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Julien Aliquot

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A COMPANION TO  
**THE HELLENISTIC AND  
ROMAN NEAR EAST**

EDITED BY  
TED KAIZER



**WILEY** Blackwell

A COMPANION  
TO THE  
HELLENISTIC  
AND ROMAN  
NEAR EAST

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WILEY Blackwell

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*In memory of Sir Fergus Millar*



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## CHAPTER 21

# Lebanon

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*Julien Aliquot*

Between the Mediterranean sea and the Syrian steppe, the area called “Lebanon” in antiquity included Mount Lebanon itself, along the Phoenician coast, and the parallel range of the Antilebanon with its southern extension, Mount Hermon. Its mountains, which surround the fertile Bekaa Valley, are the highest in the Near East. Culminating at 3083 m above sea level and extending over about 220 km from north to south and 80 km from west to east, they appear as a real water tower. Four of the main rivers of Syria have their sources here: the Orontes and the Litani in the Bekaa, the Barada on the eastern slope of Antilebanon, and the Jordan south of Mount Hermon. A multitude of smaller watercourses also enabled the development of agriculture in altitude at an early date. Lebanon has not seen the birth of any important town in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, apart from Arca, Heliopolis (Baalbek), and Caesarea Paneas. The country was rather the homeland of peasants and shepherds settled on the margins of the very civilized cities of Phoenicia and Damascus. Its history has long been reduced to the account of the disorders created by some of these men when Rome began to impose its authority over the Orient. Recent advances in archaeological and historical research today give a more balanced picture of the situation. They also provide new information on the communities which constructed the temples that already built the reputation of Lebanon under Roman rule.

### The Making of a Lebanese Arabia

Alexander the Great did not arouse a great enthusiasm in the mountain. During the siege of Tyre in 332 BCE, Arabs from Antilebanon harassed the Greeks. Nevertheless, after the Macedonian conquest, the area entered the Hellenized world for more than a millennium. Within the kingdoms ruled by the successors of Alexander it was first under the control of the Ptolemies. The kings of Egypt were much concerned about defending their empire here, and built in the Bekaa the fortresses of Brochoi and Gerrha. Lebanon was directly exposed to the attacks of the Seleucids throughout the third century BCE until Antiochus III took it with all Ptolemaic Syria in 200–198 BCE. Then it depended on the rulers of Antioch. From the late second century BCE the Seleucid monarchy experienced serious crises of succession and underwent the pressure of the Ptolemies,

the Parthians, and Rome. Cities and peoples emancipated inside the kingdom. On the coast the Phoenician cities took their independence one after the other (Chapter 20). In the mountains a people who had never drawn any attention before seized power: the Ituraeans.

The Ituraeans have been identified as Arab robbers since antiquity (Aliquot 1999–2003; Myers 2010; cf. Aliquot 2011). They may be related to the Arabs who had harassed the Greeks during the siege of Tyre, but they are best known later for plundering the neighboring cities and for forming a principality in the Bekaa under the authority of Ptolemaeus, son of Mennaëus (c. 85–40 BCE), tetrarch and high priest of Chalcis ad Libanum. This principality existed even after Pompey conquered Syria in 64/3 BCE because Rome accepted into its clientele the Mennaids of Chalcis and Abilene as well as their kins and rivals from Arca and northern Lebanon. Ituraean client kings controlled territories until the mid-first century CE and were progressively replaced by various sovereigns (Cleopatra, Herod the Great and his heirs, Cotys IX of Armenia Minor). The sources concerning them are numerous and varied. In a disparaging tone the literary tradition (above all Strabo and Josephus) provides valuable information about their dynasties, territories, and lifestyle. Epigraphy brings additional data. Coins tell us about their cults (Herman 2006; Aliquot 2009: 183–185; Kropp 2009a). And excavations and surveys have recently started to reveal the material culture of the local communities.

