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Urban Continuity and Change in Late Roman Antioch

While describing the history of Antioch at the end of Antiquity, one may have the feeling of simply listing an impressive series of tragic events, deriving both from natural calamities and military defeats, which gave way to many destructions and subsequent rebuildings of the city. At the beginning of our period of interest, around AD 400, we have the great late Roman Antioch, «the beautiful capital of the East»¹, or «the head and mother of eastern cities»², as it was called by two of its most famous citizens, Ammianus Marcellinus and St. John Chrysostom. It was one of the capital cities of the Empire, a wealthy, densely populated, cosmopolitan metropolis, and the main military, administrative, cultural and ecclesiastical centre of all the Roman East. Yet 250 years later, we find nothing more than a small provincial town, considerably reduced in size and population, located near the shifting border between two fighting empires, and deprived of its role even as a regional centre, which had passed to the nearby city of Halep. What happened to Antioch between the fifth and seventh centuries AD is indeed a perfect example for the definition of ‘Decline and Fall’ given by Wolfgang Liebeschuetz at the end of his book about late Roman cities: «the end of a political tradition, the end of a pattern of urban design related to the political tradition, the end of a particular ideal of what makes for the good life,

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1 AMM. 22,9,14: «Antiochiam, orientis apicem pulchrum».

2 JO. CHRYS. *stat.* 3,1 (PG, XLIX, col. 47 *in fin.*): τῶν γὰρ πόλεων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν ἔω κειμένων κεφαλὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστὶν ἡ πόλις ἡ ἡμετέρα.

the end of a secular ideal of education, and [...] a shrinkage of population»³.

In the present paper I am not going to narrate in detail all the catastrophes which affected the metropolis, and which can easily be read in the erudite and absorbing pages of Glanville Downey's *History of Antioch*⁴. What I am going to do is to consider the history of the city during these centuries, trying to answer some specific questions. What impact did these tragic events have on the urban image of Antioch? What changes did Antioch undergo through so many destructions and subsequent rebuildings? How was a civic identity constructed while the city was being rebuilt after each catastrophe? These are difficult to answer, because of our incomplete evidence, especially for the last decades of the history of Antioch as a Roman city. But it is worth trying, because any information about this city may be of great importance for our comprehension of the period. The obstinacy of both the authorities of Antioch and the imperial government, in rebuilding after each catastrophe what was considered the political, economic and symbolic centre of Graeco-Roman civilization in the East, gives the city of Antioch a fundamental role in the evolution of urbanism between the fifth and seventh centuries AD.

The event I have chosen as a starting point for my enquiry is the earthquake which struck Antioch in AD 458⁵. This earthquake marks the end of a period of great prosperity for Antioch. During the fourth century the city was chosen as imperial capital by Constantius II and Valens⁶ and experi-

3 J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford 2001), p. 415.

4 G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton 1961).

5 Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 476-480. The date of this seismic event is discussed by Downey in greater detail on pp. 597-604: the evidence of the literary sources is somewhat contradictory, because of a calendar change that occurred in that period, shifting the beginning of the new year from October 1st to September 1st. Since the earthquake happened in the night between the 13th and the 14th of September, some sources date it in the last month of the year on the basis of the old calendar, while some other sources, following the new calendar, date it in the first month of the new year. The date AD 458 proposed by Downey is certainly the most probable.

6 Constantius II resided in Antioch from AD 333/334 to 350 and again in AD 360-361: on the close relationship between this emperor and the city see Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 355-373; P.-L. Malosse, *Antioche et le Kappa*, in *Antioche de Syrie. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique*, actes du colloque (Lyon, 4-6 octobre 2001), éd. par

enced intense building activity, which remarkably increased its monumental appearance. This is the city we know from the famous description that closes the discourse XI, *On Antioch* (the Ἀντιοχικός λόγος) delivered by the rhetor Libanius around AD 360⁷. The earthquake in AD 458, even if it was certainly not as devastating as the following ones during the sixth century, must have had a strong impact on the perception of contemporaries. It was numbered as the fourth among the great catastrophes suffered by the city, the third one having been the earthquake in AD 115, during which the emperor Trajan (who was in town preparing his war against the Parthians) was nearly killed⁸. There had been several earthquakes at Antioch between the second and fifth centuries, but evidently they did not cause serious damage. In any case they did not have the same psychological impact as the one in AD 458⁹.

