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**Panel: Feeding the ancient city**

**Town and Country in Roman Antioch.**

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The lengthy and complex debate over the nature of the economic structures engendered by the Roman city is far from being settled. The predominantly “modernizing” approach of much scholarship in the 50’s and 60’s was countered by the Weber/Finley *consumer city* model as the one that best represented the relationship between an urban center and its hinterland.<sup>1</sup> Thus the exploitative formula whereby landed proprietors lived off rural rents and the urban communities were essentially sustained by rural labor, appeared to many modern historians as an effective way to settle the debate once and for all.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, such a view was consonant with the literary evidence of the ruling elites on their economic outlook and urban-centered life-style.<sup>3</sup>

But thirty years after Finley there are signs of impatience with the solution.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand his theoretical approach remains a seminal, necessary point of departure for any inquiries of a socio- economic kind; on the other hand it is evident that template-like, unilateral models hardly succeed in fully illustrating the variables in play at the local level. Instead of debating the acceptance or rejection of his model --or any of the other models that Weber formulated-- monitoring the degree of an urban center’s adherence to

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<sup>1</sup> WEBER 1921; FINLEY 1981, 3-23.

<sup>2</sup> PARKINS 1997, 63-111.

<sup>3</sup> WALLACE-HADRILL 1991, 241-272.

<sup>4</sup> On a recent discussion of the “spell” of Finley, see JONGMAN 2002, 32-35.

a specific ideal urban type can be an effective way forward. To this end, intensive archaeological survey has proved itself a useful way to address this problem.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I will elucidate the socio-economic dynamics at work in the territory of Roman Antioch, relying on the data collected by the Amuq Valley Regional Survey.<sup>6</sup> I will argue that the economic diversity and scale of production in the *khora* of Antioch during the time of the *pax romana* point to much more than the economic imbalance of a city siphoning off resources from its environs. The abundant evidence for the intensive exploitation of the land and its varied resources implies the existence of an economic relationship that adheres to the exploitative Weber/Finley *consumer city* scheme only to a very limited extent. I shall therefore present in this paper an interpretative framework that deviates from the model and offer an assessment of economic growth that sets ancient Antioch and its countryside in a symbiotic relationship.

Located in the Northern Levant, the fertile Amuq Valley has been host to extensive archaeological campaigns since the 1930's.<sup>7</sup>

Physical diversity is the signature of the valley; the territory in fact encompasses the plain --dominated by the Amiq Gölü, the great lake drained in the 1960's-- , the Amanus Mountain range to the West and a series of extremely eroded limestone hills to the South, East and South-West. The extraordinary number of sites featuring rich material remains in this region confirms its importance throughout prehistory well into the period when the successive Assyrian, Babylonian, Achaemenid, Seleucid and Roman empires exploited its wealth. The valley's vast array of sites has offered ideal conditions for

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<sup>5</sup> MATTINGY 2001, 66-67.

<sup>6</sup> YENER 2000, 163-220.

<sup>7</sup> YENER 2000, 163-165; TCHALENKO 1958; TATE 1992.

conducting this survey-based research on non-urban land use. In particular, archaeologists have made great advances in understanding settlement patterns from the Neolithic to the first millennium B.C.E.

The heavy “Romanization” of this landscape however, propelled by the city of Antioch has remained neglected.

Since 1995, the Amuq Valley Regional Project (henceforth AVRPP), directed by A. Yener and T. Wilkinson of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago and the University of Edinburgh respectively, has operated in this area. This multidimensional investigation, which includes excavations and field survey, addresses holistically the economic and environmental background of settlement in the valley.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the project is geared toward the elimination of the “big divide” of Roman/Late Roman settlement vs. Mounded Sites, so as to provide an historical continuum of human occupation in the region.

By far the most important of the settlements in the Amuq Valley is Antioch, modern day Antakya. “Antioch the beautiful and the great,” (*Libanius, Ant.10-15*) residence of emperors, legions, conspirators, usurpers, various communities and ethnicities, schools of rhetoric, became the capital of Provincia Syria in 64 BCE and rapidly acquired paramount political importance as portal to the East.<sup>9</sup> Virtually nothing of the city’s glorious past is visible today, with the exception of a small stretch of the aqueduct of Trajan and the early 5th century CE fortification walls.

