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## Phoenicia in the Roman Empire

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## CHAPTER 9

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# PHOENICIA IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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JULIEN ALIQUOT

IN THE FIRST BOOK of his treatise *On Censuses*, written in 213 CE and partly preserved in Justinian's *Digest*, the renowned jurist Ulpian of Tyre sketches a praise of his motherland, as well as a ranking of the most important Phoenician cities under the reign of Caracalla (*Dig.* 50.15.1.1–3):

One must realize that there are some colonies with *ius Italicum*, as, in Syria Phoenice, the most splendid colony of the Tyrians, which is my place of origin, outstanding in its territories, of very ancient foundation, powerful in war, always loyal to the treaty it made with the Romans; for the divine Severus and our emperor granted it *ius Italicum* because of its great and conspicuous faithfulness toward the Roman state and empire. But the colony of Berytus, also in the same province, was raised up by favor of Augustus and is, as the divine Hadrian says in a speech, an Augustan colony which possesses *ius Italicum*. There is also the colony of Helio-  
polis, which received from the divine Severus on the occasion of the civil war the status of an Italian colony. . . . But the colony of Ptolemais, which lies between Phoenice and Palestine, has nothing but the name of a colony.

(Watson 1998: 4:445; translation modified)

In Ulpian's eyes, obviously, the best roads were those that led to Rome. In what follows, this guiding thread will be used to trace the history of Phoenicia from the advent of Rome in Syria at the beginning of the first century BCE to the foundation of the Christian empire of Byzantium in the fourth century CE (on the overall context, see Millar 1993; Butcher 2003; Sartre 2005). Special attention is paid to the establishment of Roman rule and its impact on society, culture, and religion. The focus is on provincial institutions and cities, which provided a basis for the new order. However, side trails are also taken to assess the flowering of Hellenism and the revival of local traditions in the light of the Romanization of Phoenicia and its hinterland.

## ROMAN RULE IN PHOENICIA

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Phoenicia was in trouble on the eve of its annexation to the Roman Empire in 64/63 BCE. The decay of the Seleucid state had fostered political autonomy and violence. Following the example of Arados, upon obtaining grants of autonomy, the major Phoenician cities had started to strike coins in their own names and dated by their own eras (Tyre in 126/125, Sidon in 111/110, Tripolis between 105/104 and 96/95, Berytus in 81/80 BCE). The Ituraeans had seized power in the hinterland, and these mountain dwellers, who had been identified to Arab robbers since antiquity, were indeed able to plunder with impunity the neighboring towns from the heights of Lebanon and Antilebanon (Aliquot 1999–2003). Here as everywhere in the province of Syria that he had just created, Pompey solved the problems in his way with the assent of the Senate. On the one hand, he drove local tyrants out of Tripolis and Byblos; on the other, he negotiated the submission of Ptolemaeus son of Mennaues (*ca.* 85–40 BCE), tetrarch and high priest of a principality formed around Chalcis ad Libanum (Majdal ‘Anjar?) and Heliopolis (Baalbek), in the Bekaa Valley. In many respects this was the beginning of a new epoch. Until the end of the first century CE, and even after the demise of Zenodorus, the last prince of Chalcis, Rome still ruled over inland parts of Phoenicia through allied kings (Cleopatra of Egypt, Herod the Great and his heirs, Cotys IX of Armenia Minor), while building on the Hellenized cities along the coast. The adoption of “Pompeian” eras from Tripolis to Dora, the honors paid to Pompey’s former legates (M. Aemilius Scaurus at Tyre, D. Laelius in Arados), and the legend of the foundation of Byblos by M. Calpurnius Bibulus (Aliquot 2015) show how grateful the ruling elites of these towns could be to their new masters.

