

## Introduction

And while [the emperor Trajan] was spending time in Antioch, an extraordinary earthquake occurred: even though many cities suffered, Antioch was by far the most unfortunate. For because Trajan was passing the winter in the city, and many soldiers and private individuals from all corners had gathered there for legal matters, embassies, commerce, and spectacle, not a single people group or land went unharmed – and thus in Antioch, the whole world under Roman control was shaken.

—Cassius Dio 68.24.1–2<sup>1</sup>

From the perspective of the historian Cassius Dio, there was no room for ambiguity in characterizing the ancient city of Antioch-on-the-Orontes in northern Syria. When an earthquake struck in 115 CE, the whole world under Roman rule suffered loss because of how many regions and ethnicities were represented in the stricken population. Other cities of Syria experienced damage, but Antioch endured the worst because the city played host to the Roman emperor as well as to a multitude of soldiers, civilians, sightseers, merchants, embassies, and plaintiffs from all over the ancient Mediterranean and Middle East. The city's attraction as a political, economic, and social center meant that a single earthquake sent shockwaves across an entire empire. In modern terms, Dio's portrayal of Antioch calls to mind a city like New York or London and the ramifications of a disaster hitting either location during a world summit.

Most ancient and modern descriptions agree with Dio in declaring Antioch a prominent metropolis of the ancient world, but these sources consistently struggle in capturing the vibrancy of the people and communities located within the city. One of the main reasons for this difficulty is the fact that as a city, Antioch's cultural, economic, and governmental infrastructure always consisted of a uniquely tangled and layered web of civic, regional, and imperial political authorities. Separating these various governing bodies from the residents themselves as they negotiated with the

<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own.

larger administrations is a daunting, yet necessary task if we wish to understand how Antioch and its people endured and evolved throughout antiquity. The goal of this study is therefore to unpack Antioch's complexity by exploring the gradations of imperial power and local agency, both of which are integral to the history of the city. This book investigates the intersection between space and authority: how Antioch as a place and the Antiochians as a community were shaped by different governmental bodies within the wider Hellenistic and Roman empires.

This objective is accomplished by integrating old evidence with new methodologies. Specifically, I argue that an innovative look at coins and their synthesis with other material related to Antioch can enhance our perspective of the city, its citizens, and the various powers that claimed them both. Using digital tools to explore the coinage helps to nuance traditional portrayals of Antioch's static importance as a capital by revealing true ebbs and flows in imperial use of the city. This approach also draws out the distinct identity and far greater agency of the local civic body than previously considered, and how it was both cultivated and called upon by the larger powers at work there and within the broader region. Dio was right to portray Antioch as an important city, but we must be careful in defining for whom, when, and why.

One undeniable factor contributing to Antioch's status as a consequential cosmopolitan center was its geography (see Fig. 0.1). Now known as Antakya in southern Turkey, the ancient city sat in a prime corner of northwestern Syria, nestled along the left bank of the Orontes River and partially built into the side of Mount Silpius. This position guaranteed Antioch's exposure to the full extent of Syria's landscape and the major thoroughfares running between the Mediterranean and territories further east as well as north and south through the Levant.<sup>2</sup> The Orontes River and the westward valley through which it flowed gave Antioch direct access to the Mediterranean and its coastal cities roughly a day's travel away.<sup>3</sup> An upward land route also connected the city to the sea via a plateau where its suburb and sanctuary of Daphne lay. To the south, the Orontes River linked Antioch to territory further inland toward Apamea in the upper Orontes Valley. To the northeast, the Orontes River fed into the Lake of Antioch, which watered the fertile Amuq Valley. This area provided the necessary agricultural land to supplement the less productive land directly

<sup>2</sup> For the environment of Antioch, see Downey 1961, 15–23, 46; Leblanc and Poccardi 1999, 91–93; Casana 2003, 33–44.

<sup>3</sup> See Str. 16.2.7; Lib. Or. 11.34, 41.