According to Strabo (*Geogr.16.2.5*), Augustan Antioch serving as provincial capital and thus seat of the proconsul, the procurator and their entourage, was the home

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<sup>8</sup> YENER, forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> BUTCHER 2003, 19-78.

of at least of one the three Syrian legions and could boast a population of 500,000 inhabitants. Whatever the accuracy of these figures one fact must be reckoned with: the city had to accommodate and sustain a large contingent of military and administrative personnel, and the assumption is that Antioch played the passive role of the recipient of rural wealth and as such the burden of feeding the urbanites lay on the communities of the hinterland.

The AVRIP survey data have been instrumental in testing the validity of this hypothesis and provides the underpinnings for the economic framework presented. The survey over the years 1995-2002 essentially sampled areas in two distinct sub-regions; the plain of Antioch, and the highlands, consisting of the Amanus Mountains, and the Jebel-al-Akra relief respectively (Fig.1).<sup>10</sup>

For both areas the settlement pattern suggests a great deal of continuity between the late Hellenistic and the Early Roman phase, thus reinforcing the notion of passive administration;<sup>11</sup> the fiscal grid laid down by the governor of Syria Quirinus in 6 AD<sup>12</sup> seemingly did not alter the status quo and actually encouraged the rural settlement, as the number of sites created *ex novo* at the beginning of the century testifies. The incentives and benefits that a census typically carried<sup>13</sup> were factors that indeed encouraged the investment of capital in the country and the exploitation of land hitherto left abandoned or simply used for grazing. And we have reason to believe that such opportunities were in the territory of Antioch indeed seized by the rural communities.

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<sup>10</sup> CASANA, forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> MILLAR 1993, 27-79.

<sup>12</sup> DABROWA 1998, 27-30.

<sup>13</sup> CORBIER 1991, 227.

The sites that can be attributed to the High Roman Empire occupation phase are typically small and hardly ever measure more than 1 hectare. They are low mounds and consist predominantly of scatters of tiles, pottery and stone. The development of modern agriculture all over the region --and especially on the uplands-- has profoundly altered the configuration of the landscape and consequently only high intensity survey strategies can detect the presence of Roman settlement on the ground.<sup>14</sup> Braidwood, in the 1930's recorded only 17 Roman sites, missing the hundred of small settlements that dot the landscape.<sup>15</sup>

Intensive agriculture was the economic basis for the sites on the plain, and by and large the picture consists of small farmsteads, villas and hamlets. The incidence of the latter is of particular interest, as it plausibly entailed temporary settlement, essentially small huts for equipment and temporary residence. Accordingly, the tenants were likely to be city dwellers, perhaps part-time or seasonal farmers, commuting to and from the city. Such a system, plausibly comprising sites on the plain aligned on the Orontes riverbed, provided a continuous supply of grain to the city of Antioch. Furthermore, the Orontes itself ensured rapid and reliable transport of goods by virtue of its navigability, an aspect that in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century CE Libanius emphasizes when praising the fortunate setting and the resources in the territory of Antioch (*Ant.11.260-262*). In addition, the Antioch-Aleppo road cutting the South- East sector of the plain represented an alternative artery of communication as it linked the capital to the heart of the province of Syria.

In the eastern corner of the plain, in the vicinity of site AS 345, ancient Imma, today known as Yeni Sehir, the landscape presents a much higher level of complexity.

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<sup>14</sup> CASANA, forthcoming.

<sup>15</sup> BRAIDWOOD 1937.