Under Roman rule, Phoenicia remained as divided as before. However, once the page of the Roman civil wars was turned, the country generally benefited from the *Pax Romana* without hosting any legion. Some changes occurred under Hadrian, when Syria Palaestina was created and included parts of southern Phoenicia, and even more under Septimius Severus. In 194 CE, the African emperor drew the lessons of Pescennius Niger’s unsuccessful bid for imperial investiture, and decided to grant less power to the consular governor of Syria by splitting the province in two, with Coele Syria in the north and Syria Phoenice in the south. As a result, the core of Phoenicia from Arados to Ptolemais was then administered by a senator of praetorian rank perhaps settled at Tyre, while Gabala, Paltos, and Balanea (Claudia Leucas) were kept within the jurisdiction of the proconsul of Coele Syria. Syria Phoenice was “Phoenician” in name only, for its territorial jurisdiction included the camp of the third legion Gallica at Raphanae, as well as the cities of Damascus, Emesa, and Palmyra up to the Euphrates. Nonetheless, every inhabitant of the province was liable to be described as “Phoenician”—like, for instance, the Severi from Emesa and Arca, or the Palmyrene queen Zenobia.

Among the most conspicuous signs of the establishment of Roman rule in Phoenicia, a series of epigraphical documents, mostly written in Latin, testify not only to the repression of the Ituraeans on Mount Lebanon and to the recruitment of auxiliary units among the Ituraeans and the Tyrians but also to road renovation and land survey. Between Byblos and Berytus, the mouth of the Lycus River (Nahr al-Kalb) was a *lieu de mémoire* where the Roman authorities, following the example of Egyptian pharaohs and Assyrian kings before them, displayed inscriptions that commemorated their work along the public highway from Antioch to Ptolemais and beyond (Maïla-Afeiche 2009). In northern Lebanon, under Hadrian, two procurators were responsible for carrying out the “delimitation of forests” (*definitio silvarum*) within a vast imperial estate where the emperor reserved the exploitation rights of four timber species (Breton 1980). Similar operations seem to have occurred later, possibly under Caracalla. While reminiscent of Lebanon’s lumbering by the Achaemenids and the Seleucids, they also reflect an unprecedented policy of rationalization in terms of scale, consistency, and display.

## FROM GREEK CITIES TO ROMAN COLONIES

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In addition to provincial institutions, Rome could rely in Phoenicia on cities of various statuses. At the dawn of the empire, most of these towns had come to adopt Greek constitutions inherited from the Hellenistic past (for the Hellenistic period, see chapter 8, this volume). All but the “allied” (*foederata*) city of Tyre were liable for the tribute assessed on cultivated land (*tributum soli*) and the head tax (*capitatio*), as well as tolls and shipping taxes (*portoria*). The cities were allowed to levy local taxes and to strike coins with the portraits of the emperors on the obverse (on Phoenician coins, see also chapter 25, this volume). They were also free to reform their chronological systems and to manage autonomously municipal affairs at home, within the limits of their territory, and even in the overseas communities, like those of the Tyrian traders gathered in *stationes* at Rome and Puteoli (Aliquot 2011: 80–81). Above the people (*δημος*), the civic council (*βουλή*) was now a permanent body in which the local elites were co-opted to hold in turn the main offices (*ἀρχαί*, plural of *ἀρχή*), from market or harbor oversight by the agoranomos or the limenarch to the supervision of schools and athletic contests by the gymnasiarch. In consideration for the monopoly of local power, the leading families had to assume expensive burdens and honors, such as priesthoods, embassies, or the presidency of Greek-style games (*ἀγῶνες*) by the agonothetes. In such a system, internal disputes were the counterpart of civic competition, and Augustus still had to stop factional fightings in Sidon and Tyre (Cassius Dio 54.7.6).

Not surprisingly, the Phoenician towns thrived under the empire primarily thanks to their agricultural and craft products, including wine (especially from Berytus and Tyre), oil, ceramics, glass, purple, silk and other textiles, which were now exported by maritime trade to Rome, Italy, and beyond. They also developed through the

