians were executed in Antioch. The rebuilding of the area of the city that had been destroyed enabled improvements to be made in the water supply by means of new aqueducts in Antioch itself and in Daphne, dedicated in the presence of Hadrian in A.D. 129. Further notable additions to the buildings of the city were made later in the second century by Commodus when reinstating the Olympic games after a ban lasting six years. The ban had been imposed by Marcus Aurelius as punishment for Antioch's part in a brief rebellion by the governor of Syria, Avidius Cassius, during which he proclaimed himself emperor, but Commodus' love of sports led him to lift the ban and to extend further at public expense the life of pleasure to which most Antiochenes were devoted. He built a new running track and endowed the old Syrian orgiastic festival of Maiouma, which was held every three years in honour of Dionysus and Aphrodite. Public horse races and wild beast hunts were instituted and public funds were granted to the city to support mimes and dancers. Benefactions of this kind contributed to the popularity of the emperor concerned and to the entertainment of the citizens without making life more stable. The encouragement of public games strengthened the strongly political tendency of rival sporting factions in Antioch and indirectly added fuel to political rivalries which were always ready to burst into flame in a volatile, multi-racial city. On the death of Commodus in A.D. 192 there followed a rapid succession of brief reigns, each ending in bloodshed, and Septimius Severus found it necessary two years later to divide Syria into two administrative sections, Syria Coele and Syria Phoenicia, as well as to punish Antioch for its riotous conduct by depriving it of the title of Metropolis and temporarily transferring the Olympic games to Issus. Antioch did not regain the status of Metropolis until A.D. 212, when Caracalla, planning a Parthian campaign from Antioch, stood in need of popular support.

In A.D. 230 the Sassanid empire supplanted the old kingdom of Parthia, and from this date the new kingdom of Persia contributed a perpetual source of danger to the eastern Roman empire. While this necessarily

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added to the importance of Antioch as a military base, it also increased the fears of its inhabitants in the face of the growing threat from the east. As a counter-measure to Shahpur I's plans to annex Syria and Asia minor to his territories, a peace treaty in A.D. 249 did little to restore Antiochene confidence. There were seditious movements in the city which favoured Persia rather than Rome. When Shahpur invaded Syria in A.D. 253 and set fire to Antioch he was accompanied by an Antiochene renegade, Mariades, who had a following in the city. Prisoners were taken, settled in Persia, and increased in number after a second invasion in A.D. 260. Antioch was rebuilt by Valerian (253–60), who needed the city as his predecessors had done as a base from which to organize a campaign against Persia. A new element in the defence of the city was the fortification of the island in the Orontes. Valerian's move against Persia was ill-fated, for not only did the Persians defeat his army in A.D. 260, but they captured Valerian himself in company with a large number of prisoners. The treatment of prisoners on this occasion, as in A.D. 253, was generous: they were settled in Persia and allowed to build their own churches and monasteries. Shahpur was anxious to make use of the knowledge and skill that he believed would be found among Antiochene prisoners.

The apparent weakness of Rome in face of Persia led Odeinath, prince of Palmyra, to assert his independence of Rome. Being given command of a combined Roman and Palmyrene army for use against Persia, he used it to secure his own hold over a large part of Syria, and although he was assassinated in A.D. 266/7, his wife Zenobia maintained Palmyrene domination over the region and became in effect ruler of Antioch. On the accession of Aurelian (A.D. 270–5), she proclaimed her complete independence of Rome, and her son Wahballath assumed the title of Augustus in 271, but in the following year Zenobia's forces were driven from Antioch and destroyed and she was sent to Rome for public display.

The stability of the eastern empire was restored, and that of Antioch with it, by the great administrative ability of Diocletian (A.D. 284–305), under whose direction civil government, finance and defence were reorganized. A peace treaty with Persia was concluded in A.D. 298. The fortified Orontes island was rebuilt to include an imperial palace and the city was equipped with new baths, arms factories and granaries. During the reign of Diocletian the 'great' persecution of Christians began in 303, lasting until long after Diocletian's death. The course of the persecution in Antioch is outlined by Eusebius, as part of his narrative of the events leading up to the inauguration of the Christian empire under Constantine (A.D. 306–37). Although it was early in the reign of Constantine that Shahpur II succeeded to the throne of Persia, an event which marked the beginning of increasing tension between the two empires as Shahpur planned to win back the territories lost under the treaty of 297, it was not until A.D. 334 that the first