Multiple sets of water mills, dams and canals demonstrate the introduction and use of water technologies as early as the 1st century CE;<sup>16</sup> among the better-preserved sites is the complex at site AS 202 adjacent to the town, where a network of canals tapping water from the uplands led water to reservoirs and overshot water mills (Fig.2). The complex was identified by the AVRS team through declassified Corona imagery and because of the good state of preservation of the establishment, parts of which were still used in the Late Islamic period. What is evident is that the capital cost of this infrastructure must have been significant if one considers the magnitude of the undertaking and the additional expenditures for the mill apparatus. The capital investment, however, must have been rapidly paid off by the scale of production and increased output rates, because of the substantial advantages that water mills had over animal mills in these terms.<sup>17</sup>

Such maximization of production and profit must then be understood in terms of rational economic behavior and the capability to seize the opportunities offered by a fertile, well-watered landscape. To take the argument a step further, the town of Imma might have accommodated one of those markets which Libanius claims were a signature of Antioch's territory. Technologically advanced agricultural production, small industries like the several kiln-sites located in its immediate environs and easy access to the road network support such a hypothesis and make the town an additional commercial center in the territory of Antioch. The settlement pattern in the highlands also merits attention. Survey of selected areas in the Amanus Mountains to the West, and in the low hills of the Jebel al-Aqra to the South revealed no occupation prior to the Seleucid period writ large. Towns, farmsteads, villages and a few villas are the typical features of the Roman phase.

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<sup>16</sup> WILSON 2002, 1-32.

<sup>17</sup> WILSON 2002, 12.

The Jebel al-Aqra intensive survey yielded the highest density of sites recorded, 3.50 per square Km, as opposed to the 0.40 in the plain. This said, the sample areas surveyed by and large display occupational trends towards the foothills and lower elevations. In a regime of mixed agriculture olive oil production was seemingly the economic mainstay of the highland settlement, as ubiquitous fragments of mills and pressing apparatus testify. Furthermore, only the 2% of the number of sites exceeds the 600 m elevation threshold, limit above which the cultivation of olive tree is not feasible for Mediterranean climates. Now, when one considers the site density recorded in the Jebel al-Aqra area, and that approximately only 30% of the sub-region has been surveyed and the same site-density may be predicted for the un-surveyed areas of the Jebel, it is likely that the overall output of olive oil far exceeded the local demand, rising even well above regional standards and thus making it a viable commodity for trade and export. The river Orontes and its course to the city or, alternatively, all the way to Seleucia Pieria on the coast represented the most efficient vector for far-flung distribution.

An entirely different set of problems has been raised by site AS 232 (Fig.1), in the vicinity of the Kisecik area, in the Amanus Mountains, where substantial traces of the quarrying and mining industry have been recovered. The site does not constitute a *unicum*, as other settlements in the Amanus area, such as AS 245 can be convincingly interpreted as quarries with associated small living quarters. Nevertheless, the relatively small size of the infrastructures monitored and the virtual absence of slave labor in Provincia Syria suggest that management and actual work were contracted out by the city to local communities and entrepreneurs. The possibility that the scale of this industry was significant, however, should not be discounted, considering that the extraction of local

good limestone and its transportation down to the valley floor were crucial for the accomplishment of the several building programs carried out by emperors in the city during the High Empire.<sup>18</sup> The information we have gathered on the extractive industry is, however, still piecemeal, and the upcoming research focused on these very questions will be able to provide insights on the magnitude, duration and beneficiaries of an activity that indeed contributed to the formation of a distinct Roman landscape.

To sum up: this rapid excursus on economic diversity in the territory of ancient Antioch set out to suggest that a city of its size siphoned only a relatively small portion of resources from the landscape, in terms of taxes and rural rents. Commercial occupations on a significant scale and entrepreneurial activities linked to the possible trade in Eastern Sigillata A pottery, textiles and precious metals must have taken place in the city<sup>19</sup> and thus provided sources of income, but they also offered services to the countryside, thus in a way reversing the proposition of Finley. On the other side, after paying their dues to the metropolis, the communities in the hinterlands seized the opportunity to invest some of their profits in technology and more intensive production, thereby creating the conditions for local markets and for independent commercial strategies. The self-sufficiency Libanus boasts for those communities two and half centuries later was apparently attained.

In conclusion, for the time of the *pax romana*, the picture thus derived offers a symbiotic relationship between town and country. The economic growth of the landscape is chronologically consonant with the grandeur reached by the city at the time of Hadrian.