Beyond the tricky reconstruction of events, the available evidence can address two fundamental questions: to the specific issue of the settlement history of Lebanon the more general problem of the formation of the Arab peoples in antiquity is to be added (on Arabs, Arabia, and Arabic, see Macdonald 2009a, 2009b). Both phenomena have been conceived of as the result of successive waves of migration. In the wake of the orientalist René Dussaud (1955), Arabs were supposed to have periodically left the Arabian Peninsula to reach the Fertile Crescent throughout history (Chapter 34). The Bible is the starting point for Dussaud and his followers (Knauf 1989, 1998). Some books of the Old Testament (e.g. Genesis 25:15) provide a list of the twelve sons of Ishmael, the mythical ancestor of the Arabs. Biblical scholars regard this genealogy as an inventory of a tribal federation formed between the late eighth and the mid-seventh century BCE. According to them this federation should have come from northern Arabia, the topography of which kept some names of the tribes, such as Duma and Tema. Among Ishmael's sons is a Yetur, whose name evokes that of the Ituraeans in Greek (*Itouraiōi*) and Latin (*Ituraei*). On one occasion, in the second century BCE, the translators of the First Book of Chronicles (5:19) replaced the Hebrew name “Yetur” by the Greek ethnic of the Ituraeans. Based on this isolated piece of evidence, the homeland of the Ituraeans was located in northern Arabia. From there the Ituraeans would have migrated northwestwards, because the same text would indicate their presence in Transjordan under the Achaemenids. This is the classical theory, which relies on the references to Yetur in the Old Testament to trace the long migration of the Ituraeans from northern Arabia, or at least from Transjordan, to Lebanon.

This sophisticated reconstruction raises many objections. First, the identification of Yetur with the Ituraeans is based on a single text. It may be the result of a vague assonance. Josephus himself, when he adapted the Bible, never equated Yetur to the eponymous ancestor of the Ituraeans. More generally it must be considered how the Old Testament was written in successive layers before being translated into Greek. The occasional replacement of “Yetur” by the Ituraean ethnic could only correspond to a more or less relevant update of the biblical text. It does not testify to the identity of the two groups. In this respect the case of Yetur is not isolated. The reality of the relations between Ishmael's sons and the peoples that occupied the Near East in the first millennium BCE has recently been challenged. The best-known example is that of the Nabataeans, who were once artificially related to biblical Nebayoth.

In short, nothing proves that the Ituraeans had migrated from northern Arabia. If we stick to the facts, the Ituraeans were referred to only during the late second century BCE, at a time when the Seleucid authority was decaying. North of Lebanon, the Emesans may already have started to settle the middle Orontes Valley around Arethusa (Chapter 2). Southwards the Jewish state of the Hasmonaeans had emerged in Judaea after the Maccabean revolt. In this context the Hasmonaeans

were seeking to expand toward areas already occupied or dominated by Ituraeans. Incidentally they were able to convert some of them to Judaism, at least for a while. Thus all that can be said is that there was a territory populated or dominated by Ituraeans in the second half of the second century BCE and that it was partly coveted by the Hasmonaeans. This territory cannot be defined with high precision, but it should be sought in the Bekaa, where the Hasmonaeans led military expeditions in 104/3 BCE.

Although it leaves unanswered the question of their origin, evidence concerning the Ituraeans helps us to characterize them quite accurately. The Ituraeans formed a “people” – in Greek an *ethnos*, as in Strabo and Josephus; in Latin a *gens*, as in Pliny the Elder. Pliny (*HN* 5.81) also has this interesting phrase: “the people of Ituraeans and those among them who are called ‘Baethaemi’,” which hints at tribal subdivisions within a larger ethnic group. A Latin inscription from Berytus further shows that Rome officially recognized the Ituraean people, even though by fighting it (*CIL* 3.6687). At the same time Rome started to raise auxiliary troops of “Ituraeans,” sent them to the West and soon compensated for their losses by recruiting men locally, so that the Ituraean ethnic came to describe soldiers who did not necessarily originate from Lebanon. On several occasions Ituraeans were also related to Arabs. Strabo (16.2.18 and 16.2.20) mentions separately “Ituraeans and Arabs.” In his turn, Cassius Dio (59.12.2) writes that Caligula appointed a dynast of the “Ituraeans amongst Arabs” in northern Lebanon. To explain these differences we must consider that the Ituraeans were not alone: at the time of the Maccabees the Arabs called “Zabadaeans” occupied Antilebanon, and Strabo himself distinguished between the Ituraean and Arab mountain-dwellers and the peasants of the Bekaa. However, the onomastics and cults of the Ituraean dynasts may point to an Arab identity. As well as Mennaecus, father of the first tetrarch of Chalcis, Soemus and Ouaros, lords of northern Lebanon, bore Hellenized Semitic names which call to mind those of the Arab dynasts of Edessa and Emesa, and which also (though not exclusively) occurred in Arabic languages. On the coins of the dynasts of Chalcis, the images of Athena and the armed Dioscuri reflect the popularity of deities in military dress among the Arabs and the inhabitants of the Syrian steppe. Gods armed with bows and spears still appeared in the civic coinage of Arca under Antoninus (e.g. Seyrig 1970: 97).