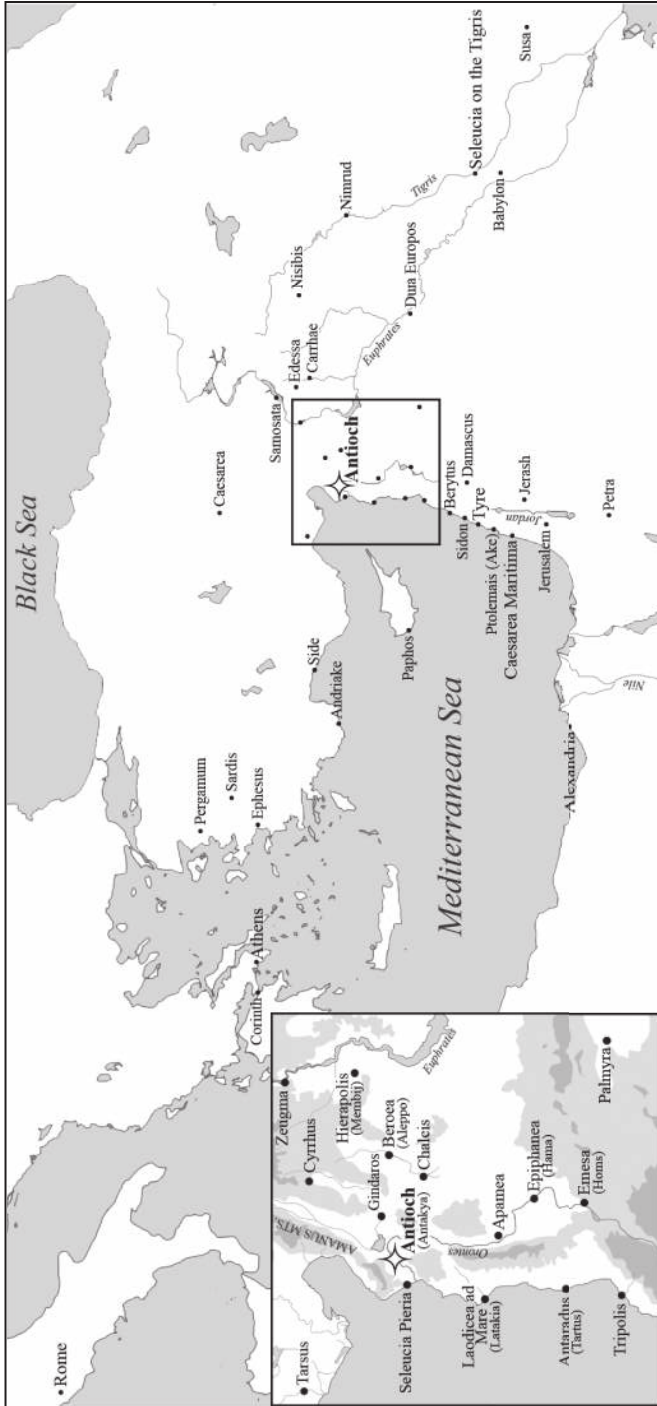


Fig. 0.1 A map of Antioch in its geographical context.

around Antioch. It also served as a major “gateway” for commercial and military traffic to and from inland Syria around Beroea (modern Aleppo) and further east. Access northwest to Cilicia and Asia Minor was somewhat limited by the Amanus and Taurus mountains, but the nearby Syrian Gates (Belen Pass) provided the major thoroughfare on the Syrian side and granted entry to the west.<sup>4</sup>

According to the opinion of Antioch’s native son Libanius writing in the fourth century CE, one could not find a place better situated or endowed.<sup>5</sup> In his famous encomium about the city, he remarks upon the fertility of the local plains and hills (*Or.* 11.13, 15, 19–24, 174–175), the fullness of the streams (*Or.* 11.27, 240–248), and the secure proximity to the sea (*Or.* 11.34–41, 258). The sea and the lake nurture this prosperity as well as create a transportation route to and from Antioch (*Or.* 11.260–265). The overhanging mountains provide natural resources and shade without disturbing the levelness of the actual city (*Or.* 11.25–26, 196–202). These combined features made Antioch a choice location and accommodation for both eastern and western conquering powers seeking to rule the region (*Or.* 11.84–130).