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<sup>18</sup> DOWNEY 1961.

<sup>19</sup> BOWERSOCK 1989, 68-69.



This mutual flourishing of town and country, however, was short-lived. The 3<sup>rd</sup> century, with bad crops, famine and invasions<sup>20</sup> opens a crisis that only the emergence of new trading routes and new emphasis on long-range commerce will heal.

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<sup>20</sup> DECKER 2001, 71.

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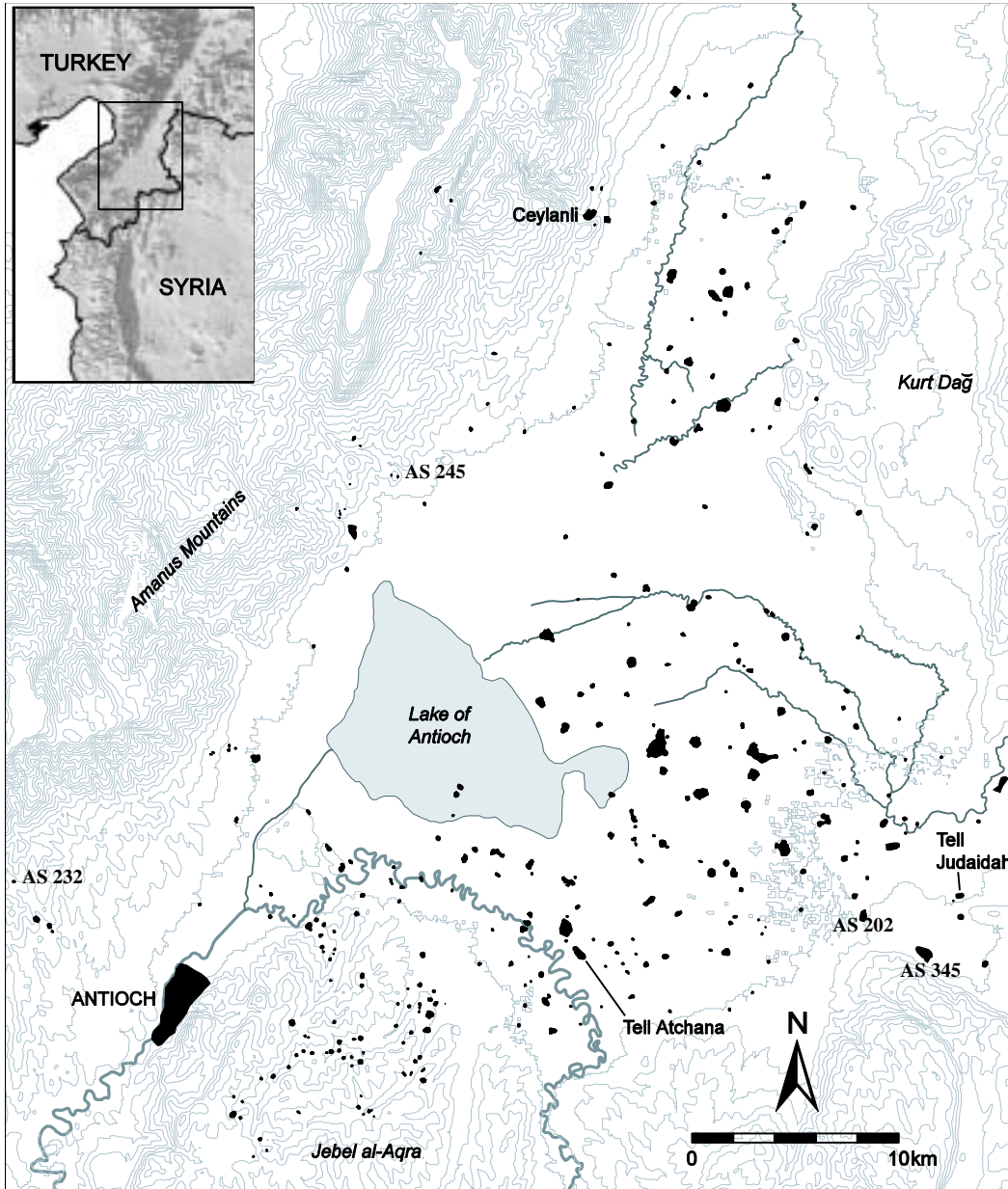


Fig.1: The Amuq Valley Regional Survey, 1995-2002.