The Ituraeans had traditions in common with the Arabs of Syria. While adopting features of Hellenism they were also under the influence of Aramaic culture. With the exception of Mennaecus, the lords of Chalcis bore Greek names (Ptolemaeus, Lysanias, Zenodorus) and some of their gods (Zeus, Hermes, Artemis) were not specifically Arab. On their coins, dates, names, and titles were normally written in Greek. This is not a surprise. In Lebanon as all over the Hellenistic and Roman Near East there was a significant distortion between written and vernacular languages – on the one hand, Greek and Latin, languages of dominant powers; and on the other, Semitic languages, especially Aramaic, which had once been the language of administration and culture in the Achaemenid Empire. In this context it is interesting to find Aramaic letters on a coin minted by Lysanias of Chalcis (Briquel Chatonnet 2005). The text is not clear, though it may be translated “son of Mennaecus.” But its mere existence may indicate that the Ituraeans officially used Aramaic. It is very tempting to relate it to a Hellenistic dedication discovered in Yanuh, east of Byblos. This inscription is the first that demonstrates the use of Aramaic in a public context in Lebanon. Its paleography derives from a standard of the Achaemenid period without relating to any of the branches of Aramaic known in the East. The text commemorates the construction of a temple (“house of gods”) by a group of individuals. It is dated from 110/9 BCE, which corresponds to the time when the Ituraeans seized power. This dedication may testify to the importance of Aramaic culture in the local communities of Lebanon.

To sum up, the issue of the Ituraean ethnic identity calls for a nuanced response. The problem of the geographical origin of the Ituraeans remains unsolved, but it cannot be excluded that they came from Lebanon. A series of clues further permits to regard them as an Arab people influenced by both Greek and Aramaic cultures. Presumably their situation was comparable to that of the Emesans and the Nabataeans, who were sedentarized in the Hellenistic period, who wrote either in Aramaic or in Greek, and whose onomastics and cults were comparable to those of the men

who were referred to as Arabs in antiquity. Under this assumption the Ituraean ethnic would have experienced the same evolution as the Emesan and Nabataean ethnics: it would have referred first to a tribal or ethnic identity, then to the subjection to a prince, and finally, after the annexation of the client states to the Roman Empire, to being native to a specific geographical and cultural area.

In this respect, defining the extent of the Ituraean lands is not easy. What ancient authors called “Ituraea” originally corresponded to the vast Lebanese estate of Ptolemaeus of Chalcis and his son Lysanias. However, Ituraea did not remain unchanged. On the one hand, it was reduced step by step from the 20s BCE. On the other hand, several neighboring regions, including Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, and Auranitis, in present-day Golan and southern Syria, were added to the remains of Ptolemaeus’s estate for a while. Obviously these regions were not areas of Ituraean settlement (despite Hartal 2005), and a distinction ought to be made between the territories which at a given time were under the domination of an Ituraean prince and those areas populated by Ituraeans. This area overall matches the region Strabo calls “the Massyas and the mountainous country of the Ituraeans,” i.e. the Bekaa and the surrounding mountains (*Geogr.* 16.2.10). Chalcis, Arca, and Abila were located there. This is also where the Romans fought Ituraean robbers in the early first century CE. This area has to be regarded as one of the small Arabias of the Near East following Cassius Dio (49.32.5), who equated Ituraeans to Arabs and who logically considered that around 36 BCE Cleopatra was awarded the “Arabia of Ituraeans,” separate, for example, from those of the Emesans and of the Nabataeans.

