

ANTIOCH ON THE ORONTES

An Introduction

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ANTAKYA BITTI, READ a message from my friend Hakan Boyaci on February 12, 2023. “Antioch is over.” Only six days earlier a 7.8M earthquake and hundreds of aftershocks had leveled vast tracts of the city, toppled countless buildings, killed thousands of people, and left a trail of horrific destruction from Aleppo to Kahramanmaraş. Hakan, Hatice, Iskender, are but some of the many whose lives have been forever impacted by the calamity. Stories of horror, fear, destruction, looting, and incredible tenacity ultimately rehash a well-known trope.

Take May 29th of the year 526, for instance. It was just another ordinary day in the life of Antioch. People were milling around going about their lives. Some presumably hastening to do their shopping or strolling along the city’s boulevards, others killing time playing a board game, some others were enjoying the pleasures of parenting, struggling to keep their kids away from Antioch’s notoriously bad wheeled traffic (Figure 1.1). After departing from the grand church of Constantine and the ancient apostolic church, where they had commemorated the Ascension of Christ, some hoped that the recent conflagration that had afflicted the city the previous year had finally quelled. They held onto the belief that perhaps the divine displeasure, stirred by the city’s persistent religious discord, had subsided. Soon after plazas and thoroughfares had started to clear, the ground rumbled. In an instant, a powerful earthquake cracked the streets, flattened homes, triggered landslides, scorched trees, and disintegrated public buildings. Registering an estimated magnitude of 7.0, the quake jolted the city in all of its parts, leaving a trail of devastation from north to south. Thousands of people lost their lives. No sooner had the rescuers started to move cautiously



Figure I.1 Yakto (Daphne) Megalopsychia Mosaic, detail of the framework. Courtesy of the Antioch Expedition Archives, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University; Princeton.

among crumbled buildings than new tremors began; the dread that the worst of the shaking was far from over loomed large. In an unfortunate turn of events, aftershocks rattled the community for over a month, and more destruction was ahead. Indeed, this event was the last of a long string of tremors that had shaken the Antioch basin from time immemorial. Just another day in the life of Antioch.

Seismic events, floods, and fires in Antioch demolished buildings, buried vast tracts of the urban fabric, and altogether introduced the notion of the “lost city,” a characterization that gained much traction after Christine Kondoleon’s seminal 2000 exhibition. Instead, I and the authors in this volume are in agreement that, if anything, environmental downturns foregrounded the city’s resilience and energies, reoriented its governance, and paved the way for new social forces, while relentlessly modifying the city’s skyline. Simply put, in the overturning of order that the Greek word *kata strophe* entails, Antioch invariably succeeded in finding a new course of action. All too often on her knees, the Tyche (the iconic divine fortune of Antioch on this book’s cover) got back up and did it again. We have plenty of reasons to believe that it will be just like that after the recent events of February 2023.

Lest the discussion of the forces of nature take the upper hand, this book captures the nucleation, growth, and evolution of Antioch and its transformation during the classical epoch and Late

Antiquity; the people, their agency, as well as political and religious outlook, as it also resonated in the city’s visual culture, take center stage in this collection of essays. Antioch on the Orontes is the most significant and continuously occupied major city of the eastern Mediterranean. The description of the historical continuum, however, hardly captures the impact that this community had on the ancient world, hence this book delves deeply into themes that further the discourse of Antioch and its society and how a modest Seleucid colony went on to becoming one of the most prominent cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, both culturally and politically. Not surprisingly, a host of research initiatives are now casting new light on Antioch, and courses on the city and its society are being taught at universities in North America. Thus there has never been a better time for a comprehensive treatment of the material culture, ecology, and religion of a city which changed the ancient world in fundamental ways. This book aims exactly at that. Of course, the riveting, multi-layered character of this unique community has been previously addressed by decades of scholarship. The seminal works of P. Petit and J. W. Liebeschuetz have placed much emphasis on life at the time of Libanius and John Chrysostom, while the material record of and opulence of Antioch houses, as shown by studies on the extraordinary finds of the 1930s Princeton