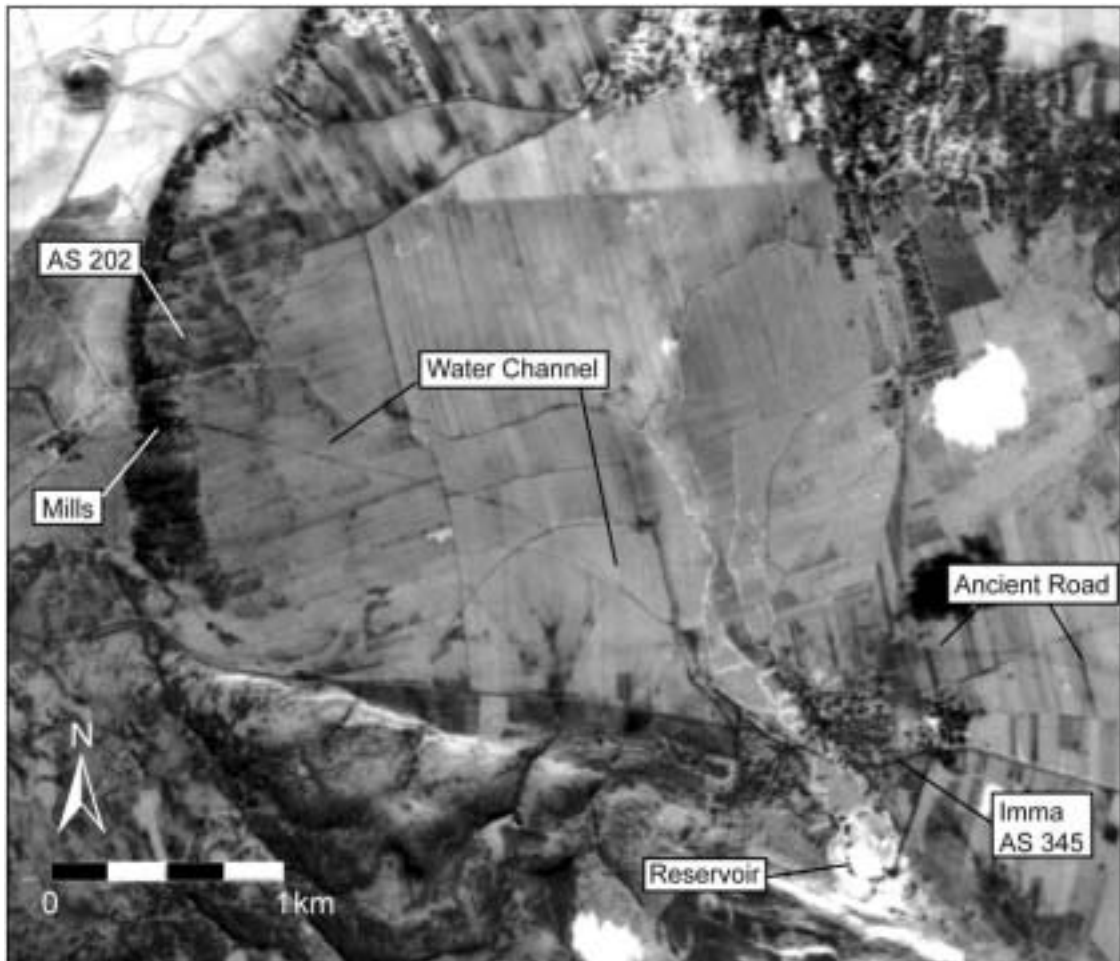


Fig.2: Water Technologies in the vicinity of Imma (courtesy of J. Casana).