

## THE UPPER EUPHRATES VALLEY DURING THE HELLENISTIC-ROMAN PERIOD

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When in later Antiquity, in the late fourth century A. D. to be precise, Egeria decided to continue her pilgrimage journeyings into Mesopotamia she describes her route as follows (in a justly celebrated passage):

I beseech Your Charity to believe me that there is no Christian who has come as far as the holy places of Jérusalem who does not go to Edessa to pray. It is a twenty-five day journey from Jerusalem. Since Antioch is nearer to Mesopotamia, it was very convenient for me, God willing, to go from there to Mesopotamia, on my return to Constantinople, for my route lay through Antioch. And, through God's will, this was done.

### Chapter 18

In the name of Christ our God, I set out from Antioch to Mesopotamia, traveling through various resting stations and cities of the province of Coele Syria, which is the province of Antioch; and, from there, after crossing the frontier of the province of Augusta Euphratensis, I arrived at the city of Hierapolis, which is the capital of the province of Augusta Euphratensis. As this city is very rich and beautiful, and abounding in all things, I had to make a stop there, since it is not far from the borders of Mesopotamia. After having traveled fifteen miles from Hierapolis, in the name of God, I arrived at the river Euphrates, which Scripture very well described as the *great river Euphrates*. It is large and rather frightening, for it flows with as swift a current as the river Rhone, except that the Euphrates is much larger. Since we had to cross the river by boat, and by very large boats only, I remained there more than half a day. Then, in the name of God, we crossed the river Euphrates and I arrived on the territory of Mesopotamia of Syria.

### Chapter 19

After making my way through a number of resting stations, I arrived at a city whose name we find in Scripture, namely, Batanis; and this city still stands today. Many shrines of martyrs are located there, as well as a church with a bishop, who is a holy man, a monk, and a confessor. The city is filled with great crowds of men, for an army with its tribune is stationed here.

We then set out from this place and we arrived, in the name of Christ our God, at Edessa; and immediately after our arrival there we hastened to the church and the shrine of Saint Thomas.<sup>1</sup>

For our purposes it does not matter whether Egeria waited for her crossing of the Euphrates near the mouth of the Sajour, in the vicinity of (say) Hammam Kebir/Tell Khamis or opposite Tell Ahmar, or at Qala'at Nadjm, or even at Tell Bazi, or whether indeed any of these crossing points had at the time the toponyms of Caecilia/Caeciliana or Bethammaria, names found in Ptolemy's *Geography* and on the

1. Translation by G. E. Gingras (Ancient Christian Writers 38), New York 1970.

Peutinger Map.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly she waited to cross the Euphrates somewhere in the Upper Euphrates Valley and the river—then as now—figured as a major feature of the landscape: crossing points were important. The river, especially in Spring and Summer when at its highest, could be a barrier, though not an insuperable obstacle, and as such, crossing points had significance for military, commercial and communication purposes, as locations of observation and control.

It is true that the military history of the region, especially in the later Roman and early Byzantine periods<sup>3</sup>, shows that the river in this region could be crossed, and crossed again, indeed criss-crossed, in the course of military operations, but nevertheless crossing-points, with the river at its narrowest, would still be highly desirable strategically, given the fact that the perilous manoeuvre of crossing over an army and its *impedimenta* on a pontoon bridge of boats left it militarily vulnerable and often in dangerous disarray. The shorter the crossing the better.

But to go back more than seven centuries, from the time of Egeria to the beginning of the *Greek* period first, from the late fourth century B.C. onwards.

It is important to appreciate that the early Seleucids had inherited this alien region as conquered territory—it therefore needed to be controlled militarily. And the river, though at this period no frontier, figured accordingly in their planning militarily as well as commercially. The river functioned as the great thoroughfare of communication and trade all the way down to their eastern capital, Seleukeia on the Tigris, and out into the Gulf. Shipping along the course of the river needed safe halting stations to berth and to trade. A military presence was needed at the most obvious crossing points strategically (both to protect their own subjects and to repel potential enemies), serving as well to control the rich alluvial and food-producing riverine plains, remembering that much of the uplands would have been at this time heavily wooded. A series of para-military settlements were founded accordingly with these multiple functions in mind along the course of the river, sometimes on virgin sites, if required, at others in conjunction with previously inhabited towns or villages.