excavations, has brought to the fore the exquisite craftsmanship of 300+ pavements scattered across America and France.¹ In particular, these archaeological collections give us a glimpse of a city that played a fundamental role in the shaping of politics and cultures in the Greek and Roman East for more than a millennium. Although most of the monuments that this venture had set out to explore were missed, its cumulative – and complicated – archaeological record still entices throngs of scholars. Pavements, sculpture, coins; these are the media that writ large have attracted most of the scholarly attention. Today, as this book shows, we unpack new gripping stories of agency, patronage, and viewership. But what did Antioch on the Orontes look like? And what about the conglomerate of ethnicities that made up its constituency and shaped the built environment in fundamental ways? Further, how did the community cope with a particularly frail ecology? This volume tackles these core-questions and offers new exciting vistas into the textual and material records of Antioch.

What is more, the volume furthers our understanding of Antioch's topography. With a new set of maps and discussions that zero in on the city's fortifications and water supply systems, Antioch reveals the incessant transformation of its built environment, finally parting company with Glanville Downey's idealized map of the city, all too often used as a measure and compass of the city's materiality. The disappearance of the so-called island, a quarter populated by Antiochus III Epiphanes (241–187 BCE) which was later the seat of the imperial palace from the days of Galerius onward, has been recently brought to the fore by recent scholarship.² The data presented here, however, make it possible to now wed the topography of the city (Plate I.1) with previously undocumented infrastructural systems and, ultimately, interpretative frameworks.

Antioch's vast literary repertoire, primarily Late Antique, of course affords glimpses into the here and now of life in the city, but it is

hardly a coherent narrative. More to the point, the voices of the actors that made Antioch are missing. Where did most Antiochenes live? Do Libanius' letters inform the daily routines of Antioch's 99 percent of the population? It helps to stress the meager numbers of inscriptions – less than a hundred – that inhibit the braiding together of stories of families, notables, and the folks at large who inhabited the city. But Antioch is also a perfect case study of a border town inhabited by diverse populations. Greeks, Romans, Jews, Persians, Arabs, and Armenians are some of the constituencies that shaped the fabric and the history of this city.

The urban collage that Antioch once was is the rub. Previous scholarship has emphasized the chasm between the city's fragmented materiality and the wealth of textual sources. In 1961, Glanville Downey wrote a history of Antioch that, though essential, shunned the archaeological record of the Princeton Excavations (1932–1939). Overall, this project produced a modest publication series, limited definition of the city's topography, and a staggering archaeological collection that is now accessible through two digital platforms. The mosaics, of course, are the centerpiece of the assemblage; Doro Levi and Christine Kondoleon have each ushered in new vistas onto the study of these materials, and two essays in this volume draw on this important work.³

To be sure, Antioch is much more than mosaics. Liebeschuetz's 1972 seminal study on the city's society and economy in the fourth century CE has reoriented the discussion toward the people of Antioch.⁴ In the United States, a research team has been conducting new work on republishing the material excavated from the city in the 1930s by Princeton using never before studied objects from the Princeton University Art Museum and the archives of field notes, maps, and photographs. In Europe, a new initiative has been culling sources from every period about the city's topography to produce a new