The prominence of Antioch for these royal and imperial authorities has occupied much of the ancient and modern writings about the city. From its very foundation in 300 BCE by Seleucus I, Antioch was designed to serve as a military and administrative center for the general-turned-king as he established an empire stretching from Asia Minor to the borders of India.<sup>6</sup> The city was not yet an exclusive seat of power, but it instead shared this responsibility in the northern Levant with three other Syrian cities collectively known as the Tetrapolis. A hundred years later, as the limits of the larger empire realigned, Seleucid reliance upon Antioch now elevated the city above its neighbors to the status of capital.<sup>7</sup> At this point, the geographer Strabo justifiably designated Antioch as a royal residence and emphasized its power as equal to two other Hellenistic capitals, Seleucia on the Tigris and Alexandria in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> The Greek historian Polybius – a contemporary of the period – marveled at the royally

<sup>4</sup> The Syrian Gates as well as the Cilician Gates further to the west remained important passes throughout antiquity. See Xen. *An.* 1.4.4–5; App. *Syr.* 11.54. Cic. *Fam.* 15.4 mentions two narrow entries into Cilicia from Syria; the passage to Cappadocia was far more open.

<sup>5</sup> The Greek grammarian Athenaeus also considered the city beautiful; see Ath. 1.36.

<sup>6</sup> Str. 16.2.4; App. *Syr.* 52–55. See also Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 8–20.

<sup>7</sup> Notice how often the Seleucid administration returns to Antioch in Joseph. *AJ* 12.315, 12.367, 13.33, 13.42, 13.86–87, 13.113–115, 13.133–142, 13.209.

<sup>8</sup> Str. 16.2.5.

sponsored games, spectacles, and parade hosted there and how many eager visitors were drawn to the suburb of Daphne.<sup>9</sup> During the late second and early first centuries BCE, the shrinking borders of the Seleucid Empire into Syria promoted Antioch still further as the final dynasts and usurpers fiercely contested for its control.<sup>10</sup>

When the Roman general Pompey conquered a substantial portion of the eastern Mediterranean in 64 BCE and annexed it to the western empire, the ancient accounts are clear in Antioch's continuing value to the new imperial administration.<sup>11</sup> From the beginning, governors of the Roman Republic took up residence within Antioch even while the contenders of the Civil Wars camped within its walls.<sup>12</sup> The Parthians aimed to capture Antioch as well as they invaded Syria in efforts to extend their own eastern empire, but were eventually pushed back by Roman forces.<sup>13</sup>

By the time of the Principate, Antioch had become a central city for the administration of the Roman province of Syria, acting as both a headquarters for the governor and *metropolis* (meeting place of the provincial *koinon* or regional assembly).<sup>14</sup> The Roman historian Tacitus deemed the city the provincial *caput* or head of Syria, akin to Caesarea Maritima in Judea.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish historian Josephus echoed this appraisal along with highlighting Antioch's magnitude and prosperity as the third largest city in the Roman Empire.<sup>16</sup> Antioch's prominence attracted Roman emperors and usurpers as well, either to support their own bids for the imperial seat or to use as a home base for launching military campaigns further east.<sup>17</sup> In the third century CE, foreign invaders from the expanding Sasanian Empire also targeted Antioch, as did Queen Zenobia who helmed the newly arisen Palmyrene Empire.<sup>18</sup> By the late antique period, a gamut of provincial, military, and imperial officials resided and ruled from Antioch, thereby returning the city to its original status of imperial center or even capital.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Polyb. 30.25.      <sup>10</sup> See Downey 1961, 126–136. On games at Daphne, see Ath. 5.210, 12.540.

<sup>11</sup> On Pompey's annexation, see App. *Mith.* 118; Cass. Dio 36.45–37.20; Plut. *Pomp.* 39.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Cass. Dio 40.28–29, 48.24–25, 51.7; Cic. *Fam.* 12.14, 12.15; Joseph. *AJ* 15.8–10.

<sup>13</sup> Cass. Dio 40.28–29, 48.24–25.

<sup>14</sup> On provincial capitals generally, see Haensch 1997. On the Syrian *koinon*, see Sartre 2005, 58–60; Vitale 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 2.78.      <sup>16</sup> Joseph. *BJ* 3.29, *AJ* 17.132.

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Cass. Dio 72.22–23; SHA *Marc.* 25; SHA *Avid. Cass.* 9; Downey 1961, 211–214, 220, 226–227, 244–261, 587–595; Pollard 2000, 278–279.

<sup>18</sup> Frye 1984, 291–303; Isaac 1990, 275.

