

# The Syrian Hauran

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J.-M. DENTZER (Ed.), *HAURAN I. RECHERCHES ARCHÉOLOGIQUES SUR LA SYRIE DU SUD À L'ÉPOQUE HELLENISTIQUE ET ROMAINE* (Bibliothèque archéologique, tome CXXIV, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris). Première partie, pp. xiv + 217 (1985) FF 380; deuxième partie, pp. 219-426 (1986) FF 420. ISBN 2-7053-0262-X.

After a lengthy hiatus, the so-called 'lava lands' of the Hauran in southern Syria have again become the focus of archaeological research. Of primary importance in this regard has been the contribution of the Unité de Recherche Archéologique 20, an impressive team of scholars directed by J.-M. Dentzer of the CNRS in Paris. Since the modern geographical designation of the 'Hauran' for this region of southern Syria can be traced back to New Kingdom Egyptian and Assyrian texts, it certainly deserves treatment as a distinct administrative and geographical region. From 1899 to 1909 it was the subject of some important field surveys, including those of Princeton University, Dussaud and Macler, Brünnow and Domaszewski, and others.<sup>1</sup> This intensive investigation lapsed afterwards, and needed to be revived. In recent decades the marked increase in population and rapid economic development has endangered the antiquities. Thus the project of URA 20 is an enterprise of special significance and interest.

In the early Roman imperial period, this region was a maze of conflicting political boundaries, representing the neighboring kingdoms of the Ituraeans to the north, the Nabataean Arabs to the south, and the Herodian dynasts to the west, as well as comprising part of the territory of the Decapolis. With the Roman annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in 106, the city of Bosra (Bostra) in the Hauran was established as the capital of the new province of Arabia. The original provincial borders were 15 km north of Bosra and just west of Der<sup>c</sup>ā, whereas Qanawāt and Suweidā and the region northeast of Bostra (known today as the Jebel al-<sup>c</sup>Arab and formerly as Jebel al-Drūz) were part of the province of Syria. It was only during the Severan period that the provincial boundaries were extended northwards to include this adjacent territory.<sup>2</sup> From the 1st c. B.C. and continuing for several centuries, the region saw unprecedented intensive settlement and development. At the end of the 1st c. A.D. Bostra constituted a 'second royal seat' of the Nabataean kingdom after Petra, and remained capital of the province of Arabia until the Islamic conquests. The URA 20 Hauran project, inclusive of these peripheral areas, encompasses over 9000 km<sup>2</sup>.

Such a vast landscape of complex political configuration imposes some natural limitations on the scope and objectives of the project. Dentzer's initial prescription narrowed the chronological focus to the pre-provincial period, with emphasis on the native indigenous culture, especially from the 1st c. B.C. to the creation of Arabia in 106, when the area witnessed dramatic changes. The geographical focus is restricted to the Syrian Hauran, exclusive of the smaller but important Jordanian sector. Concentrated excavations are also limited to the important sites of Bostra and Si<sup>c</sup>, with only selected sondages elsewhere. The first stage of the project began in 1974 with a photographic documentation of topography and architecture. In 1977 and later, excavations were conducted at Si<sup>c</sup> and Bostra, with intensive regional surveys of the northeast district around Qanawāt-Si<sup>c</sup>, including sondages at selected sites to establish the chronological framework of surface finds of ceramics and architecture. The publication under review presents a provisional analysis of the results of this ongoing project; *Hauran II* will follow. More specialized and

1 H. C. Butler *et al.*, *Publications of Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904-05 and 1909*, I-IV (Leiden 1911-1943), hereafter *PAES*; R. Dussaud and F. Macler, *Voyage archéologique au safa et dans le Djebel ed-Drúz* (Paris 1901); R. E. Brünnow and A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia* (Strassburg 1904-1909) 3 vols.

2 E. Kettenhofen, "Zur Nordgrenze der provincia Arabiae im 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.," *ZDPV* 97 (1981) 63-73 and G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge 1983) 99-102. As early as Vespasian, a military unit was recruited from Canatha, the *cohors prima Flavia Canathenorum* (CIL 7. 2394-2395 and AE 1969/70, 435).