Lexicon Topographicum Antiochenum. In the last decade, archaeological teams have remapped the city and its walls, and surveyed its hinterlands, while stand-alone studies by Gunnar Brands (in German) and Catherine Saliou (in French) have greatly advanced the discourse of Antioch during Late Antiquity.⁵ Meanwhile the 2014 *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 15 on Syria has produced a new remarkable synthesis of Antioch's history (in German).⁶ I have personally contributed to this picture of scholarly vitality through my 2016 *Ancient Antioch* volume (published by Cambridge University Press) and the 2021 *History of Antioch*, co-written with Asa Eger and covering the city from its origins to the Ottoman period.⁷ What is more, Kristina Neumann's study of the city's numismatic record offers new compelling evidence of the role of the local mint vis-à-vis imperial coinage, while Lucy Parker's study on St. Symeon the Younger greatly furthers our understanding of sixth century Antioch.⁸ In sum, the scholarly discourse of Antioch of the last two decades could not be more vibrant. Truth be told though, the general reader and the students of archaeology, history, and religious studies are not navigating this literary landscape with ease. Nor are the scholars who may not have access to literature in German, French, Italian, and Turkish. This theme-based survey of Antioch's society and built environment is a reference work that will supplement the main textual sources. It illustrates key themes, and is both concise and user-friendly; more importantly, it is a versatile compendium for a reasonably wide variety of teaching needs.

DESCRIPTION

This book offers several contributions to the study of Antioch. Each of these is grounded in dominant themes and connects periods of the city's long history. Foundation, ecology, topography, political orientation, religion, demographics,

sieges, decline, reception: these are but some of the questions that the city still poses and altogether some of the themes that the book sets out to explore. Overall, this project draws on a vast body of modern research, literature, and images to inform the built environment of ancient Antioch, the agency that shaped it in fundamental ways, and its main intellectual currents. This approach will revive Downey and others' work by infusing it with new cultural horizons as well as revised hypotheses on the town and its people based on its material manifestations, religious realities, and literary presentations. It thus offers a novel, holistic treatment of Antioch that purports to illustrate the history and society of the classical and post-classical city in full, from the days of the Seleucid foundation to the Islamic conquest. The latter is an ideal yardstick to bookend this project, but by no means the history of the city, as Eger shows in Chapter 30.

Overall, the main themes of the book are:

1. The discussion of the negotiation between the natural environment and the fabric of the city;
2. Antioch's rich textual record: sources and problems;
3. A narrative on the nucleation, formation, and growth of the capital city from Seleucid enclave to provincial capital;
4. The visual culture of the capital, from its Hellenistic underpinning to the forging of a local artistic currency;
5. The fortifications and water infrastructure of the city;
6. Antioch's coinage from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity;
7. A focus on the multilayered and cosmopolitan character of the city;
8. The army in Antioch;
9. The discussion of cultural and religious change in the city, with new insights on long standing debates;
10. The churches of Antioch;

- 11. Environmental downturns and survival of the city in the sixth century; and
- 12. The reception of classical and post-classical Antioch in the Islamic era.

A new visual apparatus that especially illustrates the fortifications and the water systems, as well as archival images which have never before appeared in print offer unprecedented vistas onto Antioch’s built environment. But the people of Antioch as a body ultimately take center stage in this book. The same people who have shown, time and again, incredible determination and wrestled the survival of their home against the forces of nature.

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NOTES

1 Petit (1955, xii); Liebeschuetz (1972).

2 De Giorgi and Eger (2021).

3 See “The Excavation of Antioch-on-the-Arantes 1932–1939” available at: <https://vrc.princeton.edu/researchphotographs/s/antioch/page/introduction> and <https://ochre.lib.uchicago.edu/antioch/>.

