

— EARLY —  
CHRISTIANITY  
IN CONTEXTS

An Exploration across Cultures and Continents

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EDITED BY  
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# The Roman Near East

LINCOLN BLUMELL, JENN CIANCA, PETER RICHARDSON,  
AND WILLIAM TABBERNEE

## Introduction

Rome first intruded into the Near East in 64–63 BCE during conquests by Pompey the Great (106–49 BCE). Initially, only Syria (including Phoenicia) was governed through Rome’s provincial system. Twenty years later the senate chose Herod the Great (r. 37–4 BCE) to rule Judaea, Samaria, and Galilee as a client kingdom (Richardson 1996), while Nabataea and Arabia were left alone. The earliest Christian communities developed in Jerusalem, Judaea, and Samaria (Acts 1:8) in the first century CE, and believers were soon found in Caesarea, Tyre, and Antioch. Christianity entered a difficult period with the Jewish Revolts of 66–74 and 132–135 CE. Though there was no formal parting of the ways (Richardson 2006)—Judaism and Christianity maintained a symbiotic relationship theologically, liturgically, architecturally, and ethically—the tensions led to Christianity developing independently and, ultimately, separating (S. Wilson 1995).

This chapter was written by **Lincoln Blumell** (Sinai and the Negev, Arabia Felix), **Jenn Cianca** (Antioch, the Tetrapolis, and Syria Coele), **Peter Richardson** (Introduction, Judaea, Samaria, Galilee, Syria Phoenice, Phoenicia/Phoenicia Libanensis, The Decapolis, Northern Arabia, Central Arabia, Southern Arabia, Complexity of Christianity in the Roman Near East), and **William Tabbernee** (Jerusalem).

### *The Near East within the Roman Empire*

Pompey's organizational solution did not last, partly because the region was ethnically complex and historically convoluted. Syria in the north and Judaea in the south included various subregions, while semiautonomous cities survived from earlier Hellenistic foundations: along the Mediterranean coastline were cities such as Gaza, Dor, Tyre, Sidon, and, while inland, a Decapolis (ten cities) included centers such as Pella, Gadara, Hippos, and Gerasa.

Herod's death in 4 BCE brought change. Galilee and Peraea went to Herod Antipas (r. 4 BCE–39 CE), while Hulitis, Gaulanitis, Batanaea, Auranitis, and Trachonitis were ruled by Herod Philip II (r. 4 BCE–33 CE). Judaea (including Samaria and Idumaea) was given to Herod Archelaus (r. 4 BCE–6 CE), but it was made a minor Roman province in 6 CE after he was deposed. Judaea was reunited and nominally autonomous between 41 and 44 CE, under Herod Agrippa I (r. 39–44 CE). It was briefly under direct Roman control, but Herod Philip's territories passed to Agrippa's son Marcus Julius Agrippa II in 48, with an imperial procurator responsible for taxes and peace. Following the Jewish Revolt of 66–74, Judaea was expanded to include most of Herod's old territories; when Agrippa II died (ca. 90–100), Rome assumed direct control.

In 106 Trajan (r. 98–117) absorbed Nabataea and created the province of Arabia, whose capital was Bostra. Some Decapolis cities were transferred to the new province (Millar 1993, 95), some to Judaea, and some to Syria. Hadrian's plan to make Jerusalem the new Roman *colonia* Aelia Capitolina, among other factors, triggered the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135; in the aftermath Hadrian (r. 117–138) changed the province's name to Syria Palaestina. Under Diocletian (r. 284–305) the region was divided into Palaestina Prima (Judaea, Samaria, Idumaea, Peraea, coastal plain) with Caesarea as administrative center, Palaestina Secunda (Galilee, Gaulanitis, the old Decapolis areas) with Scythopolis (Beth Shean) as capital, and Palaestina Tertia (the Negev, Nabataea) with Petra as center.

Syria's divisions were similarly complex. Pompey had united Phoenicia, historically a collection of independent cities with extensive maritime trading contacts, with Syria; soon the "official use of the Phoenician language" died out (Millar 1993, 286). Syria Coele (Hollow Syria), an ambiguous geographical designation, once referred to the Decapolis region (Millar 1993, 423) but came to be used of the areas around and between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.1–2, 16, 21). Confusing matters, Septimius Severus (r. 193–211), when he split Syria, named the southern portion Syria Phoenice, though it included more than ancient Phoenicia, and

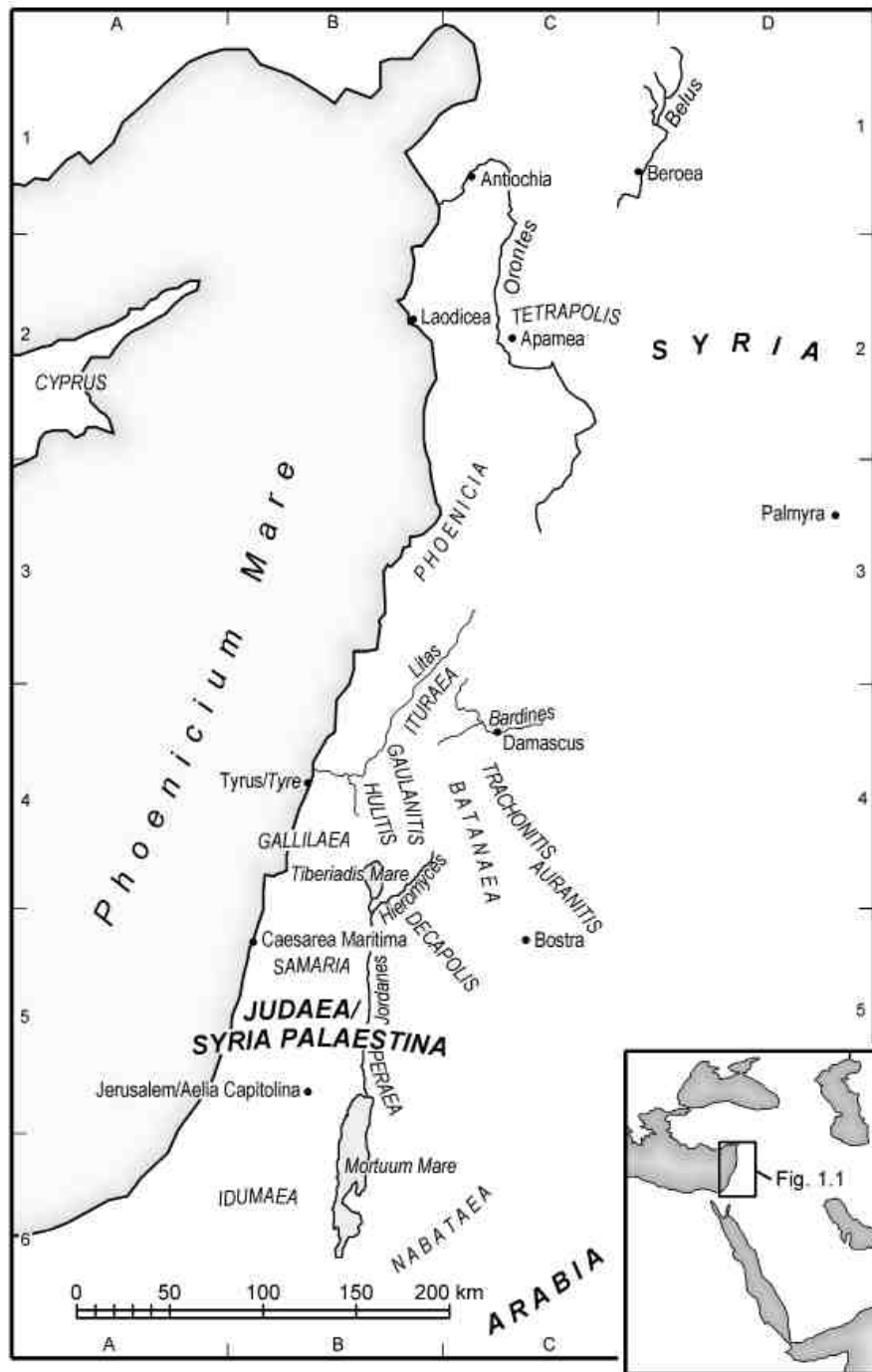


Fig. 1.1. Map of the Roman Near East

the northern portion Syria Coele, though that term once applied to areas in southern Syria. Theodosius I (r. 379–395) divided Syria in four: Syria Coele became Syria Salutaris and Syria Euphratensis; Syria Phoenice became Phoenice and Phoenica Libanensis.

### *Geography and Ecology*

Three tectonic plates—Africa, the Arabian plateau, and Asia Minor—collide within the Levant, generating earthquakes and volcanoes, rifts and uplifted mountains. Because it is an important hinge, there have always been substantial movements of humans, wildlife, and armies in the region. The mountains and rifts of the Levant run mainly north and south, but there are complicating transverse features, such as the hills of Upper Galilee and the Carmel range. Four rivers arise between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges: the Orontes runs north and the Litani runs south from the Bekaa Valley before they both turn west to the Mediterranean; the Barada runs east from the Anti-Lebanons, evaporating in the desert; and the Jordan runs south from Mount Hermon (2814 m), creating the Sea of Galilee (ca. 200 m below sea level) and the Dead Sea (ca. 400 m below sea level). The paucity of permanent rivers ensures that springs and oases acquire extra importance. The climate is generally hotter and drier to the south and east, though there are dramatic variations. Soil has formed from decomposed geological formations, mostly limestone; even where soil nurtures shrubs and trees, settlement pressures and military actions (especially by Romans and Crusaders) have denuded the hills of vegetation, resulting in serious erosion. The land's suitability for settlement, herding, and agriculture is varied, though the valley bottoms are usually fertile.

The Euphrates River, which marks the eastern limit of the Roman Near East, forms, along with the Tigris River, a “fertile crescent” that includes northern Syria and the coastal areas. This Fertile Crescent has indelibly stamped the region as a cradle of human civilization. The crescent's interior is largely desert, while the Sinai Peninsula is a wilderness appendage. Trachonitis, Auranitis, and Gaulanitis include extensive volcanic areas.

### *Peoples and Religions*

Settlements follow water, whether rivers and lakes (Apamea, Tiberias), oases (Palmyra, Jericho), permanent springs (Jerusalem, Petra), or aqueducts from mountain springs (Caesarea Maritima, Laodicea). Easily cultivated areas were settled early, less hospitable areas had small farmsteads, while desert areas supported nomadic or seminomadic groups who herded sheep and goats (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.11), though the contrast between “the desert and the sown” (the title of Gertrude Bell's 1907 book) is less sharp than sometimes thought. In the first century the Near East was a hodgepodge of local peoples interspersed with Greeks and Romans. In his *Geographica* Strabo mentions groups on the margins, such as Scenitae (“peaceful” [16.1.27]); Ituraeans and

Arabians (“all of whom are robbers” [16.2.18]); Idumaeans (“shared in the same customs” with Jews [16.2.34]); “tent-dwellers and camel-herds” (16.4.2); Sabaeans (“beautifully adorned with temples and royal palaces” [16.4.2–3]); Ichthyophagi (“fisheaters” [16.4.4]); Spermophagi (“seed eaters” [16.4.9]); and Creophagi (“flesheaters” [16.4.9]).

#### PHOENICIANS

A sense of ethnicity and religion continued for some time in Phoenician city-states, including Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. Their influence depended on commerce (notably purple dye) and exploration, together with their coinage (especially the Tyrian shekel) that was widely used until the second century CE. Phoenician deities were assimilated to Greco-Roman gods: Melqart, for example, was equated with Rome’s Heracles and Greece’s Hercules. Phoenicia practiced a northwest Semitic religion, adopting customs such as sacrifice (whether this included human sacrifice is still debated), offerings, prayer, purity concerns, and festivals (Schmitz 1992, 359–62). Berytus (Beirut) was not a Phoenician city, having been founded as a Roman *colonia* in 15 BCE.

#### ITURAEANS

Appearing desultorily in the historical record (Strabo, Josephus, New Testament, coins, inscriptions), Ituraea centered on Mount Hermon and extended into the Bekaa Valley, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Hulitis, and Upper Galilee. Widely dispersed inscriptions name Ituraeans as a Roman auxiliary unit noteworthy for archery; this auxiliary role continued after the ethnic group itself had virtually disappeared (E. Myers 2010). Nothing is known of their origins and very little about their religious activities, though they had cult centers on Mount Hermon (Dar 1993). Josephus (*Ant.* 13.11.3) claims that they were forcibly converted to Judaism by the Hasmonean Aristobulus I (r. 104–103 BCE), but he may exaggerate (Kasher 1988).

#### PALMYRENES

A distinctive culture emerged at Palmyra’s desert oasis by the first century BCE, with worship focused on Semitic deities, such as Baal Shamim and Bel. Family or clan burials were often in tower tombs, incorporating distinctive grave sculptures. Its architecture blended Roman and indigenous traditions: the Temple of Bel, for example, had a Palmyrene *naos* (inner sanctuary) within a Roman *temenos* (sacred enclosure) that included an altar, banqueting hall, and a ritual pool (Richardson 2002, 25–51). Palmyra prospered from the late first century BCE through the third century CE, reaping tariff income

through trading via the Euphrates, the Silk Road, and transdesert routes. After revolting against Rome under Queen Zenobia (r. 270–272), Palmyra only partially recovered.

#### NABATAEANS

By the second century BCE, Nabataeans had displaced Edomites (Idumaeans) from east of the Dead Sea to west of it. By the next century, Nabataeans formed a prosperous kingdom stretching from southern Syria to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (Strabo, *Geogr.* 15.4.21–26), which often conflicted with Jews. They were famous for sophisticated management of limited water resources and a magisterial skill in constructing rock-cut buildings whose details were indebted to Hellenistic architecture (Markoe 2003). Nabataean religion focused on Semitic divinities such as Dushara, al-Ilhat, and Atargatis. As wealthy middlemen in international trade between the Mediterranean and the East, the Nabataeans joined Rome in a military expedition to Arabia Felix under Aelius Gallus in 25–24 BCE, but they lost their separate identity when Rome created the province of Arabia.



Peter Richardson

Fig. 1.2. Temple of Bel, Palmyra



### 1.1 Roman Roads

Rome's armies engaged in massive road building that spurred trade and communications. Some examples, though only a portion of the integrated network (Graf, Isaac, and Roll 1992), suggest their extent and importance:

- A road connected Seleucia Pieria and Antioch with Beroea (Aleppo) and eastward to the Euphrates, a large section of which still exists west of Aleppo.
- A paved road connecting Damascus with Tyre (es-Sur), through Panias/Caesarea Philippi (Banias), went over a mountainous height of land near modern Qiryat Shemonah, west of the Jordan River.
- Roads connected the Wadi Sirhan to Ptolemais (Tell Acco) and Caesarea Maritima (Qesaria) (built 69 CE [Graf, Isaac, and Roll 1992, 785]); parallel roads connected Philadelphia (Amman) with Caesarea Maritima and Joppe (Jaffa).
- Desert caravans arriving in Petra proceeded along roads through the Negev to Gaza.
- The Via Nova Traiana (built 111–114 CE) followed the much earlier King's Highway from Aila ('Aqaba) on the Red Sea to Damascus.
- A new road mirrored the Via Maris (Way of the Sea), paralleling the coastline; the part from Antioch to Ptolemais is the earliest datable road in the area (56 CE).

