

# The formation of a Roman landscape: the case of Antioch

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Central to the politics of the Roman East, Antioch on the Orontes presents a challenge for those who seek to define its physical and socio-political configurations. Although the development of Antakya, Antioch's successor, impairs fieldwork in the urban center, the study of the rural districts to the north, east, and west allows the characteristics of the urban system to be studied. This paper summarizes the results of 10 years of research conducted in the *chora* of Antioch by the Amuq Valley Regional Project (AVRP) of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. The survey data permitted investigation of the systems of infrastructure that connected town and country, as well as factors that led to the formation of a distinct Roman landscape. The increased density of rural settlement during the first two centuries A.D. seems to have been grounded in the opportunities offered by a fertile, well-watered landscape, but the scale and pace suggest that institutional frameworks propelled the 'colonization' of Antioch's plain and hills. The veterans of the Syrian legions, discharged at a high rate between the late 1st c. and early 2nd c. A.D., may have been agents who shaped the region in fundamental ways.

## Antioch's archaeology

Much of Downey's great history of Antioch, written and published long after the excavations were terminated, could have been written before they began.<sup>1</sup>

Praising G. Downey's masterly *History of Antioch*<sup>2</sup> but lamenting the missed opportunities of the Antioch's expedition of the 1930s, G. W. Bowersock stresses the dichotomy between the abundant historical sources and the shortage of archaeological data. The accounts of Libanius and Malalas offer unique vistas of the city and its actors, as well as detailed narratives of Antioch's urban layout and major monuments. Designed to test these sources, the Franco-American expedition<sup>3</sup> operated with enthusiasm and with the methods of the day. One of its main objectives was to match the spectacular results from the excavations at Dura-Europos, but it suffered from a series of managerial and financial vicissitudes<sup>4</sup> and the understanding of Antioch's topography was only marginally advanced, while prime targets such as the forum of Valens and the Domus Aurea were missed. The mosaics are the by-product of this story: hundreds of pavements now line the halls of prestigious American and European museums, and only thanks to D. Levi were they integrated into a coherent history of the city's visual culture.<sup>5</sup> The excavations were abruptly halted in 1939 because of pending war, although a number of individual projects benefitted from that vast body of data, dealing with questions of topography<sup>6</sup> and the visual culture expressed by the mosaics recovered around Antioch, Daphne, and Seleucia Pieria.<sup>7</sup> The lack of good archaeological data is not the only hurdle to a

1 G. W. Bowersock, "The search for Antioch," in id., *Studies on the Eastern Roman Empire* (Goldbach 1994) 411-27.

2 G. Downey, *A history of Antioch in Syria: from Seleucus to the Arab conquest* (Princeton 1963).

3 G. W. Elderkin (ed.), *Antioch on the Orontes I. The excavations of 1932* (Princeton 1934); R. J. Stillwell (ed.), *Antioch on the Orontes II. The excavations 1933-1936* (Princeton 1938); id. (ed.), *Antioch on the Orontes III. The excavations 1937-1939* (Princeton 1941).

4 R. Stillwell, "Houses of Antioch," *DOP* 15 (1961) 47.

5 D. Levi, *Antioch mosaic pavements* (Princeton 1947).

6 J. Lassus, *Antioch on the Orontes V. Les portiques d'Antioche* (Princeton 1972); "La ville d'Antioche à l'époque romaine d'après l'archéologie," in *ANRW* II.8 (1977) 54-102; G. Poccardi, "L'île d'Antioche à la fin de l'Antiquité. Histoire et problème de topographie urbaine," in L. Lavan (ed.), *Recent research in late-antique urbanism* (JRA Suppl. 42, 2001) 155-73; id., "Antioche de Syrie. Pour un nouveau plan urbain de l'île de l'Oronte (ville neuve) du III<sup>e</sup> au V<sup>e</sup> siècle," *MÉFRA* 106 (1994) 993-1023; J. P. Callu, "Antioche la grande; la cohérence des chiffres," *MÉFRA* 109 (1997) 127-69; B. Cabouret, "Sous les portiques d'Antioche," *Syria* 76 (1999) 127-50.

7 L. Becker and C. Kondoleon, *The arts of Antioch. Art historical and scientific approaches to Roman mosaics and a catalogue of the Worcester Art Museum Antioch mosaics* (Worcester, MA 2005); C.