generous (but of course not disinterested) initiatives of wealthy citizens and foreign benefactors. The Herods were certainly the most active donators in this case. The list of their contributions, as summarized by Flavius Josephus (*BJ* 1.422; *AJ* 19.335–337; 20.211–212), gives an overview of urban development in early Roman Phoenicia. It also draws attention to the introduction of typically Roman buildings in the area (e.g., amphitheater, circus, imperial baths), particularly at Berytus. Alongside the impressive Herodian achievements, other princes look a bit lackluster. The honors for an Emesan dynast at Heliopolis (Baalbek) and the refounding of Arca (Tell ‘Arqa) as a “Caesarea of the Ituraeans” (*Caesarea Ituraeorum*) hardly balance the picture. Herod himself built gymnasia in Tripolis and Ptolemais, a rampart for Byblos, exedrae, porticos, temples, and public places at Berytus, theaters in Tyre and Sidon, and a temple of Augustus near the Panion, where his grandson Philip soon founded the city of Caesarea Paneas (Baniyas). Agrippa I then gave baths and porticos to Berytus, plus a theater and an amphitheater where he offered musical events and gladiatorial shows. Eventually, Agrippa II enlarged Paneas, which he called Neronias in honor of Nero, and made such splendid donations (annual shows, wheat, oil, statues) to Berytus that hate and jealousy rapidly flared up among his subjects.

The fortune of Berytus, which emerges from Josephus’s account, contrasts sharply with the marginal role to which this town had been previously confined. After being besieged by the Seleucid competitor Diodotos Tryphon in 143 BCE, the city had experienced Ituraean lootings. In 27 BCE, Augustus chose it to settle veterans from the legions V Macedonica and VIII Gallica and to found the first Roman colony in Syria (Hall 2004; Sawaya 2009). Around 15 BCE, his son-in-law Marcus Agrippa extended its territory far in northern Bekaa up to Heliopolis and the sources of the Orontes River. Eventually rewarded with the *ius Italicum*, statutorily exempt from tribute, the new *colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus* soon became a little Rome in Phoenicia and a Latin island in a Graeco-Aramaic environment. This privileged status was conducive to the development of a strong tradition of juristic studies (Collinet 1925). The jurists present at Berytus were able to interpret equally Greek and Roman laws, as well as local legislative traditions from the Near East, so that the imperial legislation, once translated from Latin into Greek, was released from there throughout the Orient. In the third century CE, a school was formed around a kernel of professional lawyers and teachers. It gave Berytus the opportunity to be designated as the “mother of the laws” or the “nurse of the laws” (*legum nutrix*), and to supersede in that regard not only Tyre, homeland of the jurist Ulpian, but also Caesarea Maritima, Alexandria, Athens, and even both other cities where the emperor Justinian later left similar state institutions: Rome and Constantinople. The Berytan school continued to thrive until the tsunami of 551 CE, which destroyed the city and forced the masters and students to seek refuge in Sidon, before migrating to Constantinople.

After Berytus, five Phoenician cities were granted the status of Roman colony and adorned with imperial epithets. Toward the end of his reign, the emperor Claudius

(41–54 CE) founded the *colonia Claudia Stabilis Germanica Felix Ptolemais* and dispatched veterans to it. In 194 CE, Heliopolis was probably separated from Berytus and given the name of *colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Heliopolis*. Its inhabitants received the *ius Italicum* from Septimius Severus for their support during the war against Pescennius Niger, while the citizens of Berytus were punished for their defection. Around 198 CE, the *colonia Septimia Tyrus* was honored in the same way. Under Elagabalus (218–222 CE), Sidon (*colonia Aurelia Pia metropolis Sidoniorum*) and Arca (*colonia Caesarea Libani/Ituraeorum*) also became colonies. The implications of such promotions must be considered in the broader perspective of the trivialization of colonial status, especially from the Severi onward. Yet, the idea of purely honorific designations does not seem unquestionable in this case. The coins of the new colonies usually bear legionary insignia that refer to military colonization or resettlement, while others types and Latin legends express pride of being Roman (Dąbrowa 2012). As regards Heliopolis and Tyre, the granting of *ius Italicum* meant full remission of *tributum*. In the first case at least, it was followed by the inauguration of a contest modelled on the Roman Capitolia (Sawaya 2009: 274–77).