#### SAMARITANS

When the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed in 722 BCE, the continuing peoples were known as Samaritans. Following its revolt against Alexander the Great (r. 336–323 BCE), Samaria was again destroyed, and the main city (also called Samaria) was moved nearer Mount Gerizim. Augustus (r. 31 BCE–14 CE) made Samaria part of Herod's kingdom. Herod built there extensively, including an imperial cult center at Samaria, which, in honor of Augustus, he renamed Sebaste (Sebastiya). Under Hadrian, a temple to Zeus Hypsistos (Highest) was built on the slopes of Mount Gerizim. Samaritanism, like Judaism, included animal sacrifice, ritual purity, and Torah (the five books of Moses). Samaritan synagogues were spread widely, in places such as Delos, Thessalonica, and Caesarea.

#### JEWES

During the Persian period, following the Babylonian exile of 587 BCE, Jews were loyal to Persia but restive under the Seleucids, until the Hasmonean Revolt (167–164 BCE) freed them from Syrian control. Dynastic conflicts led to Roman domination (63 BCE) and ultimately to an offer of the kingship to Herod. Though Herod was ethnically half Nabataean and half Idumaeon,

his grandfather had converted to Judaism (Richardson 1996). Herod rebuilt and extended the temple in Jerusalem, on which Jewish religion focused. Jews were found everywhere in the Roman Empire (possibly 10–15 percent of its population), worshiping in local synagogues (Richardson 2004, 111–85). Three revolts between 66 and 135 CE strained relations with Rome.

### *Trade, Commerce, and Roads*

As Rome pursued extensive trade networks following Augustus's *Pax Romana* (Roman peace), the Levant became an important transportation hub. Trade followed traditional routes across the Syrian and Arabian deserts and up from the Red Sea, linking the Mediterranean with the Arabian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and the Far East. Some infrastructure already existed in major commercial centers and entrepôts, such as Antioch, Palmyra, and Petra, and this made Rome's acquisition of Syria and Arabia inevitable. Herod's construction of the largest harbor in the Mediterranean at Caesarea Maritima provided a major boost, but smaller harbors, such as Gaza, Dor, and Seleucia Pieria, were also important. Roman roads sometimes mimicked caravan routes but primarily met military needs.

As goods traveled freely along the roads of the Levant, so did ideas. Dura-Europos shows, at the moment of its destruction in 256 CE, the competition



Peter Richardson

Fig. 1.3. Roman Road, between Antioch and Beroea

among various religious traditions, where new religions such as Christianity and Mithraism coexisted with established religions (Judaism, Atargatis, and the Palmyrene gods) and Greek cults (Adonis and Zeus). The Parthian style of the frescoed illustrations in several of these cult buildings emphasizes how they shared remarkably similar cultural features.

### *Contextual Influences*

That Christianity benefited from the expanding road system is underscored by the fact that the three earliest archaeologically attested Christian buildings are deep within this road network. Aila on the Red Sea has the earliest purpose-built church (late third century); Dura-Europos, near Salihya on the Euphrates, has the earliest surviving house-church (ca. 230–240); and Megiddo at an important road junction has another third-century church. Christianity benefited from religions jostling with one another on the same streets and being carried by the same camels or in the holds of the same ships (Vaage 2006; Donaldson 2000). The time and effort that emperors such as Hadrian devoted to the Levant show its importance to Rome, and soon emperors such as Elagabalus (r. 218–222) and Alexander Severus (r. 222–235) were chosen from the East. Eventually the first Arab emperor, Philip (r. 244–249), came from Shahba (renamed Philippopolis); his tolerance prompted Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 264/5–ca. 339/40) to report that some considered Philip the first Christian emperor.

### *Christianity in the Levant*

Almost from the beginning, visitors came to Judaea and Galilee for both scholarly and pious reasons. Melito of Sardis (fl. ca. 170), the earliest known “pilgrim,” wanted to ascertain the biblical canon; Gregory Thaumaturgus (the Wonderworker), later bishop of Neocaesarea in Pontus (bp. ca. 238/9–ca. 270/5), came to study with Origen (ca. 185–ca. 253) sometime between 231 and 238; the mother of Constantine I (r. 306–337), Helena, wished to stimulate her piety. Helena traveled extensively in 326 and identified the burial place of Jesus, claiming to have found a relic of the true cross. The Pilgrim of Bordeaux in 333 was the earliest to produce a written record, but the most famous was Egeria, who left an important journal of her visit between 381 and 384 (Wilkinson 1999). About the same time, Paula and her daughter Eustochium visited the most famous places in the Holy Land in 385 (sometimes traveling with Jerome), before taking up monastic life and settling in Bethlehem. Remarkably, three of the more famous of these pious pilgrims—Helena, Egeria, and Paula—were women.

Christianity succeeded in wealth and power beyond all expectation, prompting some, like Paula and Jerome, to seek escape by establishing monasteries with an ascetic lifestyle in isolated wildernesses and deserts. The numbers were huge. Desolate areas were filled with ascetics, both males and females, seeking redemption with like-minded persons (Chitty 1966). Within three hundred years of Jesus's death, Christianity had transformed the Near East. From being the fount of Christian belief, the Near East had become a place of renewal, the ultimate destination of the pious, and a great intellectual center of the faith.

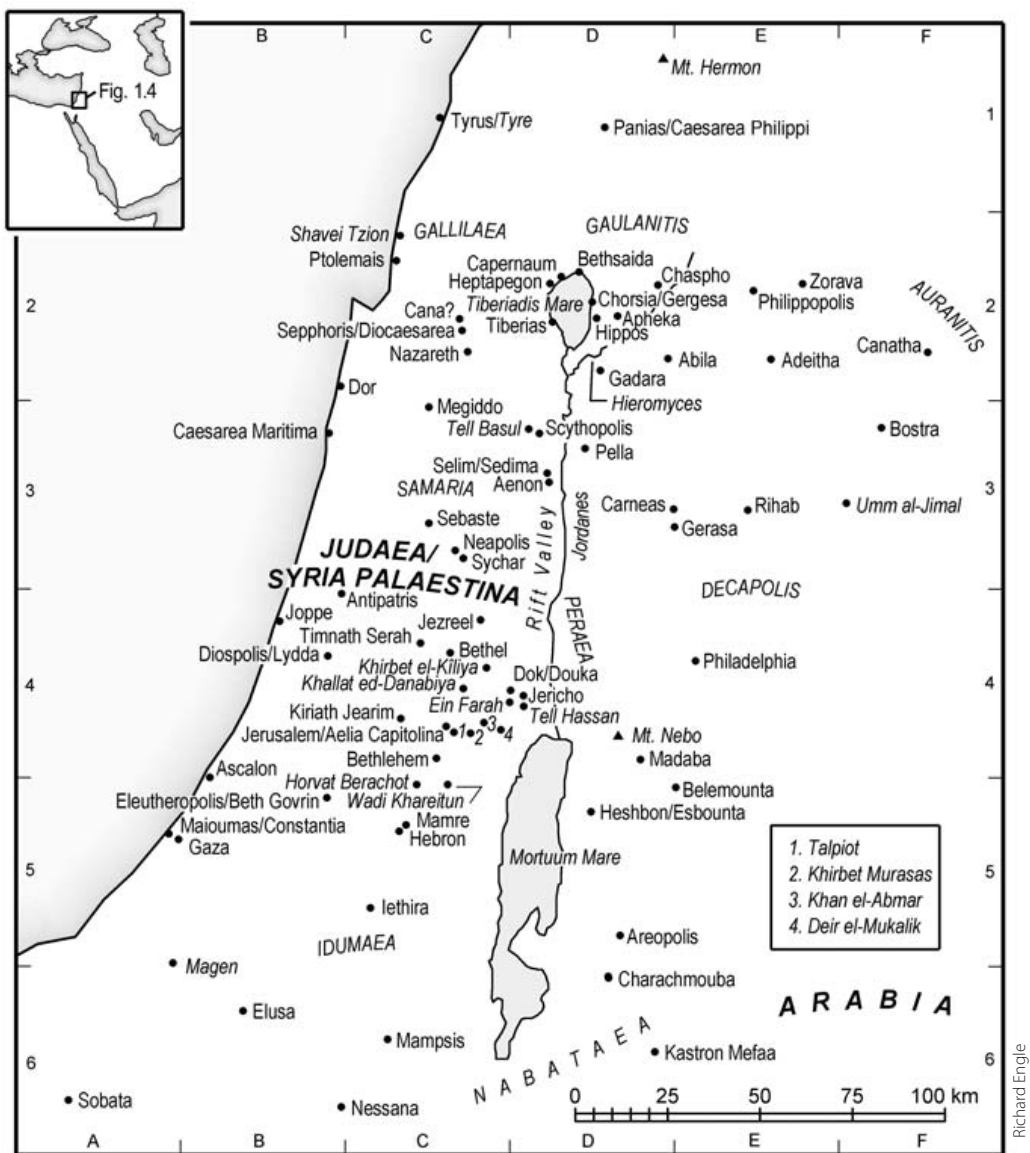


Fig. 1.4. Map of Judaea/Syria Palaestina, Samaria, and Galilee

Richard Engle

## Palaestina

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### *Jerusalem*

Christianity began in Jerusalem with a group of Jewish followers of Jesus in about 30 CE. At the time, of course, Christianity was not known as “Christianity,” nor was Christianity’s original beginning the only time when Christianity “began” at Jerusalem. There were periods in the tumultuous political history of Jerusalem when Christianity was virtually nonexistent in the city.

During the First Jewish Revolt many early Christians fled from Jerusalem, some settling for a time at Pella (Tabaqat Fahil), across the Jordan (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3; Epiphanius, *Mens.* 14–15). By the time of the Second Jewish Revolt (132–135), led by Simon Bar Kosiba (d. 135)—popularly known as Bar Kokhba, “Son of a Star” (cf. Num. 24:17)—a sizable Christian community again existed in Jerusalem. Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165) relates that Bar Kokhba persecuted Christians who acknowledged Jesus rather than him as messiah (*1 Apol.* 31.5–6). After the revolt Jerusalem was almost completely razed to the ground.

### COLONIA AELIA CAPITOLINA

A new city, called Aelia Capitolina—a name chosen to emphasize its no-longer Jewish character—was built on the site of ancient Jerusalem. *Aelius* was the family name of Hadrian (P. Aelius Hadrianus), under whom the Bar Kokhba Revolt was quelled, and *Capitolina* referred to Jupiter Capitolinus, Rome’s senior male god. Hadrian forbade Jews to live in the new city or even to visit it (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.6.1–4). He erected pagan temples on sites sacred to Jews and Christians. On the site of the Jewish temple, demolished during the First Jewish Revolt by Titus (r. 79–81), he built a shrine to Jupiter, and on a newly leveled area that covered the rocky outcrop once known as Golgotha/Calvary and the nearby rock-cut tombs, one of which may have been Jesus’s burial place,<sup>1</sup> he built a Temple of Venus (Aphrodite). Not until Constantine and Helena became interested in constructing Christian basilicas in Jerusalem were sites such as Golgotha and Jesus’s tomb recovered for the Christian community.

1. A picturesque “Garden Tomb” outside the north wall of Jerusalem was taken by General Charles C. Gordon in 1884 to be the tomb of Jesus, and the hillside into which the tomb is cut to be Golgotha. The tomb in question, however, was constructed some six hundred to seven hundred years before the time of Christ and reused by Byzantine Christians four hundred to five hundred years after the time of Christ (see Finegan 1992, 282–84 nos. 236–38). Any alleged connection with Jesus himself is spurious.

### JERUSALEM AS A CHRISTIAN CITY

Constantine demolished Hadrian's Temple of Venus and had rubble removed to uncover Golgotha and nearby long-buried tombs. Between 326 and 335 Constantine's chief architect, Zenobius, constructed the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This magnificent basilica consisted of an outer court (entered from the *Cardo Maximus*, the main north-south street), the basilica itself, a second courtyard, and a rotunda (built over the rock-cut tomb identified as the tomb of Christ) named the Anastasis (Resurrection). Part of Golgotha was incorporated into the southeastern corner of the second courtyard, which led from the basilica to the rotunda.

An early fourth-century graffito of a sailing ship and the words *Domine ivimus*<sup>2</sup> (Lord, we shall go) can still be seen on one of the walls of a vault supporting the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The inscription alludes to Psalm 122:1, "Let us go to the house of the Lord" (Vulgate: *in domum Domini ibimus*), as well as John 6:68, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" (Vulgate: *Domine, ad quem ibimus*). Psalm 122 was traditionally sung by pilgrims after they had arrived in Jerusalem,<sup>3</sup> and the graffito attests the safe completion of a journey by boat to Jerusalem by Christians who had come to the "house" that, at that very time, was being built to encompass the empty tomb of Jesus their *dominus* (Lord).

### PILGRIMS AND HOLY PLACES

Pilgrims such as those who carved the ship on the foundations of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher made it a point to visit the Temple Mount. There they could visualize the Herodian temple in all its splendor and imagine Jesus being tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:5; cf. Luke 4:9), turning over the tables of the money changers (Mark 11:15), and prophesying that not one stone<sup>4</sup> would be "left here upon another" (Mark 13:2). Another historic landmark visited by Byzantine pilgrims was the Pool of Bethesda, where, according to John 5:2–9, Jesus healed a lame man. The pool actually consisted of two adjacent pools. One pool was an *oşer*, a reservoir that collected rainwater and fed its "living water" into the smaller stepped pool, which was a *miqueh*, a Jewish bath for ritual self-immersion. Between the early second and early fourth centuries the Pool of Bethesda was part of an Asclepieum, a pagan healing center. By the fifth century a Christian church had been built at the site. Originally known as

2. That is, *Domine ibimus*; *b* and *v* were commonly substituted for each other in spoken Latin.

3. The whole text of Psalm 122:1–2 reads, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!' Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem."

4. That is, of the temple itself. Some of the temple enclosure's retaining walls, as already noted, were not destroyed and remain partially intact to this day, including the southeast corner, identified by some as "the pinnacle of the temple" (Matt. 4:5; Luke 4:9).

## 1.2 Ossuaries

A large number of ossuaries have been found around Jerusalem, all dating from before the Bar Kokhba Revolt (i.e., pre-135). Some were found in a cemetery at the traditional site where Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) (Finegan 1992, 172 no. 63, 366–74 nos. 319–26), known as Dominus Flevit. Some scholars think that drawings and symbols on a few ossuaries there indicate Christian allegiance by some of those whose bones were inside (Finegan 1992, 372–74). This is unlikely.