<sup>19</sup> Liebeschuetz 1972, 110–118; Harries 2012, 282–283; Brands 2016, 8–15.

Overall, the ancient sources make clear that for much of the Hellenistic, Roman, and late antique periods, controlling Antioch was imperative for those seeking to rule the Middle East. In fact, so many powers made use of the city over time that the historical account written by the sixth-century CE chronographer John Malalas reads as a veritable museum catalog of commemorative monuments and sculptures erected at Antioch by these authorities.<sup>20</sup> More than a political center or strategic location, however, the ancient sources are also keen to point out other aspects of Antioch's prominence that drew visitors into its walls. The Roman orator Cicero noted the city's illustriousness, wealth, and learned studies and scholars in residence there.<sup>21</sup> The Antioch-born Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus claimed the whole world knew of his hometown, as it lacked a rival in the richness of its local and foreign markets.<sup>22</sup> Antioch played constant host to a number of festivals too with the Greek historian Herodian noting celebrations almost every day of the year in the large and flourishing city.<sup>23</sup> Strabo lauded in particular the festival located in the glorious suburb of Daphne near the sacred grove and temple of Apollo and Artemis.<sup>24</sup> Coexisting with the worship of Greco-Roman gods were the practices of other faiths. Josephus emphasized Antioch as a place that offered both hospitality and hostility to the Jewish component of its population.<sup>25</sup> The writer of *Acts* and many later theologians emphasized the centrality of the city for the development of Christianity, even claiming that the word *Christianos* was coined there.<sup>26</sup> It was this Antioch with its political distinction and legacy, size and economic prosperity, and beauty and culture that the earthquake in 115 CE rattled and the ancient texts memorialize.

Given the strength of this portrayal, the challenge for modern scholars of ancient Antioch has never been in broadly characterizing the city. Ever since Carl Müller assembled the first modern account of the city in his *Antiquitates Antiochenae* in 1839, Antioch has been repeatedly described as a cosmopolitan city both Greek and eastern, a royal capital turned provincial hub turned imperial capital, a religious center, an economic crossroads, a campaign headquarters, and a resort location. In the introduction to his seminal 900-year history of Antioch, Glanville Downey especially underscored this unique combination of attributes as a constant attraction for powerful imperial rulers.<sup>27</sup> Archaeological evidence gathered

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Malalas 8–13.    <sup>21</sup> Cic. *Arch.* 4.    <sup>22</sup> Amm. Marc. 14.8.8.    <sup>23</sup> Herodian 2.7.9.

<sup>24</sup> Str. 16.2.6.    <sup>25</sup> Joseph. *BJ* 7.41–62.    <sup>26</sup> *Acts* 11.19–27; Downey 1961, 272–288.

<sup>27</sup> Downey 1961, 11–12.

since the first joint expeditions of Princeton University and several French and American museums in the 1930s only confirmed this prominence both in terms of the stunning artifacts uncovered and in the breadth of the city's borders established through survey.<sup>28</sup>

While the general importance of Antioch cannot therefore be doubted, both the ancient and modern portrayals can give the impression that the city held the same static prominence throughout its lengthy lifetime in antiquity, even though it endured several significant transitions of power from one empire or authority to another. Additionally overlooked or minimized is the fact that Antioch was more than a provincial or imperial capital. At its core was a Greek *polis* or city-state made up of civic magistrates and self-governing institutions like the *boule* ("council") overseeing the *demos* ("citizen body").<sup>29</sup> This civic community had an agency of its own in orienting toward overarching rulers, taking the occasional subversive action, setting policy, sponsoring local festivals, and overseeing the multiethnic population within its substantial walls and territory.<sup>30</sup> Integral to Antioch is the dynamic between the internal authority of its citizens and the outside forces making use of the space, and yet too often the city is characterized only according to the latter half of this equation.

These assumptions and omissions are understandable given that actual and perceived limitations within the textual and archaeological evidence make it difficult to follow the long-term evolution of the Syrian city, especially in regard to its administrative roles and the internal municipal structure of its citizens and population.<sup>31</sup> Among the textual evidence, no connected history of Antioch written before the fourth century CE has survived.<sup>32</sup> Contemporary texts for the Hellenistic period are notoriously sparse, although Polybius, papyri, and inscriptions do contribute some details.<sup>33</sup> In the written sources of the early Roman Principate, the situation at Antioch emerges only from indirect references and short anecdotes like those cited above about the city's function as a provincial center for the

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Elderkin 1934; Stillwell 1938; Stillwell 1941; Levi 1947; Waagé 1948; Waagé 1952; Lassus 1972; Kondoleon 2000; Yener 2005; Redford 2014; Brands 2016; De Giorgi 2016.