There is little doubt, for example, that Carchemish/Jerablus—Greco-Roman 'Europos'—had an important and early Greek Phase (relying on the literary testimony of Appian and Stephanus of Byzantium)<sup>4</sup> though recovering detail archaeologically is lost to us because the Greek and Roman overburden, as Sir Leonard Woolley nonchalantly remarks, was literally, and summarily, blasted away with dynamite during his excavations in the early 1920's in order to reach more conveniently the lower neo-Hittite strata, and thus the better to satisfy the trustees of the British Museum who supported the project. Woolley does, however, record in passing, with illustration, examples of Attic West Slope Ware, declared to be the commonest along with what he describes as "wares with redpaint 'trickle' ornament" found in the Lower Palace area above the destruction level:<sup>5</sup> these are, of course, indicators of imported Greek ceramics of the third and second centuries and of local domestic wares of the Hellenistic period. But any possibility of verifying whether Carchemish may have also been the earlier Thapsacus where Xenophon and Alexander crossed the Euphrates (and would therefore have produced earlier material) is now unfortunately lost to us.<sup>6</sup>

2. See R. Dussaud, *Topographie historique de la Syrie antique et médiévale* (BAH, 4), Paris 1927, pp. 447 ff.

3. See, for example, Procopius B.P. 2.21.

4. Appian *Bell.Syr.* 57, Stephan. Byz. s.v. *Ωρωπόδος*; for commentary see K. Brodersen, *Appians Abriss der Seleukidengeschichte (Syriake 45.232-70, 369)*. *Text und Kommentar*, Munich 1989, pp. 154 ff.

5. Sir L. Woolley and R.D. Barnett, *Carchemish. Report on the Excavations on behalf of the British Museum*, Part 3, London 1952, p. 235 n. 4 and Pl. 68 d.

6. Latest discussion by M. Gawlikowski, *Thapsacus and Zeugma: the crossing of the Euphrates in antiquity*, *Iraq* 58, 1996, 123ff.

Similarly, further downstream, the Hellenistic phase of Tell Barsip/Tell Ahmar is dismissed by Thureau-Dangin and Dunand with equal dispatch, in just over three pages (vol.1, 80-83) though they do appear to have uncovered the vestiges of a Hellenistic temple on the Tell; they record a coin hoard of some 70 silver coins dating from the late third/early second century B.C. down to (at latest) 95 B.C., and they publish a few Hellenistic lamps and some Greek figurines (vol. 2, Pl. XVI and XVII), but this undoubted Greek phase of life at Tell Barsip goes otherwise unrecorded and was, unfortunately, swept aside.<sup>7</sup>

The salvage work in the Tishrin catchment area itself is at long last producing records of this phase, with Hellenistic period presence, for example, attested at Jerablus Tahtani, Tell 'Amarna, Tell Khamis and Qara Quzaq, and further evidence at Tell Ahmar—all, as at Carchemish, over pre-existing settlements; and the next major station downstream appears to have been Jebel Khalid, this time laid out on a virgin site at a crossing point (with Jebel es Soda opposite), complete with river walls acting as shipping quays, a separate walled acropolis and full-scale fortifications on the landward side—perhaps the city of Amphipolis mentioned in a garbled passage of Pliny the Elder (as also by others) and which has to be located somewhere in this area.<sup>8</sup> The next major Hellenistic station downstream would be at Meskene: Dura-Europos, much further downstream, would appear to be a clone of Jebel Khalid in its Seleucid phase.