4 Liebeschuetz (1972).

5 Saliou (2012); Brands (2016).

6 Todt and Vest (2014).

7 De Giorgi (2016); De Giorgi and Asa Eger (2021).

8 Neumann (2021); Parker 2022.

Part I

BEGINNINGS

Chapter 1

THE HISTORY OF ANTIOCH

Written Sources: A Survey

Catherine Saliou

AMONGST THE WRITTEN sources¹ pertaining to the history of Antioch, there are a few primary documents such as inscriptions, papyri, or archival records. Literary texts are much more numerous. Ancient historians mention Antioch because major events took place there; they show that the city was a place of power, but they tell us nothing about the urban fabric and the life of the inhabitants. More interesting to us are texts pertaining to issues concerning the city itself. Lastly, works written in Antioch or in its surroundings are primary sources on the cultural history of the city, and contain first-hand information about certain episodes, monuments, or traditions and legends. Taken as a whole, these texts are mostly dated to Late Antiquity, from the middle of the fourth century to the beginning of the seventh century CE. However, even the most recent authors may have relied on much older sources, now lost. Moreover, some of them write narratives going back before the foundation of the city. It can be tempting to rely on such sources to write a continuous history of Antioch from its origins. Such was Glanville Downey's project in his book *A History of Ancient Antioch* (1961).² But the authors who relate past events or use ancient texts are likely to reinterpret or reformulate them according to their specific agendas. That is why we will adopt a chronological presentation of the sources here.³ We will include Daphne in this survey, as its history is intertwined with that of Antioch.

FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE CITY TO THE THIRD CENTURY CE

No contemporary source relates the foundation of Antioch and only a few texts of the Hellenistic period give some insights on the city. The first written proof of its existence is a relation of Ptolemy II's expedition at the beginnings of the third Syrian war in 246 BC (*BNJ* 160): its author mentions a gate and "people of the gymnasium."⁴ At least from the beginnings of the second century BCE, as Antioch became the unique capital of the Seleucid kingdom, the city must have been a center of literary production, but this production is lost. A letter of Antiochus III, dated to 189, pertains to the appointment of a chief priest for the sanctuaries of Daphne (*IGLS* 3, 2, 992). Polybius (30, 25–27) describes a parade organized by Antiochus IV in Daphne in 166. A biography of the philosopher Philonides of Laodiceia (fl. 175–150), courtier of Antiochus IV and Demetrius I, records discussions led in a house near the palace in Antioch (*P. Herc.* 1044, XXVII, 1.11).⁵ The first Book of the Maccabees accounts a riot in 145 during which the Antiochean populace besieged the king Demetrius II in his palace (*I Maccabees* 11. 45–49).⁶

After the end of the Seleucid monarchy in 63 BCE, Antioch became the capital of the Roman province of Syria. Julius Caesar lists prodigies recorded in the Roman East in 48 BCE, during his war against Pompey. One of them occurred in Antioch. The incident shows that the city was walled (*Bellum Civile* 3, 105). However, it is not until the Augustan period that the city begins to have some consistence in the literary texts. Livy (41, 20, 9) mentions the temple of Jupiter "Capitolinus" built by Antiochus IV at Antioch. Pompeius Trogus, a Livy's contemporary whose work is known thanks to a later epitome (Justin *Epitome* 39, 2, 5), mentions a temple of Jupiter in his account of the reign of Alexander Zabinas (128–123 BCE).⁷

The first comprehensive description of the city is owed to Strabo (16, 2, 4–5). The chronological

position of this description is not easy to define, as Strabo continued to write or revise his *Geography* during Tiberius's reign, until 23, but his source may be, for the whole passage, the philosopher Posidonius (ca 135–ca 51 BCE).⁸ In such case, his testimony is all the more important as Posidonius is a native of Apamea, not far from Antioch. He calls Antioch a *tetrapolis* (quadruple city), "since it consists of four parts," each of them being walled by its own wall and by a common wall, founded respectively by Seleucus I, "the multitude of settlers," Seleucus II, and Antiochus IV (16, 2, 4). Strabo adds that the city is the *metropolis* of Syria and includes a palace which is the residence of the rulers. According to him, Seleucus's foundation was a synoecism, as the king gathered the inhabitants of Antigonia, founded by his rival Antigonus and destroyed by himself, and the descendants of the hero Triptolemus, sent from Argos in search of Io (16, 2, 5). He devotes a few lines to Daphne and its sacred grove (16, 2, 6). He is also aware of legends regarding the Orontes (16, 2, 7). Some of the main elements of the urban identity of Antioch throughout centuries are therefore already present in this description.