<sup>29</sup> On this structure generally, see Butcher 2003, 224–227; Millar 2006, 118.

<sup>30</sup> For a lengthy exploration of these characteristics of the city, see Haddad 1949.

<sup>31</sup> This problem is generally noted for ancient Syria (e.g., Grainger 1990, 3; Millar 1993, 15, 230; Sartre 2005, 375–376, n. 6).

<sup>32</sup> See Downey 1961, 6–8, 35–44.

<sup>33</sup> This is the case for northern Syria as a whole: see Cohen 2006, 3–13; Millar 2006, 29. See also Saliou 2012a, 25–42.



Roman governor and its continuing prominence within the civic hierarchy of Syria. Authors offering the few extended glimpses of the city include Strabo, Josephus, and Tacitus. A few later writers on the second and third centuries CE occasionally feature Antioch including Herodian and the author of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*. As helpful as these accounts are, they lack a full description of Antioch, the people and authorities making use of the city, and the change experienced by all over time.

The textual record for Antioch substantially improves in the late antique period due to a large body of both sacred and secular texts. The most comprehensive information and continuous histories about Antioch come from Libanius and Malalas, both of whom resided within the city. In addition to his encomium, Libanius left a vast corpus of speeches and letters remarking on the full spectrum of activity in Antioch.<sup>34</sup> The sermons of Libanius's contemporary, John Chrysostom, offer an equally helpful perspective of daily life in the city.<sup>35</sup> Malalas provides the fullest chronology for Antioch in his *Chronicle*, in which he focuses especially upon imperial building and the intervention of the Seleucid and Roman governments within the city.<sup>36</sup> These writings are valuable not only for their detail but also because presumably Libanius and Malalas had access to city records of previous centuries when constructing their historical accounts. That said, these narratives are overshadowed by Antioch of the late antique period and cannot provide a completely reliable or thorough description of the city's earlier development.<sup>37</sup>

The archaeological record for the evolution of Antioch is equally complex. The eight seasons of the Princeton excavations – the only major systematic excavation of the city – yielded a wealth of archaeological material, such as stunning mosaics, coins, and pottery sherds.<sup>38</sup> However, political complications and shortcomings in the research agenda constrained the expedition and left many areas, historical levels, and public structures unexcavated.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the original five-volume publication of this project was neither comprehensive nor complete, thus prompting the formation of a current committee of Princeton and

<sup>34</sup> Liebeschuetz 1972, 1–39; Norman 2000. <sup>35</sup> E.g., Chrys. *Hom. de Stat.*

<sup>36</sup> Downey 1961, 38–40; Liebeschuetz 2004, 143–153. <sup>37</sup> Brands 2016, 1–7.

<sup>38</sup> See De Giorgi 2016, 27–33, for an overview of the excavations and complications faced by the project. A recently published exhibition through Koç University also provides a stunning presentation of these archaeological excavations (see Redford 2014).

<sup>39</sup> See Sandwell 2004a, 2–3.



international scholars laboring to make this material available.<sup>40</sup> Archaeological survey of the city and region – dating back to the early twentieth century – as well as periodic salvage excavations continue to expand the topographical picture of Antioch, but the layers of sediment, the modern city of Antakya on top, and the current Syrian war have hindered this work.<sup>41</sup> Finally, as Andrea U. De Giorgi reminds in his 2016 examination of Antioch's landscape, much remains unknown about the city's urban configuration and how it developed across the city's lengthy history.<sup>42</sup>

The challenges presented by this evidence have in no way diminished interest in Antioch, as demonstrated by recent museum exhibitions and publications (Cimok 2000; Kondoleon 2000; Redford 2014), conference and workshop proceedings (Cabouret, Gatier, and Saliou 2004; Sandwell and Huskinson 2004; Saliou 2012b), topographical studies (Shepardson 2014; Brands 2016; De Giorgi 2016), religious examinations (Zetterholm 2003; Soler 2006; Sandwell 2007), and even popular histories and guides (Cimok 1994; Christensen-Ernst 2012). Although Downey's 1961 synthesis of the literary, numismatic, inscriptional, and – to some extent – archaeological material remains unmatched in its depth and breadth, many of these latest studies have successfully offered new perspectives and methodologies to the sundry and uneven evidence.<sup>43</sup> The topographical approaches are especially promising in capturing the evolution of the landscape in and around the city.