By contrast with rather outdated titles in the Hellenistic tradition (e.g., “sacred and inviolable,” “autonomous”), the acquisition of the metropolitan label and the permission to found new games also played a crucial role in the competition among the Phoenician cities. Again, Berytus and even more Tyre were the two cities that had benefited most from the new deal. The title of metropolis was linked to the celebration of rituals and games in honor of the emperors, either at a municipal scale—for instance, in Berytus and Sidon—or in a regional framework, within the district of Phoenicia (ἐπαρχία Φοινίκης), whose cities sent envoys to a provincial assembly presided at Tyre by the Phoenicarch (Φοινικάρχης). In a context of agonistic explosion across the Orient, old and new contests were held with imperial consent at Berytus, Sidon, Tyre, Heliopolis, and Paneas. Elsewhere, the apparent lack of games testifies less to a deficit of Hellenism (as in Palmyra) than to a secondary position in the search for honors, privileges, and patronages that stirred up civic life.

## A PHOENICIAN RENAISSANCE

Hellenism continued to flourish in Roman Phoenicia. Latin appeared in the early empire, whereas the Phoenician language gradually ceased to exist in its written form, except a few letters on coins. The last dated Phoenician inscription in the East is a bilingual dedication to Heracles-Melqart from Arados written in 25/24 BCE (Rey-Coquais 1970: 25–27). As a result, Greek and (to a lesser extent) Latin became exclusive vehicles for the dominant culture, as well as for the multiple Phoenician traditions. In this field as in others, Tyre stayed far ahead of its neighbors (Aliquot 2011: 76–79).

The city still hosted foreign men of letters, as may be assumed regarding the Stoic philosopher Mestrius Euphrates, the Athenian sophist Philostratus, and the Christian theologian Origen. Its own scholars especially excelled in law (Domitius Ulpianus—i.e., the famous Ulpian, Gaianus), rhetoric (Aspasius, Hadrian, Paul, another less famous Ulpianus), philosophy (L. Calvinus Taurus, Cassius Maximus, Musonius, Porphyry), history (Callicrates, Nicomachus), and geography (Marinus). They often held multiple citizenships and wove friendships with the elites of the empire, from whom they gained international fame and privileges for them and their homeland. Most had built their career abroad, as in the Hellenistic period, but now they went up to Rome, where they sometimes reached the highest circles of imperial power. Ulpian (*ca.* 170–223 CE), who started in public life as an assessor for the jurist Papinian and probably as a leader of the imperial judiciary office under Septimius Severus, finally held the prestigious office of praetorian prefect under Severus Alexander. For this, Tyre was still grateful to him in late antiquity, according to a Latin dedication found *in situ*.

Without reaching Ulpian's level, three other Tyrians were among the very first scholars of their generation. The philosopher L. Calvinus Taurus, citizen of both Tyre and Berytus, was appointed as the head of the Platonic school at Athens, where he taught Herodes Atticus and Aulus Gellius. Close to Plutarch, he was received with full honors at Delphi in the middle of the second century CE. Around the same period, Hadrian of Tyre trained in rhetoric at Athens, attended Galen's anatomy courses at Rome, and traveled to Antioch, Alexandria, and Olympia. He was in the entourage of Flavius Boethus, a Roman senator native of Ptolemais in Phoenicia; of Cn. Claudius Severus, senator and son-in-law of the emperor Marcus Aurelius; and of Caninius Celer, master of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Hadrian held the chairs of rhetoric at Ephesus, Athens, and Rome. According to Philostratus (*V S* 2.10), this man "devoted to the Muses" (Μούσαισι μέλων) presented himself as a new Cadmus in his inaugural conference at Athens, where he proudly claimed: "once again letters have come from Phoenicia" (πάλιν ἐκ Φοινίκης γράμματα). He died in Rome, at the very moment he received his letter of appointment as private secretary (*ab epistulis Graecis*) of the emperor Commodus. In the following century, Porphyry, alias Malchus, studied in Athens with Longinus and joined the school of Plotinus at Rome, before moving to Lilybaeum in Sicily, from where he traveled to promote Neoplatonic doctrines throughout the Roman world.