## Mountain-dwellers and Clients Kings

The ancient tradition is unanimously unfavorable to the Lebanese mountain-dwellers. This is best exemplified by Strabo (*Geogr.* 16.2.18):

After the Macras is the Massyas [i.e. the Bekaa], which also has some mountainous parts where Chalcis is established as an acropolis of the Massyas, and the beginning of which is Laodicea ad Libanum. Ituraeans and Arabs, all of whom are robbers, hold all the mountainous parts, while peasants are in the plains; and when the latter are mistreated by those men, they need different kinds of help. They use strongholds as bases of operation; just as those who hold Lebanon possess, high up, Sinna and Borrana and other fortresses like them, and, down below, Botrys and Gigartus and the caves by the sea and the fort that was erected on the Theouprosopon, all the places Pompey pulled down and from which they raided Byblos and the city that comes next after, Berytus, which both lie between Sidon and Theouprosopon. Now Byblos, the royal residence of Cinyras, is sacred to Adonis. Pompey freed it from tyranny by beheading its tyrant with an axe.

This passage reproduces all the prejudices of the ancient ethnography on pastoral peoples (Briant 1982b). For Strabo, the Lebanese robbers were neither farmers nor even sedentary men. Their mobility makes one think about wanderings of nomads. Their lifestyle differed from that of sedentary peoples because they lived hidden in caves (perhaps rock-cut dwellings). Violence is another commonplace in Strabo, whose *Geography* is based on a scale of civilization where peoples’ humanity decreases analogous to the rise of altitude at which they live. Eventually Strabo’s thesis has a political component. The mountain-dwellers were only able to govern as tyrants. Their opposition to the farmers of the plains justified the intervention of kings before Pompey arrived as a liberator. The conquest is thus presented as a necessity. It must precede the advent of a new order under the Roman rule.

One could quote long passages of Josephus where we find the same presentation of the relationship between Rome and pastoral peoples. On the whole there is no reason to deny that brigandage was practiced, nor that the Ituraeans were involved in this matter; and it is likely that the cities really suffered at the turn of the Christian era, when Rome still had some difficulties to establish its power over the East. Nevertheless the explanation given by the ancient ethnographers

has to be challenged. According to them there was a kind of law of need: robbery was a lifestyle imposed on peoples who occupied a territory difficult or impossible to cultivate. Until recently there was no decisive argument, neither to support this statement nor to pinpoint its weakness. This is why one could read completely contradictory theories on the settlement history of Lebanon. According to the historian Henri Seyrig, the building of the numerous Lebanese temples was linked to the development of villages already in the Hellenistic period and even more under Roman rule (Seyrig 1939b). According to the geographer Xavier de Planhol, Lebanon was settled only during the Middle Ages by the Maronite and Druze communities, who had taken refuge in virtually empty areas (Planhol 1997). Today, while validating Seyrig's brilliant intuition, the work carried out by a French archaeological mission at Yanuh and in the upper valley of the Nahr Ibrahim has shed new light on this issue.