A description of the consequences of this earthquake can be found in a passage by Evagrius Scholasticus, who wrote an *Ecclesiastical History* around AD 600 and who was pretty well informed about the city, having been the legal advisor of the patriarch of Antioch, Gregory. According to Evagrius, the earthquake heavily damaged only some areas of the city, above all the so-called 'New City' which occupied an island created by the river Orontes to the north of the original settlement of Antioch [fig. 1]. This

B. Cabouret, P.-L. Gatier et C. Saliou (Lyon 2004, «Topoi (Lyon)», Supplément, V), pp. 77-96. Valens resided in Antioch from AD 370 to 378: Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 398-413.

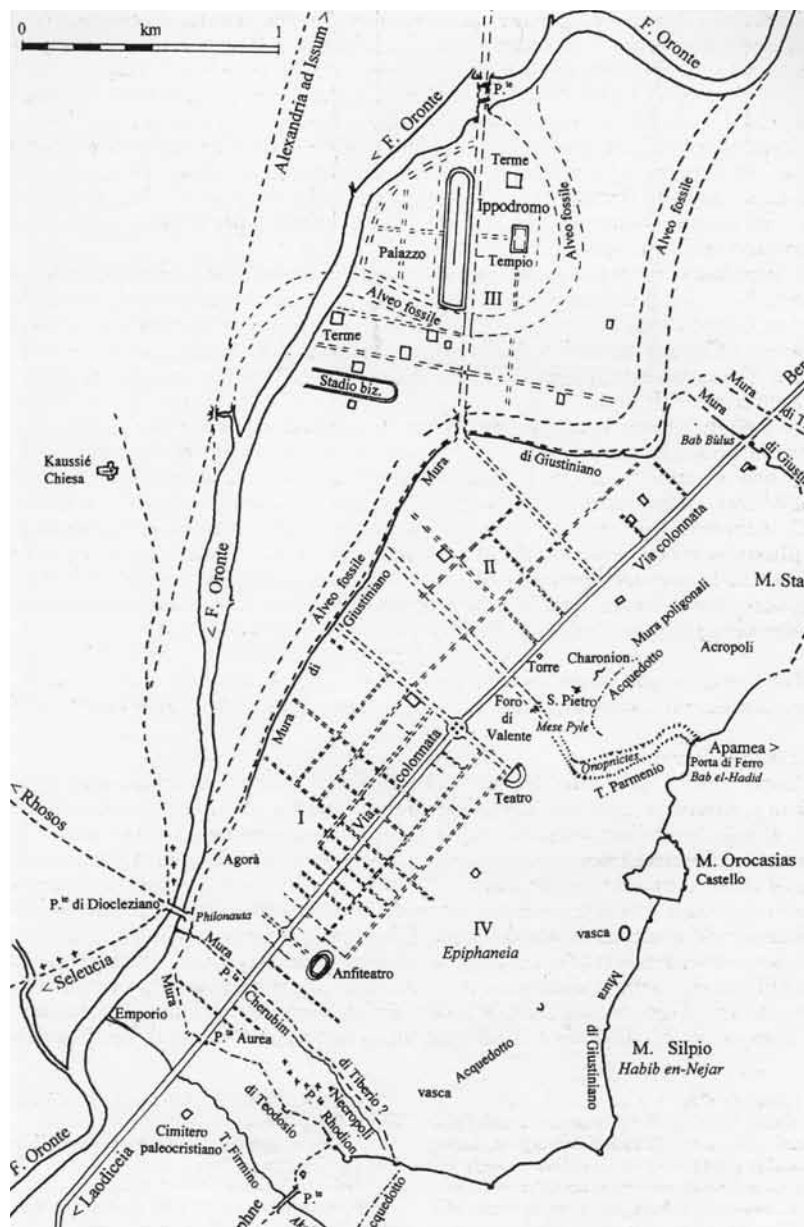
7 LIB. or. 11, 196-272 (I, pp. 504, 5-535, 13 Foerster). On the concluding section of this discourse, containing the famous description of the city, see the translation, with an archaeological commentary by Roland Martin, in A.-J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne: Libanius, Chrysostome et les moines de Syrie* (Paris 1959) (BEFAR, CXCIV), pp. 23-61. Festugière's study remains one of the best contributions about the heyday of late antique Antioch during the fourth century AD, together with the books by P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (Paris 1955) and J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1972).