Many other Phoenician scholars could be cited, such as the Latin philologist M. Valerius Probus, the rhetor Hermippos, the Platonist Lupercus, and the biblical exegete Pamphilus, all four from Berytus; or the Stoic thinker Diodotos, the Aristotelian philosopher Boethos, and the astrologer Dorotheos, all three native of Sidon. It seems more relevant here to focus on the intriguing case of Philo of Byblos (*ca.* 50–140 CE), author of a *Phoenician History*, chiefly known through Porphyry and Eusebius of Caesarea, and presented as a mere translation into Greek of the work elaborated by Sanchuniathon of Berytus before the Trojan War (Baumgarten

1981; Kaldellis and López-Ruiz 2009 = *BNJ* 790). The account combines parallel narratives mainly specific to Tyre, and secondarily to Byblos and Berytus, whereas Sidon is virtually ignored. This unifying conception of the various civic traditions supports a pan-Phoenician patriotism, in a very original way indeed, considering the fact that Philo's contemporaries attached much more importance to the mythical origins of individual cities than to Phoenician history as a whole. The thesis put forward also has a second aspect: the Greek interpretation of the local gods would have meant stripping them of their essence. What is at stake here is that adherence to the codes and values of Hellenism had paradoxically raised the awareness among the Phoenicians of their own originality. In endorsing ideas shared by some Greeks—for example, that the Egyptians were the inventors of religions or the gods deified mortals—Philo discovered that the divinities honored in Phoenicia were not Greek but, rather, Hellenized Phoenician gods and goddesses.

All other works of Philo are lost, but the tradition preserved some titles which fortunately balance the image imposed by the preference of both pagans and Christians for his religious works—that of a writer obsessed with the defense of Phoenician identity. The Byblian mythographer turns out to be an encyclopedist and a book amateur (*On the Acquisition and Selection of Books*), an antiquarian (*On Cities and the Famous Men Each of Them Produced*), and a historian of his time (*On Hadrian's Reign*). It is also well known that he belonged to a Phoenician literary coterie close to the Roman consul Herennius Severus (perhaps a friend of Pliny the Younger), whom he probably owed his gentilicium Herennius and Roman citizenship. Despite his polemic attitude, Philo was thus fully integrated into the social and literary trends of his time, which makes him a forerunner of the cultural and religious revival that affected Phoenicia in the second and third centuries CE (see also chapters 18 and 45, this volume).

Coins best show all the ambivalence of this movement that Ernest Renan (1864–1874: 153–54) already called a “Phoenician Renaissance.” From the late second century CE, Sidon and Tyre repeatedly opted for types referring to a pre-Greek or un-Greek past. A distinction must be made between the heroes of the Cadmean lineage (Cadmus, Europe, Harmonia) and other characters (the Carthaginian queen Dido, her brother Pygmalion) who were mainly known then for their links with Aeneas, Trojan hero and founder of Roman civilization; contrary to the former, which were already portrayed on Hellenistic coins, the latter only appeared from the Severi onward, when Berytus also chose to depict Aeneas. In receiving colonial status and veteran settlers, both cities had been placed on the same footing as Berytus (Aliquot 2003–2004: 201–205). For the Tyrians, coins bearing the images of Dido and Pygmalion also supplemented the available evidence on the kinship between the great Phoenician metropolis and its western colonies, such as Gades, Carthage, and above all Lepcis Magna, Septimius Severus's native city (figures 9.1–9.2). All of this justified no less than a revision of local traditions through borrowings from Roman mythology.