The results of the surveys conducted in the vicinity are well-known: those of Matthers *et al.* in the River Queiq catchment area; of Sanlaville *et al.* in the Sajour catchment area and in some of the Tishrin Dam area; to the immediate north of the Tishrin Dam Catchment by Algaze *et al.*; to the North-East in the Urfa region by Wilkinson *et al.*; to the East in the Jezirah by Einwag *et al.*; and further away by Wilkinson and Algaze—as well as, of course, to the South during the Tabqa dam catchment area surveys and archaeological salvage.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, classical period occupation, distribution, and intensity has not always been recorded in any finely calibrated way, but what these surveys do show is that the settlement pattern so characteristic of the whole region, with villages and hamlets sparsely dotted over the landscape, not only continued but received moderate stimulus from the influx of new Greek settlers, traders and colonists into the region—though Greek immigrants, at least initially, tended to concentrate, somewhat nervously, within the walled *apoikiai* (colonies), *poleis* (cities) and *phouria* (fortresses) of the Seleucid foundations—or so often re-foundations—and often taking up separate quarters alongside pre-existing communities.<sup>10</sup> Put in very general terms, however—and not just exclusively of the Tishrin Dam area—under this Greek period stimulus, settlement sites tend to expand, some previously abandoned or destroyed sites are significantly re-occupied and some entirely new sites—like Jebel Khalid—are opened up. The economic

7. F. Thureau-Dangin and M. Dunand (BAH, 23), *Til Barsib*, 2 vols., Paris 1936.

8. See Gawlikowski, *art. cit.* (*Pliny N.H.* 5. 87; *Appian Bell.Syr.* 57, 298; *Stephan. Byz. s.v. Ἀμφίπολις*). And on Jebel Khalid see P.J. Connor, G.W. Clarke, 'Jebel Khalid in North Syria: The First Campaigns', *Meditarch* 9/10, 1996/97, 151-183 and Pl. 31-34.

9. J. Matthers, ed., *The River Qoueiq, Northern Syria, and its Catchment. Studies arising from the Tell Rifa' at Survey, 1977-79*, 2 parts (BAR Int. Ser. 98), Oxford 1981; P. Sanlaville, ed., *Holocene Settlement in North Syria* (BAR Int. Ser. 238), Oxford 1985; G. Algaze, "A new frontier: First results of the Tigris-Euphrates archaeological reconnaissance project", 1988, *JNES* 48, 1989, 241ff. at 254f.; G. Algaze *et alii*, "The Tigris-Euphrates Archaeological Reconnaissance Project: a preliminary report on the 1989-1990 Seasons", *Anatolica* 17, 1991, 175ff.; T.J. Wilkinson, *Town and Country in Southeastern Anatolia*, vol. 1, Chicago 1990; D. Meijer, *A survey in northeastern Syria*, Istanbul 1986; B. Einwag in *DM* 7, 1993, 23ff.; *AJO* 41/42, 1993/94, 299 ff.; A.K. Rihaoui, "Étude préliminaire sur la sauvegarde des monuments dans la région du barrage de l'Euphrate", *AAAS* 15, 1965, 99ff.; and M. van Loon, "The Tabqa Reservoir Survey 1964", *AAAS* 17, 1967, 1ff.

10. Emphasized by J.D. Grainger, *The Cities of Seleucid Syria*, Oxford 1990.

flow-on in a region like Syria that could muster up to 70,000 troops and which had to support large permanent barracks at Apamea is obvious.

When the Seleucid period petered out in military disaster, dynastic chaos and administrative confusion in the first half of the first century B.C., it is somewhat arbitrary and misleading to envisage the coming of the Romans into the political vacuum as entailing a major cultural break in the region. Material culture for a good while continued largely unchanged into the early Roman period. There is, therefore, considerable difficulty in determining precise dating purely on the grounds of local ceramics between late Hellenistic and early Roman phases. Indeed, to some extent over this transitional period, labeling exclusively as either Late Hellenistic, or as Early Roman can be misleading categorizing, especially given the fact that many aspects of Hellenic culture had taken a very deep and penetrating hold in the region and therefore continued to flourish into the imperial period. One has to rely on other late deposit evidence such as coins, lamp types, etc. for any refined calibration in chronology (not generally available—or only haphazardly so—in surveys).