Nor, despite views to the contrary (e.g., Shanks and Witherington 2003), is there incontrovertible evidence that the ossuary inscribed “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus” contained the bones of James the brother of Jesus of Nazareth. Given the extreme popularity of the names Jesus, Joseph, and James (Jacob) in first-century Jewish communities, and the early tradition that James was buried (in the ground) immediately following his martyrdom (Hegesippus, *Fr.*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.18), it is difficult not to believe that the ossuary is that of some other James (Richardson 2004, 309–24).

Similarly, the ossuaries found at Talpiot, 5 km south of Jerusalem (Tabor and Jacobovici 2012), are unlikely to have any connection with Jesus of Nazareth, even though they include familiar names such as Jesus, Joseph, and Mariamne/Mary.\* That some of the relatives of Jesus were deeply involved in the leadership of the early Christian community is, nonetheless, indisputable (Hegesippus, *Fr.*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.20.8; 3.32.6).

\* Attempts to identify other ossuaries found in or near Jerusalem with the families of Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57) or Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21) have also not been definitive.

the Church of the Lame Man, it was later called the Church of the Nativity of Mary, after the supposed birthplace of the mother of Jesus. A second church to St. Mary, the so-called Nea (New) Basilica, was dedicated by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565) in 543. This huge church, the largest in Palaestina at the time, was built at the southern end of the *Cardo Maximus*, as indicated on a sixth-century mosaic map found at Madaba in Jordan. This map also depicts the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and, in addition to the *Cardo*, the *Decumanus*, the main east-west street (fig. I.2).

Fourth-century Christian pilgrims record that they were shown the house of the high priest Caiaphas, where Jesus was tried by the Jewish authorities (Matt. 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54) and where St. Peter denied Christ (Matt. 26:69–75). In the sixth century the house taken to have been that of Caiaphas was made into a church named after Peter. By the twelfth century this church had been renamed as the Church of St. Savior, and the location was assumed to have been that of Pilate’s *praetorium* (judgment hall), where



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Fig. 1.5. Church of the Nativity of Mary, Jerusalem

Jesus was mockingly crowned with thorns (Matt. 27:27–31). The actual site of the *praetorium*, however, is more likely to have been the stone pavement (*lithostrōton*) next to what had once been Herod the Great’s palace. Given the razing of Jerusalem before its reconstruction by Hadrian, it is not surprising that the precise location of many sites associated with Jesus and the earliest Christian community were lost to posterity. Two different churches, for example, commemorate the site of the house of another Mary the mother of John Mark.<sup>5</sup>

#### JAMES, FIRST BISHOP OF JERUSALEM

James “the Just,” the brother of Jesus, was, along with the apostles Peter and John, acknowledged as one of the “pillars” of the church and deemed by Paul to have apostolic status (Gal. 2:9; cf. 1:18–19). The exact nature of James’s role is difficult to ascertain. The earliest Christian community in Jerusalem was more a loosely knit movement within Judaism that believed Jesus to be the Messiah than a “church” with an episcopal hierarchical structure. In subsequent centuries, however, James was anachronistically deemed to have been the first bishop of Jerusalem and to have received his episcopate from the apostles or

5. Traditionally, Mary’s house is considered to be the place where Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12) and at least one of the places in Jerusalem where the earliest Christian community gathered (Acts 2:1; 12:12).



even Jesus himself (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.1.2–4; 2.23.1; 2.23.4; 7.19). James was martyred in about 61 by being thrown from the “pinnacle of the temple,” stoned, clubbed to death, and buried in a simple tomb (Hegesippus, *Fr.*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.23.18). Pilgrims to Jerusalem were shown, however, an elaborate tomb supposed to be that of James in the Kidron Valley, near the Temple Mount, and his (alleged) episcopal chair (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.19) (Finegan 1992, 305–8 nos. 264–66).

#### CHRISTIAN JEWS IN JERUSALEM

If the information supplied by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.5.1–4) is correct, counting James, there were fifteen bishops of Jerusalem before the time of Hadrian, all circumcised (i.e., Jewish). James was succeeded by Symeon, a cousin of Jesus and James (Hegesippus, *Fr.*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.22.4; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.11.1–2; 3.32.1–4.5.3). Prior to Hadrian, it appears, the Christian community in Jerusalem comprised primarily Jews who continued to see themselves as Jews, even though they disagreed with their fellow Jews on the significance of Jesus of Nazareth. Using the term “Jewish Christianity” to describe Christianity in Jerusalem (or elsewhere) is, however, problematic, not only because the term is modern rather than ancient but also because it is unclear whether the underlying reference to Judaism is ethnic or religious. Especially pertinent is the extent to which Jewish practices such as circumcision and food laws were to be observed by early Christians who were not born as Jews or who had not formally converted to Judaism. It seems that in Jerusalem, at least during the earliest developments, there was a greater insistence on conformity to Torah than in areas of Pauline influence in Asia Minor (Gal. 2:1–21) and Greece.

Christian practice in Jerusalem may have differed little from Jewish practice, other than the church’s regular communal meals (Acts 2:42, 46) and its distinctive form of baptism (Acts 2:38, 41). Although much of the Acts of the Apostles reflects later church tradition, its references to the daily breaking of bread in the homes of the earliest disciples and to the mandatory baptism of those joining the Jesus movement may well portray accurately these practices within the earliest church. Similarly, there is no need to doubt that members of the community renounced private ownership of property and, when necessary, sold what they owned for the common good (Acts 2:44; 4:32–5:11).

It is difficult to estimate the size of the earliest community of Jesus’s followers in Jerusalem, a city of perhaps twenty thousand at the time. The figures in Acts—three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), five thousand (male) believers in Jesus’s resurrection (Acts 4:4), and the “many thousands of believers . . . among the Jews” in Jerusalem (Acts 21:20)—are

retorical statements rather than reliable statistics (Stark 1996, 5). That the earliest “Christian” community in Jerusalem consisted of around 120 members (Acts 1:15), and that this group, like Christianity as a whole, experienced a growth rate of about 40 percent per decade as postulated by Stark (1996, 5–6; cf. R. Beck 2006, 233–52) seems reasonable. By the time Symeon became leader of the community in about 70 CE, there may have been hardly more than 450 Christian families in Jerusalem. How many returned with Symeon from Pella is debatable.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from their names, little is known about the other early “bishops” of Jerusalem. Many of the fifteen persons listed by Eusebius as bishops<sup>7</sup> may, in fact, have been leading elders who, alongside the apostles, appear to have had oversight of the Jerusalem Christian community (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22) (Horbury 2006, 58–59). Jerusalem also had a diaconate, which, according to Acts 6:5, included Stephen, the first martyr, and Philip the Evangelist.

#### GENTILE CHRISTIANITY

After Hadrian’s founding of Aelia Capitolina as a Roman colony, Christianity in the city took on a distinctively Gentile character. Eusebius presents a list of fifteen non-Jewish bishops (*Hist. eccl.* 5.12.1b–2; cf. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 66.20) as a parallel to his earlier list of Jewish ones.<sup>8</sup> The second list concludes with Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem (ca. 189–216), assisted in the latter part of his life by Alexander, formerly a bishop in Cappadocia (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.11.1–2). It was Alexander who, along with Theoctistus of Caesarea Maritima (bp. 216–258), allowed Origen to preach to their congregations (ca. 230/1) while still a layman. Alexander later ordained Origen as presbyter (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.8.4–5; 6.19.16–19). The bishops of Caesarea Maritima, the capital of Syria Palaestina, were much more important than those of Jerusalem. As ecclesiastical hierarchy developed, they became the metropolitans of the region, with the bishops of Aelia/Jerusalem being accountable to them. Jerusalem began to recover some of its earlier status as the historic mother church of Christianity only when the Council of Nicaea (325) mandated that, notwithstanding the status of the metropolitan of Caesarea, the bishop of Aelia be given due honor (*Can.* 7).

6. While the historicity of the temporary withdrawal of Christians to Pella seems assured, the details are sketchy, and the significance of the event has frequently been overestimated, both in ancient times and more recently (Horbury 2006, 69; see also Lüdemann 1980).

7. According to Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.5), they were Justus, Zacchaeus, Tobias, Benjamin, John, Matthias, Philip, Seneca, Justus, Levi, Ephres, Joses, and Judas.

8. The first group of Gentile bishops, according to Eusebius, consisted of Mark, Cassian, Publius, Maximus, Julian, Gaius, Symmachus, a second Gaius, a second Julian, Capito, a second Maximus, Antoninus, Valens, Dolichianus, and Narcissus.

### POST-CONSTANTINIAN CHRISTIANITY

Macarius (bp. ca. 312–334) represented Jerusalem at Nicaea, following which he welcomed Helena to Jerusalem, starting the process by which Jerusalem became the preeminent site for Christian pilgrims. Jerusalem's reputation for orthodoxy was enhanced by the lectures to catechumens of Cyril of Jerusalem (bp. ca. 348/9–386/7). These annual lectures included an attack on the Montanists (*Catech.* 16.8) to counter their claims that the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21) would be established at Pepouza in Phrygia rather than at Jerusalem in Palaestina (see chap. 7). Perhaps earlier bishops had also felt the threat to the significance of Jerusalem from movements such as Montanists and Marcionites, as well as from the rising prestige of churches such as Rome (Irshai 2006, 105–12).

Juvenal (bp. ca. 420–458) had Jerusalem declared a patriarchate at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, in addition to the patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. After the council, at which Juvenal had reversed his earlier “Monophysite” position, the Jerusalem church was for a time deeply divided between pro- and anti-Chalcedonian Christians. In 614 the Persians captured Jerusalem and retained control until 630/1. A number of Christians were killed, including some buried in a mass grave marked by a mosaic inscription: “Those whose names are known to the Lord” (Reich 1996). Some Christian churches, such as the Nea and St. Mary's at the Pool of Bethesda, were destroyed; others, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, were seriously damaged.

Byzantine rule had scarcely been restored and the rebuilding of churches begun when, in 638, the city was conquered once again, this time by the Muslim caliph Umar (r. 634–644). Paradoxically, the Muslim occupants of the city were more tolerant than the Byzantines had been. Jews were allowed to live in Jerusalem, and various Christian groups, including “Nestorians,” Manichaeans, and Maronites, were able to gain some ground, both literally and theologically. Ultimately, however, a group of Christians known as Melkites won the day, not only preserving Chalcedonian Christology but also developing a unique Arab Orthodox (as distinct from Greek Orthodox or Syrian Orthodox) Christian community. This community, though small, was still thriving in the Holy City when the first Crusaders arrived in 1099 (S. Griffith 2006).

### *Judaea*

#### CAESAREA

Although Eusebius emphasizes that “Hebrews” were consistently bishops of Jerusalem prior to the Second Jewish Revolt, we have little information about Christians in the rest of Judaea; the majority must have been Jewish,

perhaps forming groups known as Ebionites and Nazoraeans. In the influential city of Caesarea, despite extensive archaeological excavation, little bears on Christian developments (Ascough 2000), though remnants of a (fifth-century?) chapel dedicated to St. Paul have been discovered in a warehouse area (Patrich 2000). The book of Acts hints at tensions between Jerusalem and Caesarea. In about 195 the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem jointly presided over the Council of Caesarea to mediate a dispute concerning the date of Easter, the troublesome Quartodeciman controversy between Alexandria and Antioch. Antioch argued for the older view that linked Easter with Nisan 14 (Passover), regardless of the day on which it fell, while Alexandria emphasized the day—the Lord’s Day—rather than the date. With both Jerusalem and Caesarea siding with Alexandria, the Lord’s Day won the struggle, and Judaea slid away from Christian-Jewish norms. From this point on, “Caesarea clearly became the most important church in Palestine” (Ascough 2000, 165), and not until 325 did Jerusalem regain its position.

When Origen came to Caesarea—first in 215 because of persecution in his native Alexandria and permanently in 231 because of a rift with Demetrius of Alexandria (bp. ca. 189–ca. 231/2)—it became a major Christian intellectual center, attracting not only orthodox Christians but also “innumerable heretics and a considerable number of the most eminent philosophers” (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.18.2), suggesting a broad mix of beliefs. Origen’s scholarship focused on the biblical text. Eusebius says that Origen gathered a library of over thirty thousand volumes. Among these were several Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible that he laid alongside the Septuagint in his *Hexapla*. Origen himself had found one of these “versions,” by an unknown author, in a jar at Jericho. Another was by Symmachus, a late second-century Ebionite who kept Torah in a Jewish manner (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.16–17). One of Origen’s goals in producing polyglot editions of the Hebrew Scriptures, containing not only the Hebrew text and a Greek transliteration but also multiple Greek versions in parallel columns, was to carry on dialogues, or disputes, with Jews. Origen died around 253 from injuries sustained in the Decian persecution (250–251), twenty years after he had developed a theology of interior martyrdom in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*.

Eusebius became bishop of Caesarea in about 313, about the time when Constantine officially became emperor of the western part of the Roman Empire. The eventual close cooperation between emperor and ecclesiastical leader gave Caesarea a new prominence, though Eusebius’s shared interest with Arius (ca. 256/60–ca. 336) in a particular form of trinitarian theology first developed by Origen later required justification. Eusebius gives a firsthand view of conditions during the early fourth century in his irreplaceable works,

especially his *Church History*, *Onomasticon*, *Martyrs of Palestine*, and *Life of Constantine*. Additional witnesses, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis (bp. ca. 367–ca. 403/5) and Jerome (347–419), round out the picture.<sup>9</sup>

#### ARCHAEOLOGY AND LITERATURE

Among the numerous important archaeological finds in Caesarea (Richardson 2000, 11–34), none is more evocative than an inscription found in secondary usage that refers to Pontius Pilate (using his correct title), under whom Jesus was executed: [. . .]S TIBERIEUM/[. . . PON]TIUS PILATUS/[PRA]EFECTUS IUDA(EA)E/[. . .] (Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judaea, [built] the Tiberieum) (McLean 2000, 60–62; Richardson 2000, 23–24). This reference to Pontius Pilate, governor of Judaea (26–36 CE), in an archaeological context takes us back indirectly to the historical Jesus. Other archaeological sites are, of course, associated with events in Jesus’s life. Since few shed any direct light, the main benefit of more than a century’s excavations has been to clarify the contexts, whether Jewish, Roman, or Hellenistic, in which Jesus lived. One of the most important results has been the recovery of ordinary Jewish peasant life in Galilee, Peraea, Samaria, and Judaea (Charlesworth 2006).