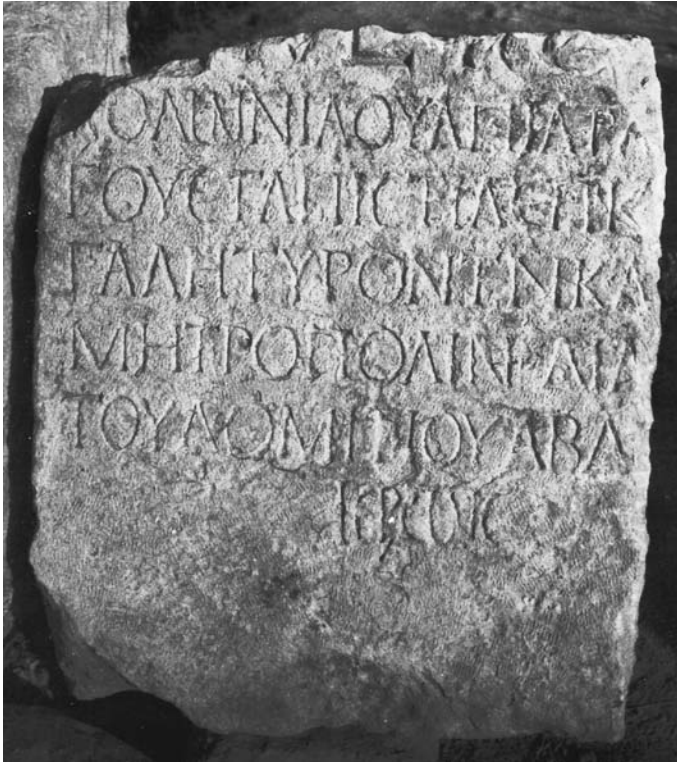
**FIGURE 9.1** Latin section of a bilingual dedication found in Tyre: It commemorates how the Roman colony of Lepcis Magna pays homage to Tyre, its metropolis, by erecting a statue in the image of this city, ca. 194–198 CE.

Source: CNRS/HiSoMA Archives.

## THE PHOENICIAN HINTERLAND

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In the second century CE, a traveler of Syrian origin came to Phoenicia with the intent to check whether the local sanctuaries were as holy as the temple of Atargatis, the goddess of Hierapolis in Syria. This man, who is often identified with the satirist Lucian of Samosata, initiated on his way an ethnographical inquiry into the local traditions to the heart of the country. He visited the main places of worship, questioned the devotees of Heracles at Tyre, of Astarte in Sidon, of Aphrodite at Byblos and on Mount Lebanon, and tried to decode the myths associated with each of these gods. His work has come down to us in the form of a Greek treatise entitled *De Dea Syria*—that is, *On the Syrian Goddess* (Lightfoot 2003). In a style that evokes Herodotus, it reflects ongoing discussions that took place in the coastal cities. Obviously, the identification of Melqart with Heracles and of Astarte with Europe was not self-evident to everybody. The account of the rituals to Adonis (6–8) especially gives a vivid insight into the ceremonies as they



**FIGURE 9.2** Greek section of the same dedication, under traces of big letters that exactly match the word *metropolin* in the last line of the Latin section. Until recently, the complementarity of the two fragments (and thus also the bilingual nature of the inscription) went unnoticed (see Aliquot 2017).

Source: CNRS/HiSoMA Archives.

were celebrated at Byblos in the Roman period, with their numerous actors (priests, barbers, ritual prostitutes) and the crowd of their worshippers gathered around a cultic pillar in the sacred precinct that was probably depicted on coins struck under Macrinus (217–218 CE). On the acropolis, several temples had taken each other's place over millennia, not without significant changes.

The cults had evolved, too. The Lady of Byblos had become Astarte, then Aphrodite. Adonis now was interpreted as Osiris, which may result from the popularity the Isiac divinities (Isis, Sarapis, Osiris, Harpocrates) enjoyed at Byblos as in Tyre since the Hellenistic period, and from the common funerary nature of the rituals to Adonis and the Egyptian god of the underworld. The passage on the Adonia is also telling of the integration of the Phoenician hinterland into the imaginary landscape of the Byblians: “They say that the affair of Adonis and the boar took place in their territory, and in memory of the sad event they beat their breasts each year and lament and perform the rites, and there is much mourning through the country” (*De Dea Syria* 6). The author goes on to explain how the bloody stream of the Adonis River (Nahr Ibrahim) signaled

the rituals of mourning to the Byblians. This raises the thorny issues of the depth of the Phoenician country and of the relationship between the Phoenicians and their neighbors to the east.