The Yanuh survey was conducted between 1999 and 2005 under the direction of Pierre-Louis Gatier (Gatier and Nordiguian 2005). It covered a remote area on the maritime slope of Mount Lebanon. Twenty kilometers east from Byblos, the Nahr Ibrahim Valley is bounded by a vast amphitheater of high calcareous plateaus. At an average altitude of 1200 m, the water stored in these permeable massives is blocked by impermeable argillaceous rocks and gushes profusely to give birth to the Nahr Ibrahim, the ancient Adonis river. This fertile area is a good example of the geological stratigraphy which brought about the agricultural wealth of Lebanon north of Beirut. The survey showed that it was permanently occupied since the Bronze Age. The era of the Ituraean domination was well-documented too. A series of small forts and entrenched rural settlements were identified in 2003 and dated from this period. These sites were difficult to access and visible from each other. Together they formed a network similar to the one described by Strabo. In the first centuries CE they were seemingly abandoned before being reoccupied in the Middle Ages. Under the Roman Empire the mountain-dwellers would therefore have settled the most suitable areas for agriculture, between 1000 and 1600 m above sea level, especially near the sanctuary of Yanuh. The first impression of an austere and self-sufficient life hardly stands up. Fine imported ceramics and Phoenician productions of the early first century BCE have been found in Yanuh. Although they were isolated, the mountain-dwellers had contacts with the Phoenician cities while under Ituraean rule. In addition, traces of rural housing of the early first century CE showed that they already occupied parts of the valley. Finally, an Aramaic inscription from Yanuh proved that, as early as the late second century BCE (Briquel Chatonnet 2005), they were able to dedicate officially a religious building (a sacrificial platform).

It would be interesting to check the exemplarity of Yanuh's case. Further south, in the hinterland of Sidon, a Polish–Lebanese–French mission has investigated a village associated with a pagan and Christian sanctuary at Chhim (Waliszewski and Ortali-Tarazi 2002). The site was particularly flourishing from the first to the eighth century CE. It was also occupied in Hellenistic times. However Chhim did not necessarily belong to the area of Ituraean settlement. Other missions were conducted in northern Lebanon and on Mount Hermon, but they only provided evidence for sporadic occupation before the coming of Rome. More generally, it is too early to identify a specific Ituraean material culture (despite Dar 1993 and Hartal 2005). One can only be skeptical about the allocation to Ituraeans of the “Golan ware,” which consists of large *pithoi* sometimes inscribed in Greek. In fact this ware was produced outside the main Ituraean settlement area and continued to be produced after the end of the Ituraean domination. Nothing suggests that it ought to be described as “Ituraean.”

Although it is not yet possible to generalize the case of Yanuh, we can safely consider that sedentary groups settled Lebanon in the Hellenistic period. Former judgments about the Ituraeans and the other Lebanese mountain-dwellers should therefore be revised, especially their assimilation to nomads who would have obtained by robbery what nature would have refused to give. This picture was probably forged in cities that suffered from their onslaughts. As it happens, the literary tradition illustrates the persistence of ancient commonplaces on pastoral peoples more than it gives positive information about their lifestyle. Overall it reveals what this lifestyle was not: the Lebanese mountain-dwellers ignored city life in the Hellenistic period; whether they were Arabic-speakers or not, be they shepherds, farmers, or bandits (or all three at once), they were at

least partly sedentarized, they were able to write in Aramaic, and the most powerful of them were likely to adopt some elements of Greek culture. And the same is true for their lords.

The Ituraean lords were divided between two families: the dynasty of Chalcis ad Libanum, i.e. the Mennaiids, or Mennaeus's heirs (Ptolemaeus, Lysanias, Zenodorus, most probably related to the princes of Abila of Lysanias), and the princes of Arca (Soaemus, Ptolemaeus, Soaemus, Ouaros). Despite some differences of political views, all of them were at the head of states comparable to those which had emerged out of the Seleucid kingdom before entering the clientele of Rome. They bore the title of "tetrarch." Their behavior was reminiscent of that of the Hellenistic rulers. The princes of Chalcis in particular asserted their independence by minting coins bearing the sovereign's name, his portrait, and the emblems of the dynasty. They may have demonstrated their power by building aristocratic monuments, such as the monument of Hermel north of the Bekaa. Exercise of power was also associated with Hellenization. The Mennaiids had Greek inscriptions on their coins. Similarly they chose to figure their ancestral gods in a Greek manner. The Ituraean princes therefore ostensibly tried to hide their barbarian origins by adopting modes of expression privileged in the Hellenistic world. This attitude was the same as that of their Syrian counterparts, especially the Arab kings of Emesa, to whom they were bound by diplomatic and matrimonial alliances. Something else put the Mennaiids closer to these dynasts: they were at the head of both a principality and a major sanctuary, in this case most probably that of Heliopolis-Baalbek (Aliquot 2009; Kropp 2009a), where their heirs were still buried under the Rome Empire.