Judaea in the early Christian period may be the provenance of several documents. The “Signs Gospel,” a hypothetical source from the 50s–60s that underlies the Gospel attributed to John (Richardson 2004, 91–107) and reflects Jesus traditions before they were incorporated into the Fourth Gospel, probably is from Judaea. Two Egyptian papyri (P.Oxy. 5.840; P.Egerton 2), containing Jesus traditions, may also derive from Judaea, as may the Epistle of James. If James 1:1 should be understood as addressed to Judaeans in the Diaspora, then James’s critical view of Paul’s understanding of “faith” is an attempt to undermine Paul’s influence where it was greatest. Jude and 2 Peter are more ambiguous; both may be early (Bauckham 1992) and could be set in Judaea, along with the early second-century *Acts of Pilate*. The *Martyrdom of Isaiah* and the *Ascension of Isaiah* are from the same period and locale, and both have later Christian interpolations, suggesting that Jesus’s “disciples will abandon the teaching of the twelve apostles” (*Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 3.21). Some argue that *Sibylline Oracles* 6–8 are Judaeans, and that Oracle 6 is from the Jordan Valley. Such possibilities imply substantial Christian Jewish literary activity that reflects a storyline different from the canonical Gospels, around but outside Jerusalem. The sources continue later in the second century with Hegesippus

9. Jerome’s writings are particularly important for the history of this period, including his *Letters*, his *Lives*—for example, of Paulus (written ca. 374), Hilarion (ca. 390), and Malchus (ca. 391)—and his preface to the *Book on the Sites and Names of Hebrew Places* (ca. 388).

(110–170) and in the third century with Origen. The *Testament of Solomon* (third century) may also derive from Judaea.

#### PERSECUTIONS

Paul identified himself as formerly a persecutor of the church (Phil. 3:6). At first, persecution of Christians was by “vigilante” action, as in the cases of Stephen and James (brother of John) during the 30s and 40s. It became more official in the 60s with the death of James the brother of Jesus. Roman authorities soon became interested in Christians. For example, Peter and Paul appear to have been martyred during a brief but local persecution at Rome initiated by Nero (r. 54–68), in about 64 (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.5; cf. *1 Clem.* 5.1–7). Domitian (r. 81–96) interrogated, but released, two grandsons of Jude the brother of Jesus (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.20.1–8). Atticus, the governor of Syria Palaestina in the reign of Trajan, executed the second “bishop” of Jerusalem, Symeon son of Clopas. Eusebius, on whom we are so dependent, cites Hegesippus to the effect that troubles were “sporadic” and “popular” (*Fr.*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.32). Such occasional instances of persecution led to widespread martyrdoms, especially under Decius (r. 249–251). Locally in Caesarea under Valerian (r. 253–260), three men and one woman from the countryside went purposefully to Caesarea “to grasp the martyr’s crown” (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.12). There were renewed bouts of official persecution under Diocletian and Maximinus II Daia (r. 310–313): churches were leveled, sacred books burned, Christians removed from office, bishops imprisoned, and everyone was required to make sacrifices to the emperor. In the post-Constantinian era there was a brief renewal of persecution under Julian (r. 361–363).

#### WORSHIP AND CHURCH REMAINS

Large parts of Judaea became Christian during the third century, though there are few remains from that period, but soon increased pilgrim activity changed the landscape. By 330 four large imperial projects were under construction



Fig. 1.6. Pilate Inscription, Caesarea Maritima

at Bethlehem (Pullan 2000), Mamre (Wilkinson 2002, 91; Freeman-Grenville, Chapman, and Taylor 2003, 13), and Jerusalem. Egeria describes Eleona (i.e., Olive Grove), a major basilica on the Mount of Olives covering a “cave in which the Lord was wont to teach” and “where hymns and antiphons suitable to the day and to the place are said” (Wilkinson 2002, 65, 67; cf. 71, 82, 85, 87). Bethlehem’s Church of the Holy Nativity, before being rebuilt by Justinian, had an octagon over the cave marking the site of Jesus’s birth. The octagon, which was attached to the basilica, emphasized the vertical relationship between God and God’s action in history. At Mamre (Haram Ramet el-Khalil), near Hebron, a site associated with Abraham, Constantine constructed a basilica inside an enclosure that Herod the Great had built, counteracting the quasi-pagan nature of the site (Eshel, Richardson, and Jamitowski forthcoming).

Egeria’s main interest was a site’s liturgical and processional activities, shedding a bright light on Judaeans’ late fourth-century worship. Among the churches she mentions are Timnath Serah, Kiriath Jearim, Bethel, and Shepherds’ Fields in Bethlehem (Wilkinson 2002, 90–100). There are no certain Judaeans’ remains of pre-Constantinian church construction. Fourth-century building activity, however, reflects a deep Christianizing of Judaea. Eusebius, for instance, notes in his *Onomasticon* that Iethira (Khirbet ‘Attir, near Eleutheropolis/Beth Govrin [Bet Jibrin]) was a village comprised wholly of Christians. From the next century, the most important is a parish church at Lod (ancient Lydda/Diospolis), built over a Second Temple period building that may have been a synagogue, in which case it may be the earliest example of a church above a synagogue (Zelinger and Di Segni 2006). An inscription refers to “the most-reverend Bishop Dionysos,” who attended the Council of Constantinople in 381 after having been persecuted under the Arian emperor Valens (r. 364–378). There were Christian cave shrines at Horvat Berachot (Tsafir and Hirschfeld 1993, 207–18) and at Khallat ed-Danabiya, a church at Tell Hassan (near Jericho), and possibly an open-air church outside Caesarea’s walls.

#### MONASTERIES

The Holy Land’s first monastery, anticipating exponential growth during the next century, was Chariton’s structure from around 330 at Ein Farah, 10 km east of Jerusalem along the Wadi Qilt (Hirschfeld 1990, 6–7). Chariton (d. ca. 350) also founded monasteries at Dok/Douka (Jebel Qarantal) near Jericho, in about 340, and, around 345, in the valley subsequently named Wadi Khareitun, after him. These three monasteries were *lauras*, with a mother house and scattered devotional cells for individual withdrawal. Communal activities took place on Sundays, when the monks gathered for a meal and corporate worship, while the remaining days were for private contemplation, worship, study, and work.

As noted above, Paula and Eustochium in the mid-380s established a convent for women in Bethlehem, where Jerome had already founded a monastery for men. Only in 411 was the first monastery of a second type, the *coenobium*, built east of Jerusalem by Theoctistus. The *coenobium* (from *koinōnos*, “common”) was a residential monastery where the monks lived a collective life of worship, work, and study, often in a walled complex of buildings. Early structures of this type are St. Euthymius’s and St. Martyrius’s monasteries, built around 480 at the sites of earlier *lauras* near the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. From then onward, churches and monasteries are attested at numerous locations.



Peter Richardson

Fig. 1.7. Monastery of St. Martyrius, near Jericho

### *Samaria*

The book of Acts reports the risen Jesus speaking of witnesses in “Judea and Samaria” (1:8) and claims that “Samaria accepted the word of God” (8:14), but it gives no details. Acts also says that a scattering, because of persecution, brought Philip to work in Samaria in an unnamed city. One of Philip’s converts was Simon Magus, who already had such a reputation for wonder working that he was known as “the power of God that is called Great” (8:10), though Peter and John rejected his request to share their power (8:4–24). A later Gnostic sect focused on Simon Magus, prompting Irenaeus of Lyons (in the late second century) and Eusebius of Caesarea (early in the fourth century) to consider him the “father of all heretics” (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3 preface; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.13.5–6).





Fig. 1.8. Church Mosaic, Megiddo

Justin Martyr was born in about 100 in Flavia Neapolis (Nablus) of Roman parents and was converted to Christianity about the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, probably in Asia Minor. At about the same time Hadrian built a temple to Zeus Hypsistos near the Samaritan holy place, reached by 1,300 steps, according to the Pilgrim of Bordeaux (Wilkinson 2002, 27). Justin, regrettably, says little about Samaritanism or Christianity in Samaria. Samaritan theology and piety flowered during the third and fourth centuries, and Samaria as a whole reached its peak of settlement in the Byzantine period (Zertal, Dar, and Magen 1993), for the number of villages at that time was double the number during the Roman period. When the Samaritans were subsequently repressed, only a small group remained, near Nablus.

On the boundary between Samaria and Galilee a third-century Christian building has been discovered in a prison courtyard at Legio (Megiddo), with a floor inscription that reads, “The God-loving Akeptous has offered this table, as a memorial to the God Jesus Christ” (Tepper and Di Segni 2006, 36). Although mention of a table is noteworthy at this early period, the unique formulation “God Jesus Christ” is more surprising (fig. 1.8). The floor has not been stratigraphically dated and thus is still uncertain, but the building seems to reflect an early and vigorous Christian presence, like the buildings at Dura-Europos and Aila.

There were enough Samaritan Christians that Sebaste had a bishop, Marinus, who attended the Council of Nicaea in 325. Relics, notably John the Baptist's head, were located at Sebaste. Even after Julian the Apostate scattered the relics, Christians still venerated John's tomb. The area around nearby Nablus was equally important to Christians. Eusebius refers to Sychar, associated with the account of the woman at the well (John 4:4–30), and the Pilgrim of Bordeaux reports “a baptistery, which takes its water” from this well (Wilkinson 2002, 27), implying the baptistery was built sometime between 300 and 333. Egeria refers to two churches 50 m apart, one containing the well and the other Joseph's tomb (Wilkinson 2002, 93). The Pilgrim of Bordeaux also speaks of Mount Gerizim, above Neapolis/Nablus, which had a sophisticated octagonal church to St. Mary Theotokos (Godbearer) built in 484 as part of a Byzantine attempt to convert Samaritans, covering the ancient Samaritan place of sacrifice. Egeria also knew of nearby Aenon (Khirbet Khisas ed-Deir), where John baptized (Wilkinson 2002, 127). Remains of a third-century church adapted from a Roman fort have been found at Khirbet el-Kīliya (Magen 1990).

#### MONASTERIES

Samaria had fewer monasteries than Judaea, and none were as early, though between five and ten walled cenobitic monasteries, built of large ashlar with broad margins and decorated with crosses and other motifs, have been located within 2 or 3 km of each other between Antipatris and Jerusalem. Yizhar Hirschfeld (2002, 188–89) suggests that they were occasioned by the Samaritan revolt of 529/30 and were funded by tax exemptions to the Christian community as a result of damage to Christian estates in the region, a strategy that demonstrated the victory of Christianity. If we include Scythopolis here, a Decapolis city that the Pilgrim of Bordeaux visited in 333, which hints that it may have been an important Christian site, the number of monasteries is increased. There was a late fourth- or early fifth-century monastery at Tell Basul (just west of Scythopolis), with a courtyard paved with mosaics. Better known is the later Monastery of the Lady Mary (ca. 567), with a rich battery of mosaics, including a zodiac not unlike that found in some synagogues.

#### *Galilee*

Galilee stretched from Samaria to Tyre and over to the Sea of Galilee (Aviam and Richardson 2001) (for Peraea, see below), a region reestablished as Jewish by the Hasmoneans. Surprisingly, the earliest synagogue that has been archaeologically excavated is an early second-century synagogue at Khirbet Qana, the probable site of Cana (Richardson 2004, 55–71, 91–107; Runesson,

Binder, and Olsson 2008, 22–25). Hellenistic-Roman culture was also present, particularly in major cities such as Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Ptolemais, but in minor ways even in small villages. Gradually Galilee acquired a majority of Christians during the early Byzantine period; there were at least eighteen Christian communities in the third century, thirty-six in the fourth, and ninety-six in the fifth (Avi-Yonah 1984).

#### LITERARY MATERIAL

The earliest Gospel material, designated by scholars as “Q,” was likely written in Galilee during the early years of Agrippa II. A source of the later Gospels attributed to Matthew and Luke, Q is a first-generation document from the 50s (Kloppenborg 2000; Arnal 2001, 159–64, locating Q in Capernaum) that presupposes agriculturally based communities that followed Jesus’s precepts. Small groups no doubt met in houses (Richardson 2004, 73–90), though Virgilio Corbo’s specific claims about the house of Peter in Capernaum (J. Taylor 1993, 57) and similar claims about a house in Nazareth are doubtful. Yet, there probably were early Christian worship groups in these places and others, such as Cana and Bethsaida.

Evidence of Galilean Christianity, however, is sparse for all sites. The book of Acts suggests that Christianity really began in Galilee (10:37; cf. 8:1; 9:31), but it notes nothing significant other than Judas the Galilean’s uprising (5:37). Galilee appears neither in the rest of the New Testament nor in the Apostolic Fathers. Anthony Saldarini (1992, 23–38) suggests Matthew may have been written in Galilee, though Antioch and the Phoenician coastline are also possible provenances. Saldarini also maintains that the Matthean community formed a sectarian Jewish community operating within wider Jewish society. Albert Baumgarten (1992, 39–50) argues that the Pseudo-Clementine literature was Galilean, reflecting a group with such detailed knowledge of rabbinic Judaism that it implies “two groups in close proximity that maintained intellectual contact with each other” (47). Perhaps the early second-century *Gospel of the Hebrews* (often situated in Egypt) should be located in Galilee, as well as the *Protevangelium of James* in the mid-second century, if it does not belong to Phoenice. Eusebius is of little help, since he provides locations for neither of his two kinds of Ebionites (*Hist. eccl.* 3.27). He fails to note much of historical significance in Galilee, though he does refer to a statue of Jesus with a woman seeking healing in Caesarea Philippi (*Hist. eccl.* 7.18).

#### GROUPS

The literature hints at the development of Christian groups in Galilee through more than a century, implying that Galilean Christians operated

largely within a Jewish context, though the history of Christianity there seems discontinuous. If Christians shared the fate of Jews in the revolt of 132–135, which included Galilee (Eshel 2006), that would help to account for the lack of continuity, with a fresh beginning coming just before the Constantinian period. When Epiphanius discusses the Ebionites, he implies a similar discontinuity. He focuses on Joseph of Tiberias (*Pan.* 30.4–12) (Manns 1990), who in the 330s built four churches at Constantine’s request, in Tiberias, Diocaesarea (formerly known as Sepphoris), Nazareth, and Capernaum. He goes on to insist that the population in these places included no Hellenes, Samaritans, or Christians, implying that Joseph had no Christian foundation to build upon, even in Nazareth and Capernaum. The fact that the Council of Nicaea had no bishops from Galilee would support this supposition.

#### MATERIAL REMAINS

Only after Constantine does Galilee come into its own. The dating of the Christian house-church in Capernaum is controversial. Michael White (1997, 152–59) argues on archaeological grounds against a continuous Christian presence starting in the first century, suggesting the quadrilateral building is post-Constantinian, perhaps Joseph of Tiberias’s building, while the octagonal church is fifth century. Egeria confirms that the “house of the Prince of the apostles” was a church in her day (Wilkinson 1999, 97). She also says that “the synagogue [of Nazareth] . . . is now a church,” that there was a church (below the present church) at Heptapegon (Tabgha) along with one or two other churches, and that at Tiberias a church was built on top of the “house of the apostles James and John” (Wilkinson 1999, 96–98). Presumably, this was the church built by Joseph of Tiberias (J. Taylor 1993, 289). The Pilgrim of Bordeaux adds that Mount Tabor, Mount Carmel, and Jezreel also had churches.