But what the Roman period did bring, when administration eventually settled down, was not only relative security but an entirely new military configuration, with the Euphrates now marking in formal terms in this area the Roman frontier for the next two and a half centuries, until the very end of the second century A.D. Even so, the river delineated not the easiest line to defend and it was inconveniently long as it traced its Big Bend towards the Mediterranean. With this military reconfiguration four Roman legions became established, notably to the North on the river itself, at Samosata and not far distant at Zeugma, and at various times elsewhere further to the West at Cyrrhus and Antioch, and southwards at Raphanaea, Apamea and Chalcis:<sup>11</sup> that is to say, there were some 40 to 50 thousand men at arms, along with more locally recruited squadrons (*alae, cohortes, auxilia* as well as *vexillationes*)—and therefore thousands of unproductive soldiers requiring to be fed and equipped, paid regularly in coin and creating demand for goods and services, not only agricultural products but also commodities such as metal, hides, textiles and clothing, ceramics, building materials, etc. The stimulus to the local economic life is obvious.

We do know of an *ala* at Europos in the first century A.D., and not too far below the Tishrin dam site at Tell el Hajj (presumably ancient Eragiza) a small fort was occupied at various times by a *cohors secunda pia fidelis* and a *cohors prima milliaria Thracum*, with watching stations continuing downstream, for example, at Tell Qannas, Meskene, Dibsi Faraj, and so on.<sup>12</sup> One would expect a similar series of Roman watching stations upstream between Tell el Hajj and Europos/Carchemish—all possibly under the control of a *praefectus ripae Euphratis* (an officer attested in the first century A.D. at Palmyra). Certainly the citadel of Tell Bazi has now produced one such Roman period fortress and at a crossing-point: another appears to be sited on the West bank roughly opposite Tell Khamis.<sup>13</sup>

The abandonment of the Hellenistic fortress-settlement of Jebel Khalid has to be read in this context of military and strategic reconfiguration under the Roman administration. In general terms, for warning stations the Romans preferred more compact fortlets forward of their main forces which were concentrated in the legionary camps, creating thereby greater mobility and striking flexibility for their major military strength. Jebel Khalid with its nearly 4 km. of walls requiring to be manned and enclosing some 50 ha. of land was hardly ideal for such a compact warning station: it was far too large. As alternative sites were available, such as Tell el Hajj or Tell Bazi, they were chosen in preference. (In the

11. See L.J.F. Keppie, 'Legions in the East from Augustus to Trajan', in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy, eds., *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* (BAR Int. Ser. 297), Oxford 1986, part II, pp. 411ff.

12. W.H. Gracey, *The Roman Army in Syria, Judaea and Arabia*, Oxf. D. Phil. Thesis, 1981, chap. 1 and 4; P. Bridel, R.A. Stucky, "Tell el Hajj, Place Forte du Limes de l'Euphrate", in J.-Cl. Margueron, ed., *Le Moyen Euphrate. Zone des contacts et d'échange. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 10 à 12 mars 1977*, Strasbourg 1978, pp. 349ff.

13. B. Einwag *et alii*, *DM* 8, 1995, 95ff.; *DM* 9, 1996, 15ff.; *AJA* 10, 1997, 108; *Antike Welt* 6, 1996, 459ff.

mid-fourth century A.D. when the site of Jebel Khalid was thoroughly ruinous, a *temporary* Roman encampment was actually thrown up over the original public building area of Jebel Khalid, but it was in a position without any commanding view of the river.)