Each Ituraean dynasty had its own capitals: for the Mennaiids, Chalcis ad Libanum in the Bekaa and Abila of Lysanias on Antilebanon; for the lords of northern Lebanon, Arca in the plain of Akkar, at the location of the early Hellenistic city of Heraclea of Phoenicia. Only Arca could ever have claimed the status of a city following its refoundation as a Caesarea in the early Roman period. Its development resulted either from an Ituraean initiative or from a Herodian decision. In any case, the Ituraean past was still locally meaningful enough under the Severan dynasty for the city to mint coins under the name of "Caesarea of the Ituraeans." The fact that Alexander Severus was born here was certainly decisive. Unlike Arca, Chalcis and Abila were just the main settlements of rural communities. Chalcis probably has to be placed at the current location of the Ptolemaic fortress of Gerrha (Majdal Aanjar) in the Bekaa. It should also be identical to the *castellum* mentioned in a famous Latin epitaph from Berytus (*CIL* 3.6687). The text outlines the career of the prefect Quintus Aemilius Secundus, who was credited with the capture of the *castellum* of the Ituraeans on Mount Lebanon around 6/7 CE. Obviously this *castellum* was not one of the small forts of northern Lebanon, but rather an important fortress, the capture of which preceded the breakup of the Mennaid principality, following which the site was certainly integrated in the territory of Berytus. Chalcis's failure was similar to the mediocre fate of Abila of Lysanias. The latter was scattered around modern Suq Wadi Barada above Damascus. According to its name, a Mennaid had founded it either in the late first century BCE or in the early first century CE. The place is well known for its sanctuaries, especially for the high place of Nabi Abel, which, under Tiberius, was dedicated to Cronos by a freedman of the tetrarch Lysanias (the same Lysanias as in Luke 3:1). Abila may have been incorporated into the territory of Damascus before it became a city in late antiquity.

## Rome in Lebanon

The situation changed step by step under Roman rule. Following the conquest of the Near East by Pompey in 64/3 BCE, most parts of Lebanon were ruled by client kings in the name of Rome. The area was definitely integrated into the province of Syria only in the late first century CE, after the death of Agrippa II, the last Herodian king. It remained in the same province until 194 CE, after which it came to belong to Syria Phoenice until the territorial modifications of the fourth century CE. Soon, nothing was heard of the Ituraeans, apart from those who had been recruited

in the Roman army. On a smaller scale, the emperors monopolized forest resources while allowing the cities to possess parts of the mountain. Lebanon was divided between the Phoenician cities, Damascus, and a Roman colony that was granted the privilege of *ius Italicum*. The latter, the first of its kind in Syria, was founded under Augustus in 27 BCE at the location of Berytus. Populated by Roman veterans from the legions *V Macedonica* and *VIII Gallica*, the new *colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus* saw its territory being extended in the Bekaa to the sources of the Orontes river by Augustus's son-in-law Marcus Agrippa around 15 BCE. In Heliopolis the Roman colonists continued the work of the Ituraeans and (maybe) the Herodians (Wiegand 1921–25; Aliquot 2009, 2010b, 2019; Kropp 2010b; Van Ess and Rheidt 2014; Lohmann 2017). The site certainly belonged to their territory until Septimius Severus made it an independent colony in 194 CE to thank its inhabitants for their support during the war against Pescennius Niger while punishing the citizens of Berytus for their defection. The important point is that the Roman takeover was contemporary with the construction of an impressive set of more than a hundred sanctuaries (Aliquot 2009, with a comprehensive gazetteer). Cities were far from being responsible for all of this. Some districts of the former client kings kept an ambiguous status. Others had a marginal situation in relation to the cities on which they depended. The new sanctuaries were especially numerous there.