By the Byzantine period Christianity was dominant in western Upper Galilee (forty-nine churches and monasteries, most relatively late), where synagogues were rare. Judaism remained strongest in eastern Upper Galilee (twenty-one synagogues), where churches were absent (Frankel et al. 2001, 114–15). The geographical separation between Judaism and Christianity followed exactly Josephus’s western border of Upper Galilee. The same regional survey showed that while Jewish occupation of eastern Upper Galilee was continuous, when intense Christian occupation occurred in western Upper Galilee in the Byzantine period, it replaced a previously pagan occupation (Frankel et al. 2001, 131). Only around the Sea of Galilee were Judaism and Christianity found side by side. Some Christian Galilean church buildings, such as at Horvat Hesheq (Church of St. George), were unusual architecturally, with a nave at the second-floor level (Aviam 1990).

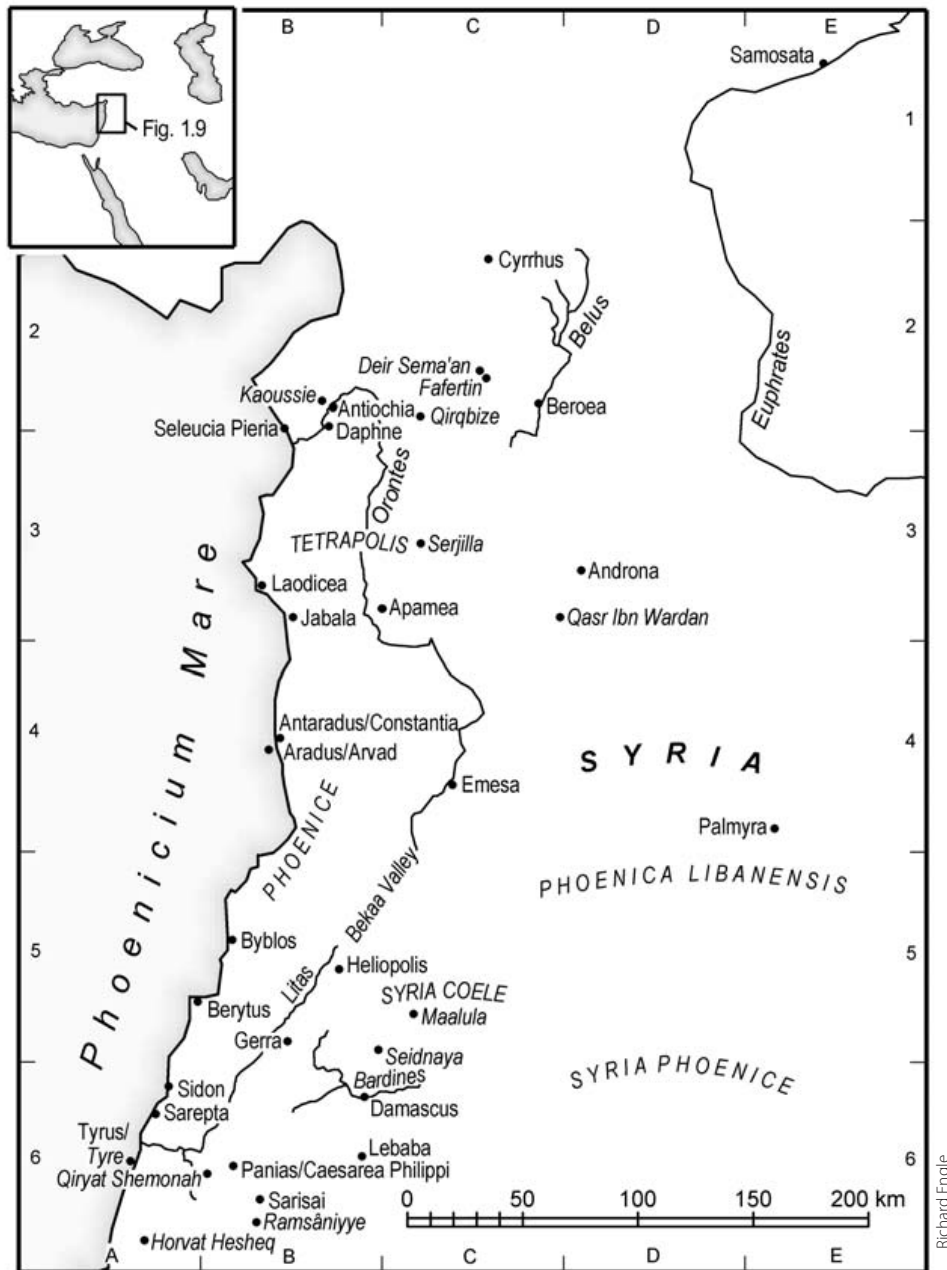


Fig. 1.9. Map of Phoenicia and Syria

## Syria

As noted in the introduction, the Roman organization of Syria changed much during the period. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to the northern section of ancient Syria as the Tetrapolis and Syria Coele. Phoenicia was the coastal region similar to modern Lebanon, but reaching farther north and south. Syria Phoenice was similar to Diocletian's Augusta Libanensis, stretching inland.

### *Antioch, the Tetrapolis, and Syria Coele*

The Syrian Tetrapolis, a group of four cities near the Orontes River, comprised Antioch, its port Seleucia Pieria, Apamea, and its port Laodicea. Combined with the villages of the Limestone (or Belus) Massif, they hold a special place as an early and intensively Christianized area. The cities were founded by Seleucus I Nicator (r. 311–281 BCE) in 300 BCE and soon were Hellenistic cities burgeoning with culture. When Pompey conquered Antioch in 64 BCE, he made it the administrative seat of the Roman province of Syria, just as it had been the capital of the Seleucid Empire. Situated perfectly between East and West, it was an important link with Rome and cities farther afield. Roman building programs outfitted Antioch with baths, a hippodrome, an amphitheater, a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus, and a colonnaded street—the first such street in the Roman Empire. It had all the trappings of a Roman imperial city (Ball 2003, 152–55). Since it enjoyed close connections with Rome, many emperors, including Trajan and Hadrian, spent considerable time in Antioch.

Antioch's position of political importance was checked, however, by earthquakes (in 115, 526, and 528) that changed the face of the city and left it crippled. Misplaced alliances under Septimius Severus (r. 193–211) relegated Antioch to a secondary role after Apamea (which hosted the second Parthian legion, 215–244); Apamea was the capital of Syria Secunda in the late fourth century. Antioch declined in the sixth century, while other parts of the region rose. At the same time, the villages of the neighboring Limestone Massif were thriving, sustained by their success in growing and harvesting olives (Foss 2000, 27).

#### RELIGION

Greco-Roman religion was alive and well at Antioch, where special affection was held for the gods Zeus/Jupiter and Apollo, especially at Daphne, the upscale western suburb of Antioch. As a cosmopolitan Hellenistic city, the religious affiliations of Antioch's people naturally included Egyptian, Roman, Greek, Phoenician, and other eastern cults. From the earliest days a community of Hellenistic Jews was present in Antioch, perhaps rewarded with land for their service as mercenaries under the Seleucids. They constituted a large portion of the Antiochene population (Zetterholm 2003, 43–62) and functioned as a *collegium*, with rights that may have exceeded those of other *collegia*. Numerous synagogues in three different areas of the city have been posited, although excavations have yielded no confirmation. This large Jewish community formed the beginnings of the fledgling Christian movement.

Acts 11:26 claims that Antioch was the first place where Jesus's followers were called Christians, so it is no surprise that it has been the locus of scholarly

interest. The famous dispute in Antioch between Peter and Paul (Gal. 2) has been invoked in discussion of the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity (Zetterholm 2003, 202–24; N. Taylor 1992, 125–39). The Gospel attributed to Matthew may have been written in Antioch, reflecting Jewish and Gentile groups in the same community (Brown and Meier 1983, 13; Brent 2007, 25). Yet the angry homilies of John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) “against Judaizing Christians” demonstrate that the boundaries between the groups remained blurred well into the fourth century (Brown and Meier 1983, 12; Brooten 2000, 35), so there was no simple transfer from one group to another. It was not just with Jews that Christians struggled in Antioch. Internal arguments flared over church authority, leadership, and theology; these involved movements such as Arians, Encratites, and Novatianists, as well as the teachings of Basilides (fl. ca. 125), Cerdo (fl. ca. 135), and Tatian (fl. ca. 165). Epiphanius, writing around 376 CE, refers explicitly to Encratites at Antioch in his own day (*Pan.* 47.1.2–3). Ignatius (d. ca. 115), the second bishop of Antioch (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.22), claimed in his letter to the Romans that he was the “bishop of Syria” (*Rom.* 2.2) and elsewhere pushed for a common leadership (*Phld.* 4: “one eucharist . . . one altar . . . one bishop”), but rather than evidence of unity his struggle seems to indicate the opposite.<sup>10</sup> Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.24.1) says that Theophilus, the sixth bishop of Antioch (bp. ca. 169–ca. 183), battled heretics “as though driving off wild beasts from Christ’s sheep,” and that he composed a treatise against Marcion, now lost.<sup>11</sup> Paul of Samosata, bishop of Antioch from 260, espoused views of a heterodox nature (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.27–30) and was deposed by a synod of bishops in 268.

#### PERSECUTION

Martyrdom and persecution afflicted the Antiochene Christian community, beginning with Ignatius in the first quarter of the second century.<sup>12</sup> Although his letters provide crucial evidence for this early period, Ignatius says almost nothing about the reasons for his arrest and transport to Rome to face the beasts in the amphitheater. During the reign of Diocletian, a wealthy Antiochene

10. Literary sources for Christianity in Antioch are plentiful, including the writings of the fourth-century pagan rhetorician Libanius (ca. 314–ca. 393); the homilies, sermons, and treatises of John Chrysostom, who studied under Libanius in Antioch; the sixth-century chronicler John Malalas; and the other letters of Ignatius. An interesting letter found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, refers to “Sotas the Christian” and was sent from Antioch to Oxyrhynchus in the second or third century (*SB* 12.10772; *P.Oxy.* 36.2785); see also chap. 5 below.

11. The only extant work of Theophilus of Antioch is *Ad Autolyicum* (*To Autolyicus*).

12. Brooten (2000, 33) points out that 4 Maccabees, which may have been written in Antioch, also was interested in martyrdom.

woman, Domnina, and her two daughters threw themselves into a river to escape being raped by soldiers (John Chrysostom, *On Saints Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina*). The relics of Babylas (bp. 237–251), martyred in the Decian persecution, became part of a controversy between the Antiochene Christians and Julian the Apostate; they were placed at Daphne in about 350, removed by Julian in 362, and eventually moved back to a cruciform church built by Bishop Meletius (bp. ca. 360–381) especially to house them (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.29.4; 6.39.4; John Chrysostom, *Babylas the Martyr*).



Robin Jensen

Fig. 1.10. Church of St. Simeon Stylites, the Elder (Qalaat Sema'an), Jebel Sema'an

#### CHURCHES AND WORSHIP

The limestone hills east of Antioch contain many church buildings, including some of the oldest known. In this area alone there are an estimated twelve hundred churches remaining (Ball 2003, 210).<sup>13</sup> A basilican church at Fafertin, southeast of Jebel Sema'an, is dated by inscription to 372; the church at Serjilla could be earlier, although the lack of an identifying inscription makes it impossible to be certain. Earlier still is the house-church at Qirqbize, the initial building phase of which is dated to 330 (White 1997, 27), though its identification as a church is certain only later, when “liturgical embellishments” make its function clear (White 1997, 136). In the fourth century it was given a triumphal arch, similar to many other churches in North Syria (Butler 1969; Tchalenko

13. This works out to one about every 4.5 km. At its peak, the population of the Limestone Massif was reported at about three hundred thousand (Ball 2003, 207), which indicates an extremely pious community at one church for every 250 people or so. As mentioned above, the area thrived through the olive trade, and economic growth presumably was strong enough to provide for such extensive church building. The ease of acquiring limestone in the area must also have played a role.



1980; White 1997). In the fifth century a *bema* (a raised speakers' platform or pulpit)<sup>14</sup> was added, and in the sixth century a martyrrium. Antioch's material evidence is much later. The origins of the Cave Church of St. Peter, said to have been founded by Peter himself, are, of course, unsubstantiated, but the church became an important pilgrimage site. The cruciform church at the suburb of Antioch known as Kaoussie, dated by inscription to 387, is sometimes presumed to be the church honoring Babylas, built by Meletius; however, since Meletius died in 381, that church would probably have been completed before then.

Centrally planned churches are common in the Tetrapolis, the most spectacular being the tetraconch (four-apsed) church at Seleucia Pieria, built at the end of the fifth century, then rebuilt after the great earthquake of 526, when the baptistery was added (Kleinbauer 1973; 2000; Loosley 2001; Hickley 1966). It was constructed as a double-shelled tetraconch, its four sides squared by *L*-shaped piers. The nave has a grand *U*-shaped *bema* in its center, and its columns have "windblown" capitals, similar to those of Qalaat Sema'an (Kleinbauer 1973, 94). The church houses a beautiful mosaic, depicting a rich collection of animals parading around the ambulatory. Decorative wall panels (*opus sectile* revetments) depicting biblical scenes most likely belong to the later period of construction as earlier panels would probably have been destroyed in the 526 earthquake (Kondoleon 2000, 118).<sup>15</sup>

### MONASTICISM

Both John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrrhus (bp. 423–ca. 466) relate stories of monks entering the city from the mountains (Chrysostom, *Stat.* 17.1–2) or visiting the many ascetics who lived in the limestone hills nearby (Theodoret, *Phil. hist.* 9.14). Aphrahat (ca. 270–ca. 345), an ascetic from Edessa, settled near Antioch in 360, drawing visitors from all over the area (Harvey 2000, 41). "The region surrounding Antioch was noted for its unconventional and extreme expressions of Christian piety" (Kondoleon 2000, 10); these extremes are nowhere more evident than in the accounts of Simeon Stylites the Elder, the great pillar saint. St. Simeon (d. 459) was famous for living atop his pillar for over forty years, sustained by disciples who climbed a ladder to bring him provisions. After his death his body was brought to

14. *Bemas* are quite prevalent in the churches of Syria; Kleinbauer (1973, 94–95) notes that at least thirty-two other churches in northern Syria alone have *U*-shaped *bemas*. See also Loosley 2001; Butler 1969; Hickley 1966.

15. This church may have been a martyrrium, possibly dedicated to Thecla (Harvey 2000, 41), but Kleinbauer (1973) sees it as an episcopal or diocesan seat, inspired in function by the now lost Great Church or Golden Octagon of Constantine, described by Eusebius (*Vit. Const.* 3).

Antioch, but the pillar upon which he had lived for so long became one of the greatest centers for pilgrimage in the Late Antique and Byzantine periods. The initial building phase of Qalaat Sema'an, on the slopes of Jebel Sema'an (Simeon's Mountain), took place in about 480–490, and the site gradually became larger and more complex, with multiple annexes, two monasteries, a convent, a baptistery, and a martyrium. What remained of the pillar itself was encircled by an octagon, four sides of which were squared off by four basilicas. This huge complex bears witness to the importance of the ascetic saint in the region, as do the hundreds of medallions found bearing his image that had been taken away by pilgrims seeking blessings. St. Simeon inspired another pillar saint, Simeon Stylites the Younger (521–597), whose sixth-century complex on the summit of a nearby mountain west of Antioch attracted pilgrims of its own.

