

Antioch on the Orontes

by Chris Freeman

Founding:

Antioch on the Orontes was founded as one of 16 Antiochs by Seleucus Nikator, the founder of the Seleucid empire. Seleucus was a general of Alexander the Great, and won Syria after Alexander's death. It was founded as one of four sister cities in NW Syria. It is said Alexander camped here in his campaign, since it is at a strategic crossroads of three main trading routes leading from Babylon, Asia Minor, and Judea, and the river Orontes was navigable from the Mediterranean by large ships up to this site. An ancient town of Meroe was at the site, and later incorporated into a suburb. Meroe is the site of the "Persian Artemes"

Greek Period:

Laid out in imitation of Alexandria by the architect Xenarius, it was known as a tetropolis since it contained four distinct districts. It was founded with between 17,000 and 25,000 Greeks and Jews, not counting locals and slaves. At the end of the Hellenistic period it contained over half a million free people, (again not counting slaves). It became the capital and court city of the western Seleucid empire, with the eastern capital being Seleucia on the Tigris.

Its population became less Hellenized with passing years, and spoke Aramaic on a daily basis. All of the nicknames of later Seleucid rulers were Aramaic. Antioch was the site of many rebellions against its weak Seleucid rulers, rebelling in 147, 129, and in 83 BC going as far as to invite Tigranes of Armenia to come and rule. In 65 BC it instituted its last rebellion against Seleucid control, petitioning Rome. In 64 BC its wish was granted and it came into Roman control, but remained *civitas libera*, or "free city".

Roman Period:

Roman leaders favored Antioch from the start, preferring it as the seat of Roman power in the East over Alexandria due to Alexandria's isolation in Egypt. Great building plans were financed for her. Julius Caesar visited in 47 BC and confirmed her freedom. Germanicus died here in 17 BC and was burned in the forum. Titus set up the Cherubim, captured from the Jewish temple, over one of the gates. Commodus even had the Olympic Games held here.

Antioch was also the site of many disasters. Earthquakes rocked the city periodically, with large ones in 115, 526, 528, and 588 most noted. Also, the Sassanids captured the city in 256 and slew a great many inhabitants in the forum.

In later Roman times Antioch became one of the great seats of Christianity, being one of the 4 locations of Archbishops, the others being Rome, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. Because of its large Jewish population, it was one of the first major cities to have a large Christian population, being visited by Paul on missionary journeys. The Patriarch of Antioch is still in existence, though now located in Damascus. Similar to the Pope, it is an unbroken string of Patriarch's in charge of their church.

After the earthquake of 526 and the Sassanid capture in 538, Antioch lost over 300,000 residents. Justinian rebuilt the city and renamed it Theopolis, or City of God, but Antioch would never regain its former prestige.

Later Period:

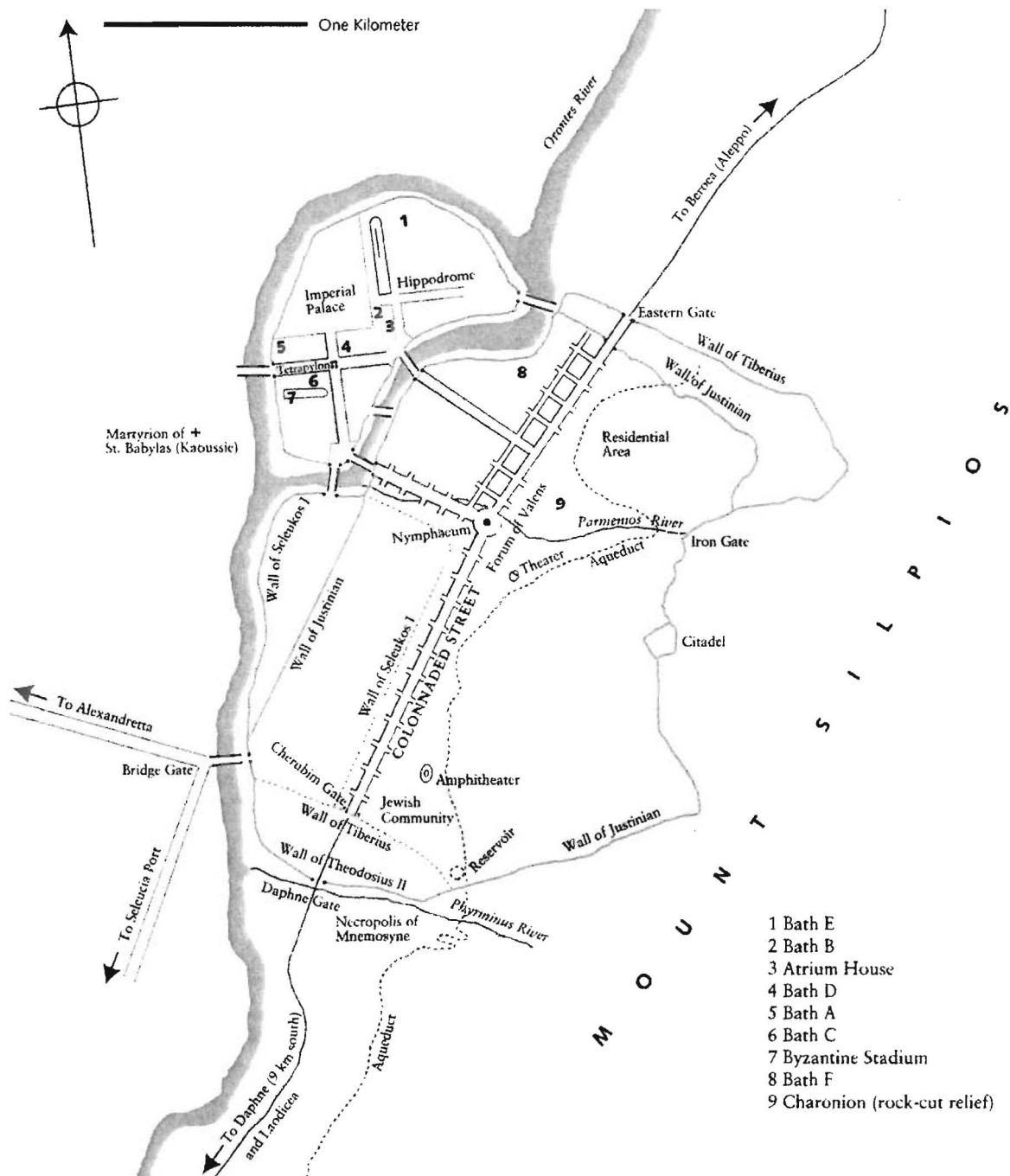
In 637 Antioch was captured by the Ummayyads and known as Antakayyuh. Since the Ummayyads were unable to push deeper into Asia Minor this left Antioch on the frontlines of the war for over 350 years, leading to further declines. It was recaptured by the Byzantines in 969, lost to Armenians in 1078, lost again to the Turks in 1084. In 1098 the First Crusade captured the city and made it the seat of the Latin Principality of Antioch, much to the dismay of the Byzantines who in return for their help expected the city returned to them. It survived in this manner until being captured in 1268 by the Egyptian Baibars. The Baibars slaughtered the Christian population. In addition to this, the river Orontes by this time had silted up and was no longer navigable. This two events ensured the long term decline of the city, with its former role moving to the port city of nearby Alexandretta, (Iskenderun).