There are still some misconceptions about the Lebanese sanctuaries. Too often they are presented as places where the depths of oriental paganism would have been transformed only superficially by the Greco-Roman tradition. Here we are faced with the presuppositions of a model that has met with great success in both scholarly and popular literature on the ancient Near Eastern religions: the model of the high places, according to the most common translation of the Hebrew term *bamah*, which refers to the outdoor places of worship of Canaan before its conquest by the Hebrews. This model is based on the (real) presence of dozens of Roman sanctuaries in the Phoenician hinterland and on the (much more questionable) assimilation of the culture of the worshippers of these sanctuaries to that of the Canaanites of the Bible and the Phoenicians. This model partly owed its success to the reputation of Lebanon. Since antiquity, the mountain has been identified with a border land 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 picture, even though they interpreted the regional mythology in Greek terms. Philo of Byblos, in his *Phoenician History*, regarded Lebanon and Antilebanon as divine giants and rejected them on the fringes of primitive humanity (for this author, see Chapter 5). For others, Lebanon was a small Arabia, or a Near Eastern Arcadia, i.e. a harsh country of shepherds and giants. The Ituraean raids probably revived these legends that reflected the prejudices of ancient ethnography on Arab, pastoral, and nomadic peoples.

Lebanon's Roman sanctuaries were very different from the traditional places of worship of Phoenicia, where the agglutination of chapels and rooms inside an enclosed courtyard still prevailed in Roman times. Their features reflected the emergence of a new way of designing sacred spaces. Religious building tended to be planned by the use of architectural drawings, plans, and models. One building, the temple, was more important than ever. It was clearly distinguished from the altar, standing in an axial position on a high podium, and closed. These changes modified the way of looking at the statues nestled in the *adyton*, which only the priests were allowed to enter. Of course, all this took place in accordance with tradition and there were adjustments and exceptions to these trends. Sanctuaries without temples still existed in Sfireh and Mashnaqa. High-altitude cults were still practiced on the summits (the most spectacular example being that of Mount Hermon at 2814 m above sea level) or through the construction of tower-altars at Sfireh, Machnaqa, Qalaat Faqra, and Baalbek. In any case, the religious building accompanied the advent of a new social order. It was due neither to Rome, nor to cities (apart from Arca, Heliopolis, and Caesarea Paneas), but to villagers. The sanctuaries were built by notables who came after the client kings. This is why their aspect reflected the search for a compromise between local traditions and Roman models that had been first adapted at Berytus and Heliopolis (Figure 21.1). This is also the reason why the Lebanese temples today appear as the most "Roman" temples of the





**Figure 21.1** The courtyard of the great Roman sanctuary at Heliopolis-Baalbek. © J. Aliquot 2009.

Roman Near East. Notables funded the religious buildings, managed the priesthoods, controlled the sacred funds, and dedicated their own resources to the gods. The choice they made to adapt the Roman architecture thus appears as a manifestation of their influence on society and as a means to perpetuate their domination.

Under no circumstances were the rural sanctuaries of Lebanon 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. With that in mind, they translated vows by imitating behaviors that were already known in neighboring towns, especially in Phoenicia. 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 (“Lord of Dances”) 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 the Greek and Latin nomenclature came to mask the nuances that could be made if the worshippers had their dedications written in a Semitic language. The gods were distinguished from each other by references to their local, village, or civic roots, or by their success beyond civic boundaries. For example, images of Venus mourning the death of Adonis were not only discovered in Byblos, but also in Arca and Yanuh. Lebanon was definitely not a region where religious traditions would have remained archaic because they were practiced by communities without contact with the cities and the world outside.

More generally the Lebanese worshippers adhered to a theology that was widespread throughout the Roman Near East (Chapter 37). A couple of gods stood at the head of local pantheons. On the one hand, the supreme god was called Zeus or Jupiter, when he did not remain anonymous. He was sometimes accompanied by a messenger, an angel, and his power was the subject of astrological speculations. The Ladies of Lebanon, on the other hand, were called Atargatis, Aphrodite, Juno Regina, Leucothea, Venus, and Urania. In the definition of these doctrines the participation of the clergy is not always detectable, but the role of priests in the management of the sanctuaries may give a hint. Lebanon was also marked by larger currents that went through the Roman world – for instance, the exaltation of supreme gods participated to the henotheistic trend that was characteristic of the new religious style of the imperial era.