Even so, trying to follow the long trajectory of Antioch's historical and political development resembles chasing someone down the street, only to have that person repeatedly disappear into the crowd or around corners and out of sight. What seems to evade our grasp is a consistent standard by which to visualize and evaluate how such a clearly renowned city changed over time in its local, regional, and global contexts via the different authorities and communities – local, regional, and imperial – making use of it.

<sup>40</sup> Elderkin 1934; Stillwell 1938; Stillwell 1941; Waagé 1948; Waagé 1952; Lassus 1972. For information about current work on Antioch by the *New Committee for the Excavation of Antioch and Its Vicinity*, see <http://antioch.princeton.edu>.

<sup>41</sup> Among the earliest survey projects are Braidwood 1937 and Tchalenko 1953–1958. Recent survey projects include the Amuq Valley Regional Projects (AVRP) and the Orontes Delta Archaeological Project. See Leblanc and Poccardi 1999, 91–126; Casana 2003; Yener 2005; Pamir 2012, 259–270. On survey and rescue excavations, see Pamir 2014, 80–112; see also Gutzwiller and Çelik 2012.

<sup>42</sup> De Giorgi 2016, 8. <sup>43</sup> See also Bowersock 1994, 411–427.

But one such red thread for this labyrinth already exists in the historical record for Antioch: the coins. The literary testimony is intermittent and the archaeological record uneven, but from its foundation and continuing into Late Antiquity, the city's mint or mints continued to strike coins.<sup>44</sup> These coins were produced in base and precious metals for three tiers of administration or authorities: the civic government of Antioch and occasionally other cities of the region; the provincial Roman government of Syria and sometimes other eastern provinces; and the royal and imperial governments of the Seleucid kings and the Roman emperors. There was much overlap and interplay among the authorities in terms of the policies prompting the issue and imagery of these coins, and yet enough distinct characteristics emerge from the material to support their examination according to the three categories of local, provincial, and royal/imperial administrations.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, although these coins exchanged many hands throughout their circulation, the varying quantities in which they are found can reveal idiosyncratic patterns testifying to how they functioned as currency, the policies governing their movement, and how the different authorities guaranteeing their value were received within and beyond the city by the people participating in the economy.<sup>46</sup> Altogether, the numismatic evidence has the potential for providing a more consistent standard by which to measure the change of Antioch in its internal and external contexts.<sup>47</sup>

This does not mean that the coins constitute a perfect set of evidence for the city or even the ancient world.<sup>48</sup> Frequently, the only testimony to the circumstances and structures around their production are the coins themselves. Their iconography often indicates when they were minted and whose authority guaranteed their value as currency, but certain design elements may offer opaque or misleading witness.<sup>49</sup> The textual record occasionally yields brief statements about when, why, or under whom coins were struck at Antioch, while the general historical context or comparison to other mints provides further clues to the prompts behind an issue.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Compare with Grainger 1990, 170; Sartre 2001, 371–372, 379.

<sup>45</sup> See Waagé 1952, ix; Butcher 2004, 15–22, 239–245; McAlee 2007, 1–2.

<sup>46</sup> Casey 1986, 12; Williamson 2005, 19. See also Howgego 2005, 1–17.

<sup>47</sup> Kemmers and Myrberg 2011, 88–89; Meadows and Gruber 2014.

<sup>48</sup> For a full critique of numismatic material in historical studies, see Casey 1986; Burnett 1987; Casey and Reece 1988; Butcher 2001–2002, 21–41; Howgego 1995.

<sup>49</sup> For example, how to interpret the appearance of the imperial Roman portraits or governors' names on civic coins has been the subject of great debate within scholarship. See Chapter 4 for further discussion.

<sup>50</sup> E.g., Tac. *Hist.* 2.82; Julian. *Mis.* 355d, 368a.