In other cities of the Syrian Tetrapolis and Syria Coele, Christianity had a similarly rich and varied history. Christianity came to Emesa (Homs) early; the earliest surviving remains are catacombs of the third century. This city also had a connection with the appropriation of December 25 for the birthday of Christ. Emesa had a prominent cult of Bel, with a sacred black stone, served by high priests of the city, one of whose daughters, Julia Domna, married Septimius Severus in 187. Severus rebuilt the Temple of Bel at Emesa to rival those at Baalbek and Palmyra. Julia Domna was the mother of Geta (r. 211) and Caracalla (r. 211–217), and the great-aunt of Elagabalus (r. 218–222). The latter had the sacred stone taken to Rome, where the cult of the Sun took hold,



Fig. 1.11. Pillar of St. Simeon Stylites, the Younger, near Antioch

though after Elagabalus's assassination the stone was sent back to Emesa. Responding to the popularity of this Sun cult, Christians appropriated the birthday of the sun for Christ's birth.

Androna (Anderin), a nearby desert town, must have been an important Christian center, for it has ten churches from relatively early periods, though the dates are uncertain. Qasr Ibn Wardan has an important centrally planned church, built under Justinian, which, like Bostra, Resafa, and others, is a part of the experimental architecture of Christian Syria. St. Mary's Church (also known as Umm al-Zennar, "Church of the Virgin's Girdle") in Emesa is a Syriac Orthodox church built over an underground church, which legend dates to the first century, though this is unlikely. In Apamea another tetraconch church (similar in construction to the church at Seleucia Pieria) is dated to the late fourth/early fifth century and decorated with mosaics (Balty 1977).

### *Syria Phoenice*

#### DAMASCUS

When St. Paul spoke of his stay in Damascus, stating that he spent three years in "Arabia" (Gal. 1:17), overlapping with the period when Damascus was briefly under Nabataean control, contemporaries presumably deduced that he intended the eastern part of Syria Phoenice. Under Rome, the area flourished from the end of the second century, though its Christian community must have been quite modest for 250 years, for we hear little about it (Eusebius's only reference is to some unfaithful women who renounced Christianity by defaming its morality [*Hist. eccl.* 9.5.2]). But there were massive conversions to Christianity in some parts of Syria Phoenice during the third century (Bounni 1997, 137), and the region's religious status changed dramatically when Theodosius I abolished pagan worship; Damascus's enormous Temple of Jupiter became the Church of St. John the Baptist and the city's bishop gained status second only to that of the bishop of Antioch.

Two Aramaic-speaking villages, Maalula and Seidnaya, just north of Damascus on the slopes of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, have unexpectedly survived from Antiquity. Maalula has a church dedicated to St. Sergius, parts of which may be from the fourth century, and Seidnaya has a Convent of Our Lady, dating from 547, when Justinian was camped nearby. Their main importance, however, is that the villagers have preserved a form of Aramaic close to that spoken in the first century. Philippe Le Bas and William Waddington found an important Marcionite inscription, dated 318/9, at Lebaba (Deir Ali), about 5 km south of Damascus: "The meeting-house of the Marcionists, in the

village of Lebaba, of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It was erected under the management of Presbyter Paul in the year 630” (White 1997, 140).<sup>16</sup> Marcionite Christianity was influential and widespread, and such an inscription underscores the diversity of Syrian Christianity. In the fifth century Syria was at the heart of Monophysitism, which was deeply influential from Damascus northeastward into Armenia, while Nestorianism dominated both sides of the Tigris River from Nisibis southward.

#### DURA-EUROPOS

Early Christian archaeological remains in eastern Syria are rare, so discovery of a house-church at Dura-Europos, overlooking the Euphrates River, is of unrivaled importance. It is the earliest unambiguous and securely dated early church, showing more clearly than any other site the fact and the form of adaptive church structures—in this case, a house built in about 231/2, and shortly afterward adapted for worship, that was destroyed in 256 (Snyder 2003, 128–34; White 1997, 123–31). A wall was demolished between two rooms, and a small baptis-

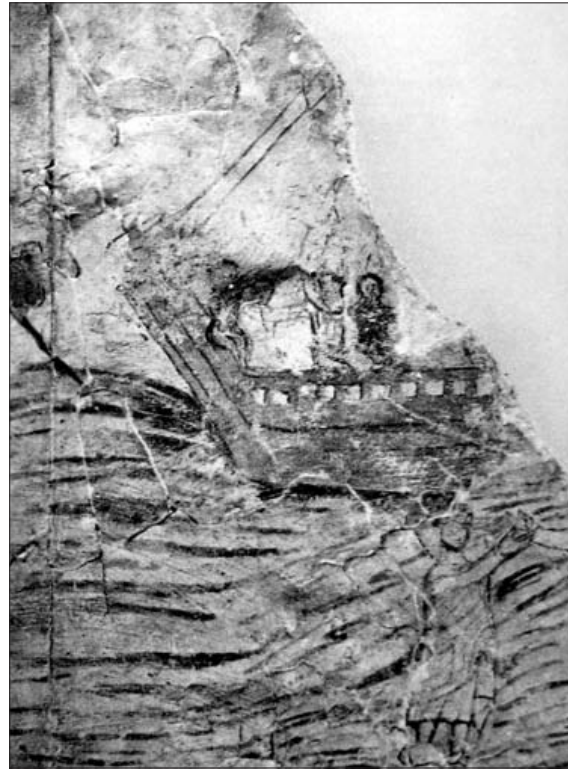


Fig. 1.12. Christ Walking on Water (House-Church Baptistery, Dura-Europos)

tery constructed in another, with frescoes of Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, the Good Shepherd, the woman at the well, the paralytic, Peter and Jesus walking on water, and women approaching a tomb. The building included inscriptions and graffiti. One crucial lesson is the strategic similarity among ambitious new cults: the church, a synagogue (now removed to Damascus’s National Museum), and a building for the worship of Mithra (mithraeum) all were located abutting the town wall, all were similarly renovated houses, and all have comparable frescoes.

16. The inscription’s date of 630 reflects the Seleucid reckoning, a period that began in 312/1 BCE.

### EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

A number of early Christian literary works, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and possibly the *Protevangelium of James* (Vorster 1992) appear to be from Syria Phoenice. All three testify to a form of Christianity with strong connections to Judaism, reflecting, however, a different understanding of their heroes. Tatian, a major figure in Syrian Christianity, was born to a pagan family in east Syria and traveled widely in the West, becoming a Christian perhaps in Rome. He compiled a harmony of the four Gospels, the *Diatessaron*, which was used extensively in Syriac-speaking churches, though it may have been created in Greek, since a Greek fragment has been found at Dura-Europos (Kraeling 1935; see chap. 2). From about the same time a late second- or early third-century collection of synagogue prayers, deriving from the *Apostolic Constitutions*, includes a number of additions that Christianize them for worship—for example, “He submitted to birth, that (birth) through a woman; (how) he appeared in (this) life, having demonstrated himself in (his) baptism; how he who appeared is God and man; . . . by him you brought the gentiles to yourself, for a treasured people, the true Israel” (*Hel. Syn. Pr.* 5.4–8) (Fiensy and Darnell 1985, 682–83). The *Gospel of Peter*, probably Syrian from before 190, is a slightly Docetic document, and the work of Bardesanes (d. 222/3) is rather Gnostic, though it may be from farther east. The third-century *Didascalia apostolorum* hints at the continuing attractiveness of Judaism among Christians, especially in chapter 26, with its implicit use of the *miqveh* and a concern for menstrual and sexual fluids (Young 2002).

### PALMYRA

Palmyra (Tudmur) is a desert city northeast of Damascus on the shortest direct route between the East and the Mediterranean, beside springs that still feed its oasis (Richardson 2002, 25–51). Pliny the Elder (ca. 23–79) says, “Palmyra is a city famous . . . for the richness of its soil and for its agreeable springs. Its fields are surrounded on every side by a vast circuit of sand” (*Nat.* 5.88), and Appian (ca. 95–ca. 165) emphasizes, “Being merchants, they bring the products of India and Arabia from Persia and dispose of them in the Roman territory” (*Bell. civ.* 5.1.9). Its four main churches are not especially early (a fourth was announced in 2008), but it is possible that there are other relevant remains to be analyzed.

### HELIOPOLIS

Ituraeans occupied areas west and south of Damascus in the late first century BCE; they were significant players politically, and they continued

strongly as an auxiliary force in the Roman army for hundreds of years, though they virtually disappeared politically (E. Myers 2010). Some of their small villages around Mount Hermon may have ultimately become Christian, such as Gerra (Anjar), but the most important site associated with them was Heliopolis (Baalbek), where remains survive of the exceptional Antonine expansion of an ancient site dedicated to Baal, rededicated to the cult of Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus, with temples to Venus, Mercury, and Bacchus. Constantine suppressed its cult of Venus, and Theodosius I demolished parts of the Temple of Jupiter and the courtyard to build a church dedicated to St. Peter. The smaller Temple of Venus became a chapel to St. Barbara, martyred in 237. Nineteenth-century archaeologists destroyed the remains of the church to disclose the pagan altar and observation tower.

### *Phoenicia/Phoenica Libanensis*

#### EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The word *Phoenikē* (red-purple) was applied historically to coastal peoples from Arwad in the north to Strato's Tower (Caesarea Maritima) in the south, a region centered on the Lebanon Mountains but not embracing the Bekaa Valley and the Anti-Lebanons. The Phoenician trade network reached from Africa's Atlantic coastline to Persia and from Nubia to the Black Sea. Acts notes the early spread of Christianity to Phoenicia (Acts 11:19; 12:20; 15:3; 21:2, 7; 27:3). We lack solid literary or archaeological sources for Christian Phoenicia, but communities of Christians probably developed relatively early. Oracle 7 of the *Sibylline Oracles* may have been written in Phoenicia in the second or third century, as maritime and other allusions suggest. For example, it mentions Jesus's baptism in the Jordan (7.66) immediately after referring to Berytus (Beirut). It echoes Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 in referring to prophets who "will falsely claim to be Hebrews, which is not their race" (7.135 [cf. Oracle 8]). The presence of bishops in both Tyre and Ptolemais by the mid-second century is stronger evidence of the strength of Phoenician Christianity (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.25), in contrast to Galilee, which had no bishops until much later. Both bishops sided with Alexandria in the Quartodeciman controversy, deciding to celebrate Easter on the Lord's Day. We also hear of Marinus and Alexander of Tyre in connection with the end of the Novatianist divisions and the "new spirit of harmony and brotherly love" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.5). Martyrdoms in Phoenician territory began in the late third century; executions under either Diocletian or Maximian (r. 285–305) included Tyrannion, bishop of Tyre;

Theodosia of Tyre (Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* 8.7.1–2); Zenobius, presbyter of Sidon (Saida); and Silvanus, for forty years bishop of Emesa (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 8.13.3–4; 9.6.1).

#### CHURCH BUILDINGS

When the Pilgrim of Bordeaux traveled from Antioch in 333—through Laodicea, Antaradus, Berytus, Sarepta, and Tyre to Ptolemais and then onward to Jerusalem—he mentions no Christian sites, even though Tyre had a cathedral before 300 that was destroyed and rebuilt to great acclaim some years prior to the Pilgrim’s visit. In his *Historia ecclesiastica* Eusebius provides a long description (10.3.1–10.4.72), with the general introduction that “cathedrals were again rising far surpassing in magnificence those previously destroyed” (10.2.1), and that the one in Tyre was the most magnificent in all of Phoenicia (10.4.1). He also records for posterity his own speech, addressed to Paulinus of Tyre (bp. pre-315–327) and delivered at the dedication of the church (10.4.2–72). The church was surrounded by a wall with a colonnaded courtyard that held fountains for “sacred purification,” with numerous gates into the building. Eusebius notes that it had cedar ceilings, marble floors, benches, and altars. Little remains at Tyre, Ptolemais, Sidon, Beirut, or Byblos, since all are heavily built up. At Antaradus (modern Tartus), which Constantius II (r. 337–361) renamed Constantia in 346, a third-century chapel to the Virgin Mary was destroyed by an earthquake two centuries later; a Crusader church now covers it.

Remains have survived, however, of a church at Dor (modern Burj et Tantara), a bishopric from the fourth century onward, even despite Dor’s decline by the mid-third century. An early fourth-century church rests atop a pagan temple; when it burned, it was rebuilt that same century (E. Stern 1994, 319–22). A marble column had “a carved recess surrounded by four crosses [and an] inscription . . . states that ‘A Stone of the Golgotha’ was inserted in the pillar, i.e., a stone from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem” (E. Stern 1994, 320), adding extra sanctity to the Dor church. There may be a late fourth-century church at Shavei Tzion, north of Ptolemais.

### Arabia

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Included here are areas that Trajan rolled into the province of Arabia in 106, such as Peraea (commonly linked with Galilee), the Decapolis, Auranitis, Trachonitis, and Nabataea. We also include Idumaea, the Negev, the Sinai Peninsula, and Arabia Felix (as Rome called modern Yemen).

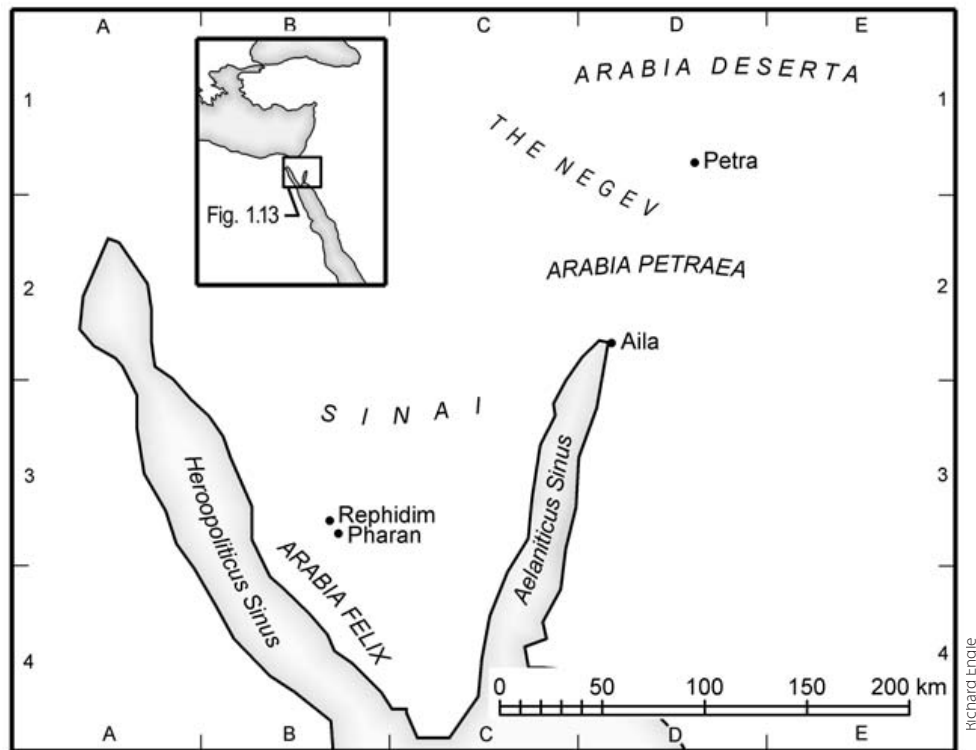


Fig. 1.13. Map of Arabia and Sinai Peninsula

### *The Decapolis*

A dozen or so Hellenized cities that derived from Alexander the Great's conquests formed the Decapolis, a loose association that included Scythopolis, west of the Jordan River; Pella, Gadara, and Hippos, overlooking the Rift Valley; and cities farther inland, such as Gerasa, Philadelphia, and Abila (Richardson 2002, 77–102). Most were primarily cultural strongholds, new walled cities with Hellenistic *boulai* (councils) that promoted Greek religion, philosophy, education, architecture, and arts, within the prevailing rural Levantine cultures, whether Nabataean, Arabian, or Ituraean.