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aggressive move was made by the Persians in occupying Armenia. Throughout the intervening years Antioch had been of cardinal importance as the base at which the Roman army was built up and equipped. Antioch was also important ecclesiastically, and Constantine enriched the city with an octagonal Great Church which he did not live to see completed. The magnificent building, with its central octagon surrounded by side-aisles and surmounted by a golden dome was built on the Orontes island near the royal palace, for the emergence of the new Christian empire had in no way weakened the religious importance of the emperor. The Christian emperor was not only, as Constantine put it, the bishop responsible for those outside the Church, but assumed responsibilities within the Church as well, as the Christians found in the emperor's attempts to solve the problems created by the Arian controversy. Antioch was drawn into the controversy at an early date. The great council of Nicaea in 325 originated in a council which met at Antioch the previous year, ostensibly to elect a successor to bishop Philogonius but mainly to combat the threat of Arianism. The new bishop, Eustathius, soon gave offence to the empress Helena, and was removed by a council convened at Antioch under the chairmanship of Eusebius. Civil disorder followed his removal and troops were called in to put down the rioting. A further council met at Antioch in A.D. 333 to investigate charges of magical practice made against Athanasius, of which he was cleared in his absence. The determination of the Persian emperor Shahpur to win back Syria, and his policy of persecution of Christians in his realms, disturbed the peace of the east during Constantine's last years. The problems concerning the maintenance of a very large army at Antioch, aggravated by a famine in A.D. 333, aroused serious discontent in the city. The emperor's eldest son, Constantius, was sent to the city to raise morale shortly before the Persians moved to occupy Armenia as the first step towards invading Syria. From A.D. 337, when Constantius succeeded his father, the emperor spent much of his time at Antioch, concerned with either military or ecclesiastical affairs and enriching the city with new buildings. At the dedication in 341 of the Great Church, Constantius emulated his father in presiding over a council at which new creeds were drafted, one of which was probably associated with the name of Lucian the martyr. Despite the disturbances in Antioch arising from the emperor's resistance to Persian expansion and from the acrimony attendant upon his acceptance of the Arian heresy, Antioch flourished during his reign. Its economic prosperity was aided by the opening in A.D. 346 of a new harbour at Seleucia Pieria to receive military supplies. The possibility of economic hardship was not far from Antiochene minds, however, for in 354 it was the fear of famine that drove the inhabitants to petition the tyrannical Caesar Gallus, who was at Antioch during Constantius' absence in Gaul, to alleviate the distress they thought was approaching. Gallus ordered a reduction in wheat prices, which was

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opposed by interested parties. Price control was not put into effect and rioting followed. The anticipated famine began to be felt but Gallus failed to counteract it, which resulted in renewed civil violence and arson. Gallus was with difficulty removed from the city on the emperor's orders and executed. Constantius imposed punishments upon those who had been associated with Gallus' four years of misrule, and upon the city as a whole. Attempts to avert open war with Persia were fruitless. Approaches had been made in A.D. 355, but Shahpur's demands could not be met and the Persian army occupied Mesopotamia. Constantius directed his Persian campaign from Constantinople, threatened not only from the east but also from the west, where the Caesar Julian had been proclaimed emperor by his troops in Gaul and was marching eastwards. Constantius' death in 361 saved the empire from civil war.

Julian's intention to restore the eastern empire to its earlier Hellenism was soon put into effect. Expecting that the Christian Church would tear itself to pieces if given scope to do so, he proclaimed freedom of religion and encouraged the return of the orthodox who had been exiled by Constantius in the interest of state Arianism. Throughout much of Julian's realm his tolerance had the effect of drawing opposed parties together rather than separating them further, except in Antioch, where hostility between ecclesiastical parties needed little encouragement from the emperor to keep it flourishing. Orthodox and Arians had long been bitterly divided and remained so. The fact that Antioch was an ancient centre of Hellenistic culture led Julian to concentrate his attention upon the city. He removed the body of St Babylas from the martyrium at Daphne, where Gallus had caused it to be reburied, an action which was soon followed by the burning of the temple of Apollo which stood on the same site. Christians were blamed for the fire and the Great Church was closed and suffered confiscation of its liturgical vessels. Julian's hopes of a pagan revival in Antioch came to little. He found the population to be cool towards his policy and became disillusioned, expressing his contempt for the city in his satirical *Misopogon*. The presence of a large Jewish population at Antioch gave Julian hope that the city would provide a centre from which he could win widespread support of Jews for his anti-Christian policy, but this again came to little. It is fruitless to speculate on the length to which Julian's Hellenizing would have been pressed if he had reigned longer. Antioch was the base for the Persian campaign which he hoped would re-establish the prestige of Rome in the east. He carried out sweeping reductions in the number of palace dignitaries and officers, but the presence of a large army ensured high prices, and the hardship arising from these was accentuated in A.D. 360 by famine. Julian remitted taxes and introduced reforms of the city senate to encourage wider sharing of financial burdens. A drought in A.D. 361/2 caused a further failure of the wheat crop, and Julian's newly-

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appointed senators were more eager to use the economic situation to their own financial advantage than to serve the city, hoarding grain in order to raise prices. Julian reformed the currency and introduced a scheme of publicly-owned land in an attempt to encourage cultivation, but proper cultivation did not take place. Disaffection was felt not only among the citizens but also within the army, and even within the Imperial Guard itself, as a result of Julian's refusal to employ Christians. Julian left Antioch early in A.D. 363 after less than three years of misunderstanding and hostility. His death in battle later in the same year marked the end of organized paganism in the eastern empire, though it continued to flourish strongly in individual areas.