The distribution of the inscriptions dated according to civic eras shows that the territory of the Phoenician cities under the empire sometimes extended far to the east (Aliquot 2009: 52–58). From the time of Tiberius, for example, the south of the Bekaa Valley and the western slopes of Mount Hermon belonged to Sidon. However, it would be inappropriate to consider all the Phoenician hinterland as generically Phoenician, particularly as regards the areas called Lebanon and Antilebanon in antiquity. First, whole sectors of the mountains depended directly on the emperor. Second, the Phoenicians were here in contact with populations who had nothing Phoenician originally—namely the Romans from Berytus and Heliopolis, and Arab mountain dwellers. Now, at the time our Syrian traveler visited Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos, the changes found in the coastal towns since the Hellenistic period started to be fully reflected in the mountains. An impressive set of villages and sanctuaries was about to cover the whole country (Wiegand 1921–1925; Krencker and Zschietzschmann 1938; Aliquot 2009; Van Ess and Rheidt 2014). “I also went up from Byblos into Lebanon, a day’s journey, having learnt that there was an ancient temple of Aphrodite there, which Cinyras had founded,” Lucian writes in chapter 9 of the treatise *On the Syrian Goddess*, which relates a trip to the famous site of Aphaca, at the source of the Adonis River.

Too often such places are presented as genuine preserves of the so-called Oriental paganism. Here we are faced with the presuppositions of a model that has had great success in both scholarly and popular literature on the societies of the ancient Near East: the model of the high places, which refers to the outdoor sanctuaries in Canaan before the Hebrew conquest. This model is based on the (real) presence of dozens of Roman sanctuaries in the Phoenician hinterland and on the (much more problematic) identification of the culture of their worshippers with those of the biblical Canaanites and the Phoenicians. It partly owes its popularity to the reputation of Lebanon and Antilebanon. Since antiquity, the mountains has been described as marginal areas consecrated to the gods, overrun with wild beasts, and inhabited by giants or by men close to the state of nature. Under Roman rule, the Phoenicians reproduced this stereotype, while interpreting the regional mythology in Greek terms. In his *Phoenician History*, Philo of Byblos thus regarded Lebanon and Antilebanon as deified giants, and relegated them to the fringes of primitive humanity. For others, the mountain area was a small Arabia, or a Near Eastern Arcadia—that is, a harsh country of shepherds and giants (Aliquot 2009: 28–37, 64–69). Such depictions reflected the prejudices of ancient ethnography on Arab, pastoral, and nomadic peoples. The Ituraean raids certainly contributed to revive them.

Lebanese sanctuaries differ from traditional places of worship in the rest of Phoenicia, where the combination of chapels and rooms inside enclosed courtyards still prevailed in Roman times. Their features matched a new way of designing sacred spaces which was also adopted in the Aradian Peraea on the Bargylus (e.g., at

Baitokaike) or in Damascene. Religious construction tended to be planned through the use of architectural drawings, plans, and models. The altar was clearly distinguished from the temple building, standing in an axial position on a high podium, and was closed. These changes modified the outlook on the statues nestled in an innermost shrine (ἄδυτον), which only the priests were allowed to enter. Of course, all this took place in accordance with tradition, and there were exceptions. Sacred precincts or spaces without temples still existed in Sfirra and Mashnaqa. High-altitude rituals were always performed on summits (the most spectacular example being that of Mount Hermon at 2814 m above sea level), or symbolically on tower-altars at Sfirra, Mashnaqa, Qalaat Faqra, and Heliopolis.

Such trends accompanied the advent of a new social order (Aliquot 2009). They were due neither to the initiative of Rome, nor of cities, nor of allied rulers (except in Arca, Paneas, and Heliopolis) but, rather, of wealthy city dwellers and villagers. The rural sanctuaries were mainly funded by notables; their features reflected the search for a compromise between local traditions and Roman models that had been first adapted at Berytus and Heliopolis. This is also the reason why the temples in the Phoenician hinterland today appear as the most “Roman” temples in the Roman Near East. The notables managed the priesthoods, controlled the sacred funds, and dedicated their own resources to the gods. The choice they made to adapt Roman architecture appears as a manifestation of their influence on society and a means to perpetuate their domination.