Flavius Josephus is the most important source of the Flavian period (70–96). A member of the Judean priestly class, he rallied to Vespasian during the Judean War, and he wrote in Rome his historical works, the *Bellum Judaicum* between 75 and 79, then the *Antiquitates Judaicae* in 93/94. He relates the riot against Demetrius II and provides details on the urban context of the palace (Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 13, 136–139). In his narratives of the period of the civil wars or the reign of Herod, Antioch and Daphne appear several times as places to stay for rulers and men of power (Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 1, 185; 243; 328; *Antiquitates Judaicae* 17, 23–25). Josephus is the first author to mention the third rank of Antioch among the cities of the empire (*Bellum Judaicum* 3, 29). He is particularly interested in the Jewish community of Antioch, its rights, and the

consequences of the Judean revolt (*Bellum Judaicum* 7, 43–44; 47–48; 55; 61; 100; 107–111; *Antiquitates Judaicae* 12, 119–120). In this context he provides information on civic life and urban fabric in the years 66–70: the (unique?) synagogue, the agora, which he describes as “tetragonal,” the buildings that border it, and the theater, used as a meeting place for civic assemblies. He is also the first author to mention the main street. According to him, its length was 4 km when Herod paved and equipped it with a portico (*Bellum Judaicum* 1, 425; *Antiquitates Judaicae* 16, 148). At the very beginning of the second century, the orator Dio Chrysostom, promoting his own project of embellishments in his city of Prusa (Bithynia), also mentions this street, to which he attributes a length of over 7 km. He seems to be referring to recent improvements to it (*Oration* 40, 11; 47, 16). Tacitus, who writes his historical works at the beginning of the second century, describes exhibition on the agora of the body of Germanicus, who died in 19 (*Annals* 2, 37, 5), and recalls the support given by the Antiocheans to Vespasian in 69 at the beginning of his ascension to imperial power, confirming on this occasion the function of the theater as a place of political assembly (*Histories* 2, 80, 1).

These sources, albeit allusive, imply a significant growth of the city between approximately 20 BCE and approximately 100 CE and testify to the importance of the relationship engaged between Antioch and Vespasian during the year 69. They are complemented by two groups of inscriptions, dated to the years 73–75, which let us know that during Vespasian’s reign two canals were built from the Orontes: one, “the channel of the fullers,” was dug by the Antiocheans themselves;⁹ the other, designated as *Dipotamia*, was excavated by Roman soldiers, and offered by the emperor to the city of Antioch.¹⁰ Moreover, the inscriptions concerning the “channel of the fullers” show that the city is organized into small units called *plintheia* (brick-frame), each bearing

a specific name. These *plintheia* are the city blocks laid out on a grid pattern typical for the Hellenistic foundations and partially visible on the contemporary map of the city. Their names provide hints about the population and about some features of the urban landscape.

On a different line, Antioch is featured in the *Acts of the Apostles*, written at the end of the first century. It is there that Jesus’s followers would have been named for the first time “Christians” (*Acts* 11, 26).¹¹ Some of first Christian texts, indeed, are written in Antioch, among them the works of two bishops, Ignatius, martyred under Trajan, and Theophilus, deceased after 180.¹²

Greek authors of the second and third centuries are not loquacious about the city. However, Pausanias the Periegete and Arrian are aware of a tradition localizing the transformation of the nymph Daphne pursued by Apollo into a laurel tree at the site of Daphne near Antioch (*BNJ* 156, f.87; Pausanias, 8, 20, 2; 8, 23, 5), and Pausanias, by naming the Antiocheans “the Syrians of the Orontes” throughout his work, points to the importance of the river in their shared imaginary.¹³ Moreover, he mentions, albeit in an allusive way, engineering works regarding navigability of the river conducted between approximately 162 and 166 (8, 29, 3–4).¹⁴ He credits the sculptor Eutychides with the statue of the Fortune of Antioch (6, 2, 7) and stresses the importance of the city which he equates with Alexandria (8, 33, 3). Lucian points out the taste of the Antiocheans for performing arts, particularly for dance (*De Saltatione* 76). Cassius Dio, writing his *Roman history* at the beginning of the third century, describes at length the earthquake of 115, which struck while Trajan was in Antioch. On this occasion, he refers to the hippodrome (68, 24–25). Philostratus was probably a courtier of Empress Julia Domna in Antioch. He seems to be the first author to style Antioch “the Great.” Referring to the relocation of the Daphne myth from Arcadia to Syria, he adds that the local river is named