Jesus traveled through the Decapolis (Mark 7:31; cf. 5:20), but details about Christianity's growth in the region are lacking; Christian literature from and developments in the ten cities are speculative. The Gospel attributed to Mark possibly originated in a Decapolis city, perhaps especially one overlooking the Sea of Galilee, such as Hippos or Gadara or Pella. The *Epistle of Barnabas's* provenance has never been satisfactorily settled, but it probably stems from the Decapolis in the 90s or from nearby areas in southern Syria (Richardson and Shukster 1983). Its Jewish-derived scriptural exegesis in the context of Hellenistic moral challenges would suit a city such as Gerasa. The hymnic *Odes of Solomon* (probably originally Aramaic or Syriac) might come from a



location such as Pella, perhaps around 100 CE (Charlesworth 1985a, 725–71): “We can occasionally glimpse the earliest Christians at worship; especially their apparent stress on baptism, their rejoicing over and experiencing of a resurrected and living Messiah, Lord, and Savior” (Charlesworth 1985a, 728). A little later, Aristo of Pella (ca. 135–170) defended Christianity from Jewish critics in the mid-second-century *Dialogue of Jason and Papiscus* (Richardson 2006). These hints show a vital, though tantalizingly vague, early Christianity in the Decapolis.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Nevertheless, archaeological evidence suggests that the Christian community developed into a major cultural movement. For example, the Gerasa cathedral (ca. 350–375) was built over an earlier temple, perhaps to Dionysus and before that to the Nabataean Dushara, utilizing the existing entrance stair from the *Cardo Maximus*, a building only slightly later than the great constructions of Constantine. The remarkable number of churches at Gerasa (see sidebar 1.3) points in the same direction.



Peter Richardson

Fig. 1.14. Cathedral Church, Gerasa

#### PELLA

An early text refers to Christians leaving Jerusalem during the First Jewish Revolt (see under the heading “Jerusalem” above), perhaps in 67/8, and going to Pella, returning later to Jerusalem. This has been seriously questioned (Lüdemann 1980), and some think that the story is modeled on accounts

### 1.3 Churches at Gerasa and Vicinity

East of the Rift Valley are several pockets with an unusual number of churches (Appelbaum and Segal 1993; Browning 1982). Gerasa has seventeen (twenty including chapels) within about two-thirds of the city's area (about one-third of the ancient city is covered by modern Jarash). (1) The building of the Cathedral Church (350–375) was followed by its Fountain Court (444–446) and then by (2) the Church of St. Theodore (464–466), which was integrated with it (and with two other chapels) in what must have been one of the great “triumphalist” church complexes of the Roman Near East. At the same time, (3) the Church of the Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs was built near the North Gate (464–465). In the next century there followed in quick succession (4) Procopius's Church (526–527); the triple church, comprising (5) St. John the Baptist, (6) St. George, and (7) SS. Cosmos and Damian (all 529–533); then (8) the Synagogue Church (530–531); (9) Bishop Isaiah's Church (begun 540); (10) SS. Peter and Paul (540) with (11) an additional small chapel; (12) the Propylaea Church (565); (13) Bishop Marianos's Church (570); (14) the Mortuary Church (sixth century); (15) Bishop Genesisus's church (611); and (16) undated churches on Artemis's altar terrace and in (17) Zeus's *temenos*. The Synagogue Church is a rare example of a church taking over a synagogue, though it is uncertain if the change was voluntary, forced, or gradual. The main structure was reused, though its orientation was shifted 180 degrees, and a new mosaic floor was laid, covering an earlier mosaic of animals heading toward Noah's ark. All these churches moved the center of the urban complex away from the *Cardo* westward to a street that accessed seven churches and southward to the *Decumanus*, which now replaced the Temple of Artemis's processional way as the main east-west route (Richardson 2002, 77–102).

An as yet unidentified smaller ancient city at modern Umm al-Jimal also had seventeen churches. In 1904/5 H. C. Butler dated Julianos's Church, the key building, to 344, based on an inscription on what he claimed to be a lintel. White (1997, 141–52) argues that the church is fourth/fifth century, that the Christian community previously met in a house, and that the lintel was in fact a memorial stone. Many of the other churches are late and adaptations of earlier buildings (Humbert 1990), yet this is still an unexpected situation for a modest rural town.

Other cities also had large numbers of churches. For example, Hippos (Horvat Susita) had eight churches, Adeitha (Khirbet es-Samra) had ten, and *Kastron Mefaa* (Umm ar-Rasas) had sixteen. Rihab's numerous churches have been overshadowed by unpersuasive claims of the alleged discovery there of Christianity's oldest extant church. These claims rest on a misreading of an inscription (Blumell and Cianca 2008). The conspicuous church building in nonbiblical cities without pilgrimage sites may be related sociologically to growing wealth or ecclesiastically to the liturgical calendar (see P.Oxy. 11.1357), where saints had churches dedicated to them so they could be celebrated on their feast day. Rural northern Arabia was densely Christianized, and Christianity must have played important social, religious, and political roles.

of Jewish leaders escaping Jerusalem. The early evidence for Christianity at Pella is not strong. The first-century civic complex was adapted as a church, beginning circa 400, while the East Church is from the last quarter of the fifth century. The earliest physical evidence may be a second-century sarcophagus (from about the time of Aristo of Pella), placed beneath the floor of the sixth-century West Church.

### *Northern Arabia*

Beyond the Decapolis, the northern part of Rome's province of Arabia included most of Auranitis (the Hauran), Batanaea, and Trachonitis. There are reasons for thinking that there was an early Christian presence in the area. The *Didache*, an important late first-century noncanonical document, probably stemmed from the region (Van de Sandt and Flusser 2002, 52). It combines ethical instruction with requirements for worship and organization, including baptism, fasting, prayer, the Eucharist, apostles and prophets, bishops and deacons, and Sunday worship. Some parts reflect close contacts between Jewish and Christian practices, as in the case of baptism in "living water," keeping Wednesday and Friday fast days, and assemblies on the Lord's Day.



Peter Richardson

Fig. 1.15. Cathedral Church, Bostra

### **BOSTRA**

Bostra, the capital of the province of Arabia, became an important bishopric in the third century. It had strong Monophysite tendencies—the belief that Christ had only one (divine) nature—a form of Christianity centered in this part of Syria. A third-century Roman basilica without aisles that still stands eave-high was converted to a church during the fourth century, underscoring

how in some places there could be a shift from a civic to an ecclesiastical function. A few meters away the Cathedral Church of SS. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius was built in 512/3, experimentally utilizing a central dome over a square building. This was accomplished with a central colonnaded quatrefoil with corner exedra (perhaps copying the martyrium at Seleucia Pieria [see section on churches and worship under the heading “Antioch” above]). Bostra’s cathedral was northern Arabia’s greatest contribution to ecclesiastical architecture and a major inspiration for Constantinople’s Hagia Sophia, the most creative and awe-inspiring Eastern church. Close by, at Ezraa (ancient Zorava), the lintel of the Church of St. George, which dates to 515, is inscribed: “What was once a lodging place of demons has become a house of God; where once idols were sacrificed, there are now choirs of angels; where God was provoked to wrath, now he is propitiated” (R. Burns 1994, 121). The church was built on the site of a pagan temple and is still in use, planned around an octagon within a square. Another nearby church, dedicated to St. Elias, dates to 542.

#### CANATHA

At Canatha (Qanawat), a flourishing Christian city in the early Byzantine period, the Seraiah combines two basilicas at right angles to each other to form a church complex. The second-century west building and the third-century south building were converted to a church in the fourth/fifth century. The latter’s transverse arches are a standard regional form of construction for roofing large areas, anticipating a technique used in Romanesque churches eight hundred years later.

#### PHILIPPOLIS

Farther north, Philippopolis (Shahba) was refounded by Philip the Arab and named after him, though building activities stopped at his death. Jerome, writing some 150 years after Philip’s death, considered him the first Christian emperor (Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 54; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.34)—an exaggerated claim, but one that presupposes extensive regional Christianization at this period. For example, when Egeria visited Carneas (Sheik Sa’ad, north of Gerasa) to visit Job’s tomb (Wilkinson 1999, 129), she mentions a bishop and a church, begun when a monk found a stone inscribed “Job” in a cave, over which an altar was built.

#### CHRISTIAN VILLAGES

The story of Christianity in northern Arabia is largely predicated on small villages, and thus minor pieces of evidence. Stephen Westphalen points out that a process of Christianization took place in the countryside in the early Byzantine period, seen clearly in the villages of Trachonitis. The steppe was urbanized by intensive clustering around churches, while clan and tribal structures influenced



Fig. 1.16. Seraiah Complex, Canatha

building patterns and local traditions (Westphalen 2006, 181–97). A major study confirms this picture for the adjacent Gaulanitis. Robert Gregg and Dan Urman’s evidence is mostly late sixth century onward, but some is earlier. A martyrium dedicated to John the Baptist in Ramsâniyye is dated to 373 on the lintel, and a builder’s inscription to 376, with undated inscriptions, such as *touto* (cross) *nika* (by this conquer), alluding to Constantine’s famous “sign” (Gregg and Urman 1996, 186, cf. 191). Of the forty-four communities surveyed, nineteen preserve evidence of a religiously mixed population, while seventeen preserve evidence for only one group (Gregg and Urman 1996, 299). Christianized villages include Chaspho (Khisfin), Sarisai (Quneitra), and Apheka (Fiq) (Gregg and Urman 1996, 314–15). Other noteworthy inscriptions include “one God” (Gregg and Urman 1996, 120, cf. 158; Peterson and Marksches 2012, 90), “X M” (“Christ born of Mary” [Gregg and Urman 1996, 81]), and “the congregation itself of the catholic church” (Gregg and Urman 1996, 82). As in southern Syria and Jordan, that many villages had mixed populations, while others were dominantly Christian or Jewish or pagan (cf. Galilee, above).

### *Central Arabia*

The literary sources and physical remains are meager for Peraea, the area east of the Jordan from the Hieromyces (Yarmuk) River to the territories of Philadelphia and Heshbon, where John the Baptist likely was active and

through which Jesus probably traveled on his way to Jerusalem. But the area is virtually ignored in the sources, though Christians must have been there; we know nothing about them for several centuries.

#### PILGRIM SITES

On the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, also known as Lake Tiberias, the late fifth-century Kursi Monastery is important for its size (120 x 140 m; basilica of 25 x 45 m) and quality. Egeria notes a number of places, such as a church associated with John the Baptist at Selim/Sedima (modern Teller Raghda) (Wilkinson 1999, 126–27), and farther south, opposite Jericho, ‘Ain Musa’s tiny church (Wilkinson 1999, 120). The Pilgrim of Bordeaux mentions the place of Elijah’s ascension, but the main point of interest was Mount Nebo’s church with the “burial place” of Moses beneath the altar (Wilkinson 1999, 121). Egeria says, “There is no doubt that it was the angels who buried him, since the actual tomb . . . cannot be seen today” (Wilkinson 1999, 121). Parts of the triapsidal church may date from the fourth century; although the splendid mosaics date from various periods, the earliest portion has a fourth-century inscription that reads, “Under the most reverend and pious priest and abbot, Alexios, the holy place was renovated,” implying a yet earlier building.



Fig. 1.17. Mosaic, Mount Nebo Monastery

#### MADABA

Madaba’s importance is underscored by its nine or ten churches, though it came to prominence relatively late. There is a cathedral (sixth century, with chapels of 562 and 575), a Church of the Apostles (578), a Church of the

#### 1.4 Mosaic Floors at Madaba and Umm ar-Rasas

The skill of ancient Arabia's mosaic makers is legendary; nowhere is their work seen to better advantage than in the irreplaceable Madaba Map and in the beautiful vignettes in St. Stephen's at Umm ar-Rasas. The Madaba Map, from the mid-sixth century, is the oldest map of the Holy Land (the present building was built in 1896 over the remains of a Byzantine church), identifying Christian sites of interest to pilgrims and in many cases indicating major churches. It is no longer complete—originally it was ca. 15.60 by 6 m (94 m<sup>2</sup>, of which only 25 m<sup>2</sup> are preserved)—but it once gave a full overview of the Levant from Lebanon to Egypt. Topographical features such as mountains and rivers, deserts, and palm groves figure prominently. Major cities such as Jerusalem (fig. 1.3), Jericho, and Gaza are shown with recognizable details. Very little interest is shown in Jewish or pagan sites, but the interest shown in numerous Christian sites, both major and minor, is astounding.

The St. Stephen's mosaic (ca. 785) was constructed more than 200 years later than the Madaba Map—in fact, long after the Muslim conquest of the area. This mosaic's representations of settlements include, on the north row, Palestinian cities (the Holy City/Jerusalem, Neapolis, Sebaste, Caesarea Maritima, Diospolis/Lydda, Eleutheropolis, Ascalon, and Gaza); on the south row, Jordanian cities (Kastron Mefaa, Philadelphia, Madaba, Heshbon/Esbounta [Tell Hesban], Belemounta [Ma'in], Areopolis [Rabba], and Charachmouba [el-Kerak]); with two additional ancient, but not yet located, Jordanian cities, Limbon and Diblanton, in each aisle. Apparently, all these were still pilgrim destinations more than a century after the Muslim conquest.

Virgin Mary, and the Church of St. George, also known as the Church of the Map (both late sixth century). The latter contains the enormously important Madaba Map, which demonstrates graphically the growth in Christian sites between the fourth and sixth centuries, as well as their locations. Pilgrim sites dominated the mapmaker's consciousness. Since some sites are mentioned for the first time by the Piacenza Pilgrim (fl. ca. 570), a date around the same time is likely. Taken as a whole, even with its substantial gaps, the Madaba Map provides a remarkable overview of Christians' presence in the Holy Land before the Muslim conquest. Heshbon did not become a major Christian center, but farther into the desert, Kastron Mefaa (Umm ar-Rasas) had sixteen churches, including St. Stephen's, with its remarkable mosaic depictions of cities of the Holy Land. The Madaba Map and the St. Stephen's vignettes permitted Christians to savor the Holy Land even without visiting it.