In the various expressions of piety, borrowings from Greek tradition played an important role, as everywhere in Roman Syria. What distinguishes Lebanon from the rest of the Near East is that here the Romans were not left behind. While colonizing the Bekaa they restructured the Lebanese cults and gave them a public character. Their contribution was evident in the case of the Heliopolitan triad, the group of gods consisting of Jupiter (*Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Heliopolitanus*, usually abbreviated to *IOMH*), Venus, and Mercury (Hajjar 1977, 1985, 1990; Aliquot 2009, 2010b; Kropp 2010b). The model was totally new in the area. It was established in Heliopolis by the Romans from Berytus, who were inspired by the organization of the Roman Capitoline triad when they tried to synthesize the cults of their territory. From the Bekaa the Heliopolitan cult spread to the West in the wake of the diaspora from Berytus and Heliopolis. 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. Outside Heliopolis they were finally responsible for the reorganization of other local pantheons, insofar as the Heliopolitan cult was either adopted, or imitated, in the Bekaa and in the mountains.

One may wonder when all this ended. Officially Theodosius I issued an edict to prohibit sacrifices and to decree the closure of temples in 391/2 CE. These drastic measures came after more than a century of struggle between supporters of the pagan tradition and followers of the Christian faith. What happened in Lebanon? Here as elsewhere in the Near East no pagan sanctuary was founded in the fourth century CE. It seems that the sanctuaries were gradually abandoned as Christianization progressed in society, but Lebanon was not affected by this change at the same rate as all other regions. Christianization spread faster and earlier in

northern Syria. Pagans were still active in and around Heliopolis in the sixth century CE, though in private circles or in remote areas. At the same time deliberate destructions by the Christians were rare. They occurred only in places that were famous for the licentious character of their cult, such as Aphrodite's sanctuary in Afqa at the mouth of the Adonis river, which was destroyed on the order of Constantine around 333 CE (Euseb. *Vit. Const.* 3.55.3–5; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 2.5.5–7). However, pagan sanctuaries remained for a long time protected as public places by the Roman authorities. Looting and reuse of their materials was also long prohibited and the Christians themselves were at first very reluctant to install their churches where demons had once been worshipped. The history of Lebanon thus took place in a renewed frame in Byzantine times.

### FURTHER READING

There are two comprehensive studies on the topics discussed here: Aliquot 1999–2003 deals in detail with the Ituraeans and the Arab presence in Lebanon; Aliquot 2009 is a book on religious life and social history of Lebanon in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, with a gazetteer of all the sanctuaries in the area (including Mount Lebanon, Antilebanon, Mount Hermon, Heliopolis, and the Bekaa), photographs, maps, developed index, and bibliography. On Arabs, Arabia, and Arabic, see most recently Macdonald 2009a and 2009b. About the Ituraeans, their dynasts, and the other clients kings, see also Herman 2006 (coinage of the lords of Chalcis), Gatier 2007c: 483–489 (Cotys IX of Armenia Minor and the Arabia of Ituraeans), Briquel Chatonnet 2005 (language), and Kropp 2009a (Ituraeans and Heliopolis); Myers 2010 is problematic (cf. Aliquot 2011). Emesans: Gatier 1996; Kropp 2010a. Heliopolis and Heliopolitan cults: Wiegand (ed.) 1921–25 (architecture); Hajjar 1977, 1985 and 1990 (Heliopolitan triad); Aliquot 2010b (oracle) and 2019 (Capitolia); Kropp 2010b (iconography and cults); Van Ess and Rheidt (eds.) 2014 (recent archaeological research); Lohmann 2017 (greater sanctuary of Jupiter). Other sanctuaries and rural life: Krencker and Zschietzschmann 1938 (architecture); Dar 1993 (Mount Hermon); Gatier and Nordiguian (eds.) 2005 (Yanuh); Waliszewski and Ortali-Tarazi (eds.) 2002 (Chhim); Gatier, Nordiguian, and Yon (eds.) 2009 (recent works). Epigraphy of Lebanon in the *IGLS* series: VI (Baalbek and the Bekaa); VIII.3 (forest inscriptions); XI (Mount Hermon).

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