Against these considerations for our region one must set the inconvenience for communications and for the traveler or trader going southwards along the lengthy Big Bend of the Euphrates: a shorter route could be taken overland, traveling through Osrhoene—(say) from Melitene up in Cappadocia via Samosata and thence through Edessa, Carrhae and down the Balikh to Nicephorium, by-passing the Big Bend of the river entirely. Some of the economic and commercial advantages of the Roman presence would have been lost for our area to this alternative route, especially when the frontier moved forward into Osrhoene and Mesopotamia, with Roman legionary garrisons established under the Severans (late second century) at Rhesaina and Singara.<sup>14</sup> And east-west traffic in the imperial period could also move downstream via (say) Petra, Gerash, Damascus, Palmyra, etc. Though now an east-west route from Nisibis via Edessa, Hierapolis to Antioch was also possible as we have seen from the passage in Egeria.

At this point it is worth recalling the findings of the exemplary survey of Algaze et al.<sup>15</sup> to the immediate North, of the 60 km. of river valley from Carchemish to the Birecik dam area as shown in the chart below.

These statistics speak for themselves. There was a 40% increase in settlement from the Iron Age to the Seleucid/Early Roman, followed by a 36% increase from the Seleucid/Early Roman to the Later Roman/Byzantine (for a total 122% increase from the Iron Age to the Later Roman/Byzantine). After the present salvage work in the Tishrin Dam Catchment area is complete, it is to be hoped that we will be in a position to aggregate comparable figures for the 60 km. stretch of river southwards, from Jerablus to Jebel Khalid. Should there then be any major discrepancy between the growth patterns to the North and to the South of Carchemish over these periods, explanation will be required. But however refined these statistics may ultimately become, that still leaves unresolved the problematic question of the *composition* of that population which expanded in the Greek and then in the Roman Period.<sup>16</sup>

14. For the move into Osrhoene see J. Wagner, "Provincia Osrhoenae: New archaeological finds illustrating the military organization under the Severan Dynasty", in S. Mitchell, ed., *Armies and Frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia* (BAR Int. Ser. 156), Oxford 1983, pp. 103ff.; F. Millar, "The Roman *Coloniae* of the Near East: a Study of Cultural Relations", in H. Solin, M. Kajava, eds., *Roman Eastern Policy and Other Studies in Roman History*, Helsinki 1990, pp. 7ff. (esp. 31ff.). For the route overland to the Balikh see M. Gawlikowski, "La route de l'Euphrate d'Isidore à Julien", in P.-L. Gatier, B. Helly, J.-P. Rey-Coquais, eds., *Géographie historique au Proche-Orient (Syrie, Phénicie, Arabie, grecques, romaines, byzantines)*, Paris 1988, pp. 77ff.; M.-L. Chaumont, "Études d'histoire parthe. V. - La route royale des Parthes de Zeugma à Séleucie du Tigre d'après l'Itinéraire d'Isidore de Charax", *Syria* 61, 1984, 63ff.; M. Gawlikowski, "The Roman Frontier on the Euphrates", *Mesopotamia* 22, 1987, 77ff.

15. G. Algaze et alii, *Anatolica* 17, 1991, 175ff. (see especially figs. 26, 29, 30).

16. See especially F. Millar, "The Problem of Hellenistic Syria", in A. Kuhrt - S. Sherwin-White, eds., *Hellenism in the East*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1987, pp. 110ff.

EVIDENCE OF SETTLEMENTS IDENTIFIED BY THE SURVEY OF ALGAZE <i>ET ALII</i>			
	IRON AGE	SELEUCID/ EARLY ROMAN	LATER ROMAN/ EARLY BYZANTINE
<b>CITIES</b> (ca. 100 ha.)	1 (Carchemish itself)	2 (Zeugma, on the Euphrates) (Apamea on the East bank opposite)	2
<b>LARGE TOWNS</b> (ca. 40 ha.)	0	0	0
<b>SMALL TOWNS</b> (ca. 6-20 ha.)	0	1 (A Seleucid foundation to the North of Zeugma, probably Antiocheia on the Euphrates)	2
<b>VILLAGES</b> (up to 4 ha.)	13	24	34
<b>HECTARES OCCUPIED BY LONG TERM SETTLEMENT</b>	110	155	245