8 The main source about the earthquake in AD 115 is the detailed account by Cassius Dio (D.C. 68, 24-25); see also Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 213-215.

9 Earthquakes at Antioch are attested in AD 341 (Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 359-360 and note 189), 365 (*ibid.*, p. 400 and note 21) and 396 (*ibid.*, p. 438 and note 152); another earthquake of uncertain date probably took place in the 370s or 380s (*ibid.*, p. 435, note 137).

quarter is probably the best known area of ancient Antioch from the archaeological and topographical point of view, because it lies outside the modern town of Antakya and because the ancient remains here do not lie as deep as in the rest of the city. The abandonment of this quarter early in the mediaeval period prevented the deposition of further building and destruction layers, and the site of the island, quite far from the slopes of Mt. Silpius, which overlooks Antioch from the east, was protected against water flooding from the mountain, from which the thick alluvial layer covering the rest of the city is derived¹⁰. The remains of ancient buildings are still recognizable on the ground [fig. 2]: the foundations of a large temple¹¹, the area of the circus¹², the depression once occupied by the so-called 'Byzantine stadium'¹³. The Princeton excavations in the 1930s uncovered many baths and a few houses in this area¹⁴. The monumental appearance of the island, rebuilt by

- 10 Recent information about the quarter on the island can be found in G. Poccardi, *Antioche de Syrie: pour un nouvel plan urbain de l'île de l'Oronte (Ville Neuve) du III^e au V^e siècle*, in *MEFRA* CVI, (1994), pp. 993-1023; G. Uggeri, *L'urbanistica di Antiochia sull'Oronte*, *JAT* VIII (1998), pp. 179-222: pp. 179 and 196-197; J. Leblanc, G. Poccardi, *Étude de la permanence des tracés urbains et ruraux antiques à Antioche-sur-l'Oronte*, *Syria* LXXVI (1999), pp. 91-126: pp. 115-122; G. Poccardi, *L'île d'Antioche à la fin de l'antiquité: histoire et problème de topographie urbaine*, in *Recent Research in Late-Antique Urbanism*, ed. by L. Lavan, (Portsmouth, R.I. 2001) (JRA Supplementary Series, XLII), pp. 155-172.
- 11 This building has never been systematically studied, but its proportions are still well noticeable on the ground; they constitute the basis for Poccardi's reconstruction of the urban plan of this area of the city: Poccardi, *Antioche de Syrie*, p. 1002; Leblanc, Poccardi, *Étude de la permanence des tracés*, pp. 115-122; Poccardi, *L'île d'Antioche*, pp. 167-170.
- 12 On the circus of Antioch (the biggest in the Roman world after the Circus Maximus, according to the excavators, with a capacity of 80,000 spectators) see W.A. Campbell, *The Circus, in Antioch on-the-Orontes I: The Excavations of 1932*, ed. by G.W. Elderkin (Princeton 1934), pp. 34-41; the extensive account by J.H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London 1986), pp. 444-461, relies on much unpublished information from the 1930s excavation reports.
- 13 W.A. Campbell, *A Byzantine Stadium*, in *Antioch on-the-Orontes I*, pp. 32-33; Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, p. 458. This building has nothing to do with a stadium indeed, and has been better interpreted as an enclosed garden area, used probably as a riding track or a palaestra in connection with the nearby 'Bath C'.
- 14 The Princeton excavation team concentrated its first season (1932) on this quarter, in the hope of finding some of the famous monumental buildings of the Roman city, for example the Imperial Palace, which according to the literary sources was located on the island. Therefore, the first volume of the *Antioch on-the-Orontes* publications is mostly dedicated to excavations held in this area; some major public buildings were found (the circus and many baths), together with a few residential structures: among them the so-



Map of Roman Antioch (from Uggeri 1998)



Aerial view of the 'New City' on the island, present state (from Google Earth, March 14th, 2003)

the emperor Diocletian around AD 300¹⁵, was described by Libanius in his discourse *On Antioch*¹⁶: the quarter was organized around four colonnaded streets; one of them, the *via regia*, led to the imperial palace. These streets converged at right angles on a monumental arch, called 'the tetrapyle of the elephants', probably supporting the statue of a triumphant emperor, standing in a chariot drawn by elephants¹⁷ [fig. 3].