Valens (A.D. 364–78) contributed much to the architectural beauty of Antioch, building the forum of Valens over the Parmenius torrent by channelling the stream through vaulting, above which were erected porticos and finely-decorated ceilings. His ecclesiastical policy was to restore the state Arianism of Constantius' reign, and he subjected the orthodox in Antioch and its surroundings to a rigorous persecution which was alleviated towards the end of his reign on the advice of the pagan Themistius. Arianism was now becoming a spent force in the east, though it continued elsewhere in the empire, and never again was it to form the basis of imperial policy in ecclesiastical affairs. Theodosius I (A.D. 379–95) at once restored orthodoxy, imposing penalties upon heretics and giving back the Great Church at Antioch to the orthodox as their metropolitan church. Economic distress and its attendant disorders were not so readily dealt with. From A.D. 382 to 384 the effects of famine were exacerbated by severe taxation. Senators were impoverished by the demands of public expenditure and public office was something to be avoided if possible. Disloyalty, neglect and oppression on the part of imperial officers caused Libanius to address the emperor on the subject of penal reform. Outbreaks of violence in Antioch in A.D. 387 followed the imposition of yet heavier taxation, leading to an attack upon imperial statues which was tantamount to an attack upon the emperor in person. Fierce punishment followed, in which Antioch was for the third time in its history deprived of its status as Metropolis in favour of Laodicea and stripped of its military supremacy. Its places of entertainment were closed and the distribution of free bread suspended. Senators were imprisoned, and bishop Flavian had to intercede with the emperor to secure the lifting of the penalties. During the reign of Theodosius II (408–50) a visit by the empress Eudocia, while on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in A.D. 438, was the occasion of the extension of the southern wall of the city to take in a further half square mile of new ground, with erection of new buildings, including a basilica and a new gate on the road to Daphne.

The threat to the religious peace of the east was by the fifth century the Monophysite doctrine of the single divine-human nature of Christ. The

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Emperor Leo I (A.D. 457–74) supported the orthodox doctrine of the council of Chalcedon, but in Antioch his policy was threatened when Peter the Fuller seized the bishopric in the absence of the orthodox bishop Martyrius. Peter was imprisoned, but shortly afterwards returned to the bishopric during the brief reign of Basiliscus, to be put to flight again on the accession of Zeno (A.D. 474–91). Antioch was the scene of perpetual violence during Zeno's reign. His orthodox bishop, Stephen, was murdered in A.D. 479. Two years later his army commander, Illus, began gaining favour in Antioch in preparation for rebellion against the emperor, calling orthodox Christians and pagan Hellenists to unite under his banner. Avoiding the appearance of ambition, Illus proclaimed Leontius emperor at Tarsus, and Leontius installed his court and army in Antioch in A.D. 484. The usurper was defeated four years later by Zeno, whose closing years were marked by extreme violence between rival mobs in Antioch. The succeeding emperor, Anastasius (A.D. 491–518), despite his ability as a reforming administrator and the harsh discipline he imposed, found it almost impossible to maintain order in the city. Lawless mobs attacked Jews and destroyed their buildings, and an army of Monophysite monks invaded the city in an attempt to unseat the orthodox bishop Flavian II, to be beaten off by a combined force of orthodox monks and citizens. Justin I (A.D. 518–27) was as able a ruler as Anastasius and fared little better. Antioch was out of control of any but rival mob leaders. It is clear that, by the beginning of the sixth century, the city was set on a course which led irreversibly to its destruction. Civil disorder obliged Justin to discontinue the Olympic games in A.D. 520. A succession of terrible fires during 525 was followed by a very severe earthquake in the following year, at a time when the city was crowded with visitors for the feast of the Ascension. There was immense loss of life as almost the whole city was destroyed and, amid the fires which usually followed an earthquake, the citizens looted and murdered. Rebuilding and rescue work were set in progress by the emperor, but earthquakes continued until A.D. 528, when the city was again destroyed. A severe winter following this disaster caused starvation which imperial gifts of food attempted to alleviate. Once again the rebuilding of Antioch was taken in hand.

From A.D. 528 fighting had broken out on the Persian frontier. Arab forces in the service of the Persian emperor reached the outskirts of Antioch during the following year and were beaten back, taking with them slaves and loot, after which there were annual campaigns fought against the invaders by a Roman army depleted by the transfer of troops to Italy. In 540 the Persians again reached Antioch in the course of an extended raid designed to collect loot. The emperor Justinian (A.D. 527–65) sent Germanus to defend the city, whose walls were still only partly repaired after earthquake damage. There was no time to repair the walls completely