In no way should the rural sanctuaries be considered as museums of the timeless religiosity of the Semitic East—this unlikely avatar of Orientalism. Their worshippers were as much concerned to show their attachment to ancestral traditions as to comply with the traditions of the Roman world. For instance, this is why they translated vows by imitating behaviors that had become common for decades in the neighboring towns, particularly on the coast. They transcribed votive formulas into Greek or Latin, and gave Greek or Latin names to their gods. It is true that we find in the names of the gods some Phoenician elements—for instance, with Jupiter Balmarcodes at Dayr al-Qalaa—and especially Aramaic elements, with Zeus Beelgalasos and Atargatis at Qalaat Faqra, or Hadaranes and Atargatis in the *pagus Augustus* of Niha. However, the adoption of Greek and Latin nomenclature came to overshadow nuances that could be made if the worshippers had their dedications written in a Semitic language. The gods were characterized by their entrenchment in villages or in broader areas, such as the mountain, the coast, the Roman East, or the whole empire. For instance, images of Venus mourning the death of Adonis were not only discovered in Byblos but also in Arca and Yanuh (Gatier and Nordiguian 2005: 28–29). The Phoenician hinterland was definitely not a region where religious traditions would have remained archaic because they were practiced by communities without contact with cities.

In the various expressions of piety, borrowings from Greek tradition played an important role, as everywhere in Roman Syria. What distinguishes Phoenicia and its

hinterland is that the Romans did not stay in the background. While colonizing the Bekaa, they restructured the local cults and gave them a public character. Their input is obvious as regards the Heliopolitan triad, comprising Jupiter (*Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus*, usually abbreviated as *IOMH*), Venus, and Mercury (Hajjar 1977; Aliquot 2009: 200–29). The model was new in the area. The Romans from Berytus established it at Heliopolis following the example of the Capitoline triad, when they tried to summarize the cults of their territory. From Phoenicia, the Heliopolitan cult spread to the West through the diaspora from Berytus and Heliopolis, or via the Roman army. Its oracle drew the attention of emperors, because Jupiter was available for consultation either locally or remotely. In Heliopolis, the Romans also innovated by introducing a new mystery cult, that of Bacchus, to whom a temple was dedicated in the second century CE (Wiegand 1921–1925: 2:1–89). Outside the city, they were eventually responsible for the reorganization of other local pantheons, insofar as the Heliopolitan cult was either adopted, or imitated, in the Bekaa and in Phoenicia up to Ptolemais and the Carmel.

## EPILOGUE: TOWARD LATE ANTIQUITY

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The fourth century CE turns out to be a transition period in Phoenicia as in the rest of the Roman world (Gatier 2012). By founding a second Rome in Byzantium, the emperor Constantine (306–337 CE) accelerated the process of partition of the empire launched in the late third century CE. The eastern provinces were grouped in a diocese of Oriens and placed under the authority of a *vicarius* of the praetorian prefect, the count of the East (*comes Orientis*), fixed at Antioch. According to the overall tendency of creating increasingly smaller administrative units, Syria Phoenice was divided into two provinces in the late fourth century CE: the first, to the west, was Phoenicia Prima or Foenice, also known as Phoenicia Maritima (Paralia); the second, to the east, Phoenicia Secunda or Foenice Libani—that is, Lebanese Phoenicia. As regards religion, even though one sees the early installation of Christian communities in the coastal towns, the first days of Christianity have left little evidence in the area, compared with the situation of Antioch and northern Syria. The persecution of Christians, which reached a peak under the Tetrarchy, stopped between 311 and 324 CE. Constantine played an essential role in the development of the new religion, which he firmly encouraged. He also initiated a policy of repression against the traditional cults. The destruction and closure of pagan sanctuaries remained very casual under his reign. Such operations happened in 333 CE at Aphaca and Heliopolis, where licentious practices would have shocked him. This certainly helped fix the image of Phoenicia as a stronghold of paganism for centuries. Yet, the heartland of the country, far away from the eastern borders of the empire, enjoyed a long period of peace and economic growth that can be considered as another golden age.

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