The evidence cited above for northern and central Arabia stresses the importance of small villages and implies that they were crucial to the growth and spread of Christianity. It is often assumed, by contrast, that the Roman

Empire was Christianized from the cities (Stark 1996, 147). While this may have been true of Paul's missionary activity, as he went from provincial capital to provincial capital (R. Beck 2006), there were other models for Christian extension, such as in Palestine during the fourth and fifth centuries, a "movement from village out to Christian shrine on the peripheries of settlements" (Frankfurter 2005, 275).

### *Southern Arabia*

#### PETRA

Southern Arabia was the heartland of ancient Nabataea, with its capital at Petra, a bustling commercial, cultural, and religious center (Richardson 2002, 52–76). Petra became important to Christians because of its associations with Moses and Aaron, especially at 'Ain Mousa (Moses's Spring) at Wadi Musa, east of Petra, and Jebel Harun (Aaron's Mountain), west of the city. Petra declined when Bostra was made capital of Arabia, a trend that was reversed in the Byzantine period when Petra became the capital of Palaestina Tertia. Christian progress in Petra was "slow and uneven" (Fiema 2003, 239). Pagan worship continued at the same time as churches were being established during Eusebius's time (Hollerich 1999, 74). The earliest remains (mid- to late fifth century) are of the Ridge Church, possibly destroyed in the earthquake of 551, when a fire carbonized a church archive with more than 150 papyri scrolls. These have been carefully conserved by a Swedish team and can be dated between 528 and 582, detailing wills, contracts, loans, and property sales, with occasional references to church life. The monumental Urn Tomb was converted into Petra's cathedral (June 24, 446 [Fiema 2003, 239]), and the Blue Chapel complex possibly was the residence of the bishop (Bikai 2002).

#### AILA

During his extensive surveys in Jordan, Nelson Glueck discovered the remains of a chancel screen and two capitals from a Byzantine church at 'Aqaba (Glueck 1939, 13). A lintel with a Christian Greek inscription and symbols was found in excavations of the early Islamic quarter at 'Aqaba (Zayadine 1994, 489). This earlier evidence has been confirmed by the identification of a late third-century (ca. 290) purpose-built church, the oldest known church actually constructed for a Christian congregation. It approximates a basilica-style layout, is built of stone and mud brick, and hints at the sorts of structures that were, judging from the literary evidence, being built prior to Constantine's conversion and the beginnings of his massive building program that set a new style for church structures.



### *Sinai and the Negev*

It is reported that during the Decian persecution many Egyptian Christians, including the bishop of Nilopolis (Dalas), fled to the wilderness of Sinai for refuge (Dionysius of Alexandria, *Ep.*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.42.3–4). Nevertheless, direct evidence for Christianity in the Sinai is virtually nonexistent before the fourth century, despite this region's proximity to early Christian centers in Palaestina. At the turn of the Common Era much of the Sinai belonged to Nabataea, although different nomadic groups collectively identified as Saracens also occupied the area (Ptolemy, *Geogr.* 5.16.3; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 14.4; Eusebius, *Onom.* 166.12). Trajan incorporated the Sinai within the province of Arabia in about 106. At the close of the third century Diocletian reorganized the Eastern provinces, and the Sinai became part of Palaestina Tertia (Salutaris), although its upper northwest corner was administratively linked to Egypt (Dahari 2000, 13).

#### CHRISTIANIZATION

In the fourth century, with the rise of Christian pilgrimage and monasticism, evidence for Christianity in the Sinai emerges around its highest peak, Jebel Musa, which Christians identified as the biblical Mount Sinai. Jebel Musa became a popular pilgrimage site, evidenced by nearly six thousand rock-cut graffiti inscriptions in the ravines leading to the mountain (Stone 1992–1994). The Christian provenance of many of these inscriptions is established by the presence of *nomina sacra*, symbols such as crosses (+, †) and monograms (X, ⌘), and names that are characteristically Christian (e.g., Athanasius, Victor, Christopher, Stephen, Thekla). The earliest are written in Greek and date from the late fourth or early fifth through the seventh centuries (Negev 1977, 77), although later Christian inscriptions are also attested in Latin, Coptic, Armenian, and Georgian (Stone 1982).

Hardly any of the graffiti near Jebel Musa are Jewish, whether from the Christian or pre-Christian period; very few are written in Hebrew or Aramaic or contain distinctively Jewish symbols. The paucity of such inscriptions probably resulted from the widespread belief in postbiblical Jewish sources that Mount Sinai was located somewhere in northwestern Arabia (Kerkslager 1998, 151–69). Christian identification of Jebel Musa with the biblical Sinai therefore seems without precedent (Solzbacher 1989, 44–74). The earliest reference to a Christian center at Jebel Musa is the report by Theodoret (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14) that in the middle of the fourth century a Syrian monk, Julian Saba, founded a small monastic community on the mountain and built a church on its summit. Egeria, writing some twenty years later (ca. 384), reports there was a small

church on the top of the mountain that contained cells for monks and a hostel for pilgrims (Wilkinson 1999, 109). The Piacenza Pilgrim likewise records the presence of a small church (Wilkinson 1977, 87).

#### ST. CATHERINE'S MONASTERY

Procopius of Caesarea (ca. 500–ca. 565) claims that Justinian patronized the building of a church to the “Mother of God” on Mount Sinai and a fortress at the base of the mountain to defend against nomadic raids (*Aed.* 5.8.4–9). Archaeological surveys near the summit have confirmed the remains of this church, since a number of stone fragments contain the contraction standing for *Theotokos*, “God Bearer” (Dahari 2000, 36). Since the ninth century, Justinian’s fortress, or fortified monastery, has been known as St. Catherine’s Monastery; it lies at the southern base of Jebel Musa (Sinai?) in the Wadi ed-Deir (Valley of the Monastery). While the largest building in this complex was the Church of the Transfiguration of Moses and Elijah, with its large apse mosaic that commemorates the transfiguration of these two figures, the *sanctum sanctorum* of this complex was reputed to be the site of the burning bush. Later tradition has it that Helena ordered the construction of a small church at the site of the burning bush; however, the church that presently marks this spot was built in the Middle Ages (Galey 1980, 63–64). Fifteen Greek inscriptions are presently known from the earliest period of the monastery’s history, from about 500 to 700 (Ševčenko 1966, 262–64). One inscription that has gained notoriety, because of its length and its location at the monastery’s entrance, commemorates the completion of the fortress (*CIG* 4.8634). It appears to date from the late eighteenth century and contains inaccuracies, but it may reflect the content of the original commemorative inscription (Chitty 1966, 177n16).

St. Catherine’s manuscript collection has attracted considerable attention. Its most famous text is the Codex Sinaiticus, discovered by Constantine von Tischendorf in the mid-nineteenth century and now housed in the British Library (von Tischendorf 1862, 25–114). This beautifully written fourth-century vellum codex preserves parts of the Old Testament (Septuagint) and the entire New Testament, as well as the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The discovery of this Bible in the library at the monastery is convoluted; its removal to St. Petersburg by Tischendorf in 1859 is notorious, but almost nothing is known about how it originally made its way to St. Catherine’s. However, owing to a distinct scribal error at Acts 8:5, where Sinaiticus mistakenly reads that Philip traveled down to “Caesarea” instead of “Samaria,” Caesarean provenance for this manuscript seems likely (Milne and Skeat 1963, 20–23). Consequently, Sinaiticus may be one of the fifty vellum Bibles that the emperor Constantine commissioned Eusebius of Caesarea to

prepare in 332 (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 4.36–37). Two other important works still in the monastery's possession are the Codex Syriacus, a fifth-century Gospel in Syriac written over an erased older Greek Gospel, and the Codex Arabicus, a trilingual palimpsest (Syriac, Greek, and Arabic) that contains a number of accounts of martyrdoms and the oldest Arabic version of the book of Job (Atiya 1952, 584–85).

#### OTHER CENTERS

One other Christian site in the Sinai with significant remains is Pharan (Tell Mahrad), located 40 km northwest of St. Catherine's on the western edge of the Wadi Feiran oasis. With rising interest in the southern Sinai in the fourth century, Pharan grew, obtained the status of a city, and flourished until the Muslim conquest in the seventh century (Grossman 1996, 28). Christians identified it as the place where Hagar and Ishmael settled after being driven off by Abraham (Gen. 21:21), as well as the site of the biblical Rephidim, where Moses caused water to flow from the rock and where the Israelites defeated the Amalekites (Exod. 17) (Eusebius, *Onom.* 142.22–25). When the Pilgrim of Piacenza visited, the city was garrisoned and had a bishop (Wilkinson 1977, 88).

#### NEGEV

There is little evidence for Christianity in the Negev prior to the fourth century (Figueras 1995). Nessana (Auja el-Hafir), a Christian center on the northern Sinai boundary, rose to prominence as Sinai's administrative capital in the Byzantine period. At one time it had been a Nabataean city, and in this region Nabataean names continued, even those of bishops. The earliest of Nessana's six churches was the fourth-century North Church, with others ranging through the sixth century (Figueras 1995, 425–30). When the city was excavated in 1935, a substantial cache of papyri was discovered, including two sixth-century codices of the Gospel of John (P.Ness. 2.3, 4) and a seventh-century Pauline codex containing Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, and Philemon (P.Ness. 2.5). Other cities in the Negev were extensively Christianized. Fourth-century churches include Haluza's East Church (perhaps 350), Shivta's North Church, Mamshit's East Church (Zelinger and Di Segni 2006) and West Church, and Magen's Buildings B and C, the latter with crosses in its floor (Tzaferis 1993, 283–85).

The most prominent city of the Negev region with the strongest Christian evidence is Gaza. The city, situated on the Via Maris approximately 20 km south of Ascalon, was an important trading center, mentioned in the New Testament: Philip was instructed to begin his missionary activities by taking the road to Gaza (Acts 8:26) (Glucker 1987, 26–30). Its location along a major

road would suggest that Christianity reached Gaza early. However, not until Diocletian's persecution is anything known about its Christian community; its most notable martyr at this time was its bishop Silvanus (Eusebius, *Mart. Pal.* 7.3, 13.4–11; cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 8.13.5). The Gaza church must have recovered by 325, as a bishop from Gaza was present at Nicaea. At about this time the citizens of Maioumas, a port town administratively linked to Gaza, converted en masse to Christianity. Constantine was so impressed by this show of faith that he made it an independent *polis* and renamed it Constantia (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 5.38; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 2.5), though its municipal status was reversed by Julian. At the same time, Gaza's large pagan population persecuted the city's Christians (Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5.9). Christianity generally flourished in Gaza in the fourth and fifth centuries, though it became embroiled in the debate between Arians and Athanasians (Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.15; Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 3.8). Its most famous Christian at this time was Hilarion (ca. 291–371), who established a hermetic monastery northeast of Gaza in about 340. Jerome devoted an entire treatise, *Vita S. Hilarionis eremitaie* (*Life of St. Hilary the Hermit*), to him (Hirschfeld 2004, 67–69). Largely due to Hilarion's influence, at least ten other monasteries opened in the vicinity of Gaza between the fourth and sixth centuries (Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2000). In 1997 a large Byzantine church complex was discovered in northern Gaza that consisted of a fifth- or sixth-century church, a baptistery, and an adjacent Christian cemetery. Seventeen Greek mosaic inscriptions were also discovered in the church and baptistery that consisted mostly of prayers dedicated to church patrons, prayers of thanksgiving, and lists naming bishops and priests (Shanks 1998).

### *Arabia Felix*

Greeks and Romans identified the fertile region in southwestern and southern Arabia as Arabia Felix (Happy Arabia), an area distinct from Arabia Deserta (central and northern Arabia) and Arabia Petraea (Stoney Arabia). Renowned for its production of aromatic resins and spices, illustrated by the description given in 1 Kings 10:2 of the caravan of the Queen of Sheba, this region was an international center of trade and export. Augustus initiated a campaign in about 26 BCE under the direction of Aelius Gallus to secure its natural resources (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.4.24; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 6.160), an expedition that was largely unsuccessful. Still, Rome secured a foothold in the region by establishing a number of forts and trading posts along the Red Sea. Toward the end of the third century CE Arabia Felix fell under the control of Axum (Aksum), the capital of northern Ethiopia; though it regained

temporary independence in 525, the Axumites subsequently reconquered the region (Trimingham 1979, 287–88).

There is little evidence that any substantial effort was made to evangelize Arabia Felix in the pre-Nicaean period, although Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.10) seems to imply that Pantaenus (d. ca. 200), the first head of the famous catechetical school in Alexandria (see chap. 5), may have preached in the region before assuming his teaching post around 177. Rufinus (ca. 345–ca. 411/2) reports that during the time of Constantine the kingdom of Ethiopia received the gospel by Frumentius, who was later ordained the first bishop of Axum, which could have hastened the spread of Christianity into Arabia Felix (*Hist.* 1.9–10; Athanasius, *Apol. Const.* 31). Regardless, it is Philostorgius (ca. 368–ca. 439) who preserves the first account of an official mission to Arabia Felix (*Hist. eccl.* 2.6; 3.4; 4a), which was led by the priest Theophilus during the reign of Constantius II. Perhaps, then, it is more than coincidence that the first monotheistic inscriptions from Arabia Felix begin to emerge within a century of this mission (Sima 2002, 165). While the gains Christianity made in Arabia Felix—to some extent a consequence of Byzantium’s alliance with Ethiopia (Hoyland 2001, 147)—were rather modest and short-lived owing to the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Christian communities established in cities such as Najran were able to flourish and thrive for some time before they were finally ended by Muslims (Trimingham 1979, 294–307; Cragg 1991, 38–40).

### Complexity of Christianity in the Roman Near East

Important as cities were in Christian growth and influence—especially the roles of Antioch, Caesarea Maritima, and Jerusalem—attention must be paid to the truly surprising distribution of Christian groups in rural areas and to the quiet increase in the strength of the church in regions such as the Limestone Massif, northern Arabia (now southern Syria and northern Jordan), the Madaba Plains, and the Negev. In these areas, as the numbers of churches in smaller locales implies, there must have been different means of diffusion of Christianity, not so much from the cities outward as by the conversion of villagers and townspeople, which ultimately resulted, it seems, in wholesale conversions. Even in Palaestina, the original homeland of Christianity, the situation was not simple; its presence seems more widespread than expected, in Samaria, for example, but less powerful in Galilee than one might anticipate. Overly simple portrayals of the growth and spread of Christianity should be abandoned in favor of a complex and multilayered picture that is built up from the surviving tangible evidence.

Alongside the indigenous developments of Christianity in the Roman Near East, especially in Palaestina, two external influences must be considered. On the one hand, the pilgrim movement resulted in knowledge of the Holy Land with its strong incentive to ensure that the holy places associated with the first generations of Christians were preserved and marked for future pilgrims. On the other hand, some who were driven by notions of a purer and simpler life were determined to stay in the Holy Land with other like-minded souls, establishing monasteries where they could keep the world at bay by solitude, contemplation, and study.