Ladon after the Arcadian river-god, father of Daphne (Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1, 16). An inscription, unfortunately undated, confirms this point.¹⁵ Elsewhere he reminds conversations in the precinct of Apollo *Daphnaios* (Philostratus *Vitae Sophistarum*, pr.). A slightly later historian, Herodian, frequently mentions the city in his account of the years 180–238. He presents in the most developed way the cliché of Antioch as a large and vibrant city with a mild climate and abundant water, but also as the city of enjoyment par excellence, whose inhabitants are only concerned with festivals and shows, and may be prone to support an usurper (e.g., Herodian 2, 7, 9; 2, 14, 6; 6, 6). A record of a court petition gives more objective information. The request was presented to the governor of Syria on 28 August 245, while he was holding a hearing in Hadrian's baths (*P. Euphrat.* 1).¹⁶ This is the earliest written evidence of one of the many thermal buildings in the city.

The pre-fourth century sources only provide a few glimpses of urban realities, as well as some insights into the ways Antioch was viewed and the Antiochians themselves regarded their own past. Interest for the Antiochean past is also attested by a certain Pausanias of Antioch, who would have written in the second or third century a book about the founding and history of Antioch. His work is known exclusively by later quotations (*BNJ* 854).¹⁷

From the beginning of the fourth century, Antioch gains a new importance as a Christian city and as a capital. Texts written in or about Antioch become more and more numerous. From this point we can only present a selection of major sources, focusing those related to the urban space or urban life.

FROM THE FOURTH TO THE SIXTH CENTURY

In the historical works of Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (approximately 260–339), the Antiochean Church features from the Apostolic

period onward. In addition, Eusebius reports in his *Chronica* the construction of a public bath by Septimius Severus (p. 212, l. 1–2 Helm);¹⁸ and at the date of 281 (which is disputable), the founding of a “New Antioch” (p. 224, l. 7–8 Helm). This “New Antioch” must be identified with the “New (City)” of later sources, that is, the imperial quarter, built on an island in the Orontes.¹⁹ In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Antioch appears in the accounts of the reigns of Diocletian and Maximin as the scene of several martyrdoms and the establishment of a new pagan cult (Eusebius 8, 12, 2–5; 8, 13, 4; 9, 2–3; 9, 11, 5–6). In the *Praise of Constantine*²⁰ (9, 15) and *Life of Constantine*²¹ (3, 50, 2), Eusebius describes the Golden Church built in Antioch thanks to this emperor, which would be dedicated only in 341. Eusebius's *Chronica* has been continued at Antioch, for the years 325–350. This *Continuatio* is known only from quotations by later authors.²²

By the end of the reign of Constantius (337–361), sources become numerous. One of the most important authors is Libanius. Born in Antioch in 314, he dedicated himself to the rhetoric in his mid-teens. He pursued his studies in Athens from 336 to 340, and began his sophistic career in Constantinople, then moved to Nicaea, and soon to Nicomedia. In 349 he returned to Constantinople, but in 353 he decided to live in Antioch. From 354 to his death in 393, he taught rhetoric in his native city, first as a private teacher, but soon as the city's official sophist. In an age of religious changes, he remained a supporter of the polytheistic worship tradition. His surviving works are numerous and multi-faced: 64 speeches (*logoi*), addressed to the Antiocheans, to the members of the civic council, to his own students, to governors, to emperors; 1,544 letters; 51 fictive speeches on imaginary themes (*meletai*); and numerous preliminary exercises pieces (*progymnasmata*). Some of the *meletai* and *progymnasmata*, however, are