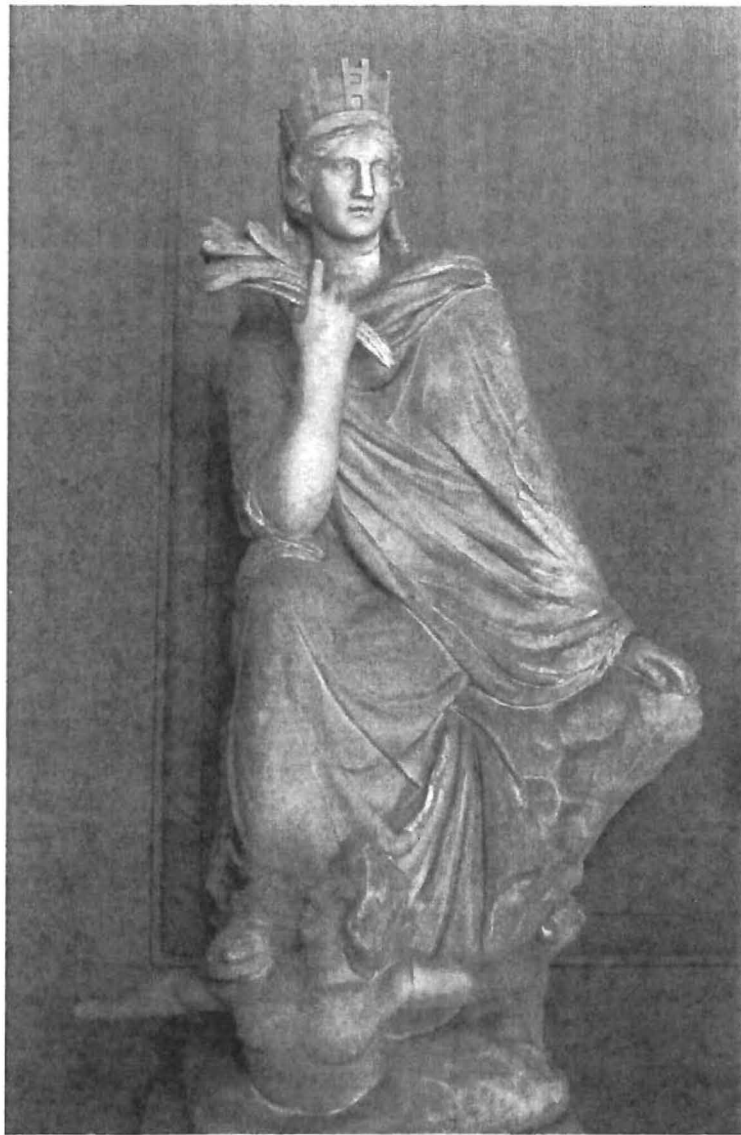
Today the modern city of Antakaya is still second city to Iskenderun, but has been growing rapidly. Many new developments are being done on historical sites, unfortunately local archeology as not protecting them. Today Antakayya has a population of about 200,000 people.

Attachments:

1. Map of ancient Antioch
2. Photo of copy of Tyche of Antioch, standing on Orontes shoulders.

ANCIENT CITY OF ANTIOCH





Tyche Antioch, (copy from Papal Museum)