

The cults of Ituraean Heliopolis (Baalbek)

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An article about the gods of Heliopolis requires some justification. The “triad” of Jupiter, Venus and Mercury has been studied extensively, with an emphasis on its alleged Egyptian or Semitic roots and character, but the available evidence (literary traditions, inscriptions, iconography) dates well into Roman Imperial times and originates in local antiquarianism of the Second Sophistic. In the case of Heliopolis, inferences to pre-Roman times are particularly hazardous since it suffered a major disruption with the settlement of Augustus’ veterans and the creation of the colony of Berytus in 15 B.C., a disruption which seems to have affected all aspects of religious life. Thus the early days of the city and its cults are largely unknown. I argue that the “Hellenistic” period of Heliopolis is not quite as murky as usually assumed,¹ since some light can be shed on the religious outlook of the Ituraean tetrarchs of Chalkis, masters of the Beqa’ and high priests of Heliopolis for much of the 1st c. B.C. New findings on the coinage of the tetrarchs, combined with evidence from sculpture, architecture, epigraphy and literary sources, can show that the gods of the Ituraeans were more intimately linked to the famous gods of Heliopolis than previously thought, and that the religious ambitions of the tetrarchs of Chalkis played a vital rôle in the development of the city and its cults.

Tetrarchs and high priests

The tetrarchs of Chalkis were among the most powerful of the many local dynasties to seize their share of the disintegrating Seleucid kingdom, at a time when the Nabataeans and Hasmonaeans, and later Herod the Great, divided the southern Levant between themselves (fig. 1).² Pompey elevated them to the status of “friend and ally of the Roman people” and left them to administer what were considered cultural backwaters, namely Mt. Lebanon, Hermon, Antilebanon and the Beqa’ valley in between, as well as the Haurân (fig. 2). Judging from their personal names, the Ituraeans may have originated in an Arabic-speaking milieu³ and (as the term “Arab” among ancient authors often implies⁴) they are described as nomads and brigands posing a threat to civilian life. Their renown as archers (a skill which would suggest a nomadic origin) was recognised by Marc Antony, who enrolled them as bodyguards — much to the dismay of Cicero (“Why do you bring Ituraeans [sic], of all tribes the most barbarous, down into the forum with their arrows?”⁵)

The tetrarch Ptolemy, son of Mennaios, ruled from his stronghold Chalkis sub Libano⁶ (unlo-

1 See, e.g., Hajer 1985 (infra n.33) 177-85; id. 1993 (infra n.29) 2459-61.

2 J. Aliquot, “Les Ituréens et la présence arabe au Liban du II^e siècle a.C. au IV^e siècle p.C.,” *MéUS* 56 (1999-2003) 161-290, provides a detailed history of the Ituraeans, mainly based on literary and epigraphic material. See also E. Schürer (edd. G. Vermes, F. Millar and M. Goodman), *The history of the Jewish people in the age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh 1973) vol. 1, 561-73; see also U. Kahstedt, *Syrische Territorien in Hellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1926) 88-91; G. Schmitt, “Zum Königreich Chalkis,” *ZDPV* 98 (1982) 110-24; W. Schottroff, “Die Ituraer,” *ZDPV* 98 (1982) 125-52; E. A. Krauf, “Die Eigennamen der Ituraer,” *Biblische Notizen* 21 (1983) 41-47 and “The Ituraeans: another Beduin state,” in H. Sa’ed, T. Scheffler and A. Neuwirth (edd.), *Baalbek. Image and monument: 1898-1998* (Stuttgart 1998) 269-78; K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London 2003) 92-94.

3 Krauf 1983 and 1998 *ibid.*; Aliquot *ibid.* 166-91.

4 M. Macdonald, “Les Arabes en Syrie” or “La pénétration des Arabes en Syrie”. A question of perceptions?, in *Topsi Suppl.* 4 (2003) 303-18.

5 Cic., *Phil.* 2.44.112; see also 2.8.19; 13.8.18.

6 Founded by “Monikos the Arab”: Stephen of Byzantium s.v. “Chalkis (4)”. The name Monikos is otherwise unattested and most scholars (following A. H. M. Jones, *The cities of the eastern Roman provinces* [2nd edn., Oxford 1971] 254) amend it to Mennaios, the father of Ptolemy. However, Dillon: “Iamblichos de Chalcis,” *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques* III (2000) 826, P. L. Gatier, “La principauté d’Abila de Lysanias dans l’Anti-Liban,” *Dossiers de l’Archéologie* 179 (2002-3) 121, and Aliquot (supra n.2) 227, would all read Monimos, ancestor of the philosopher Iamblichus of Chalkis: see Photius, *Bibl. codex* 181, § 1. The suggestion is plausible if instead of Chalkis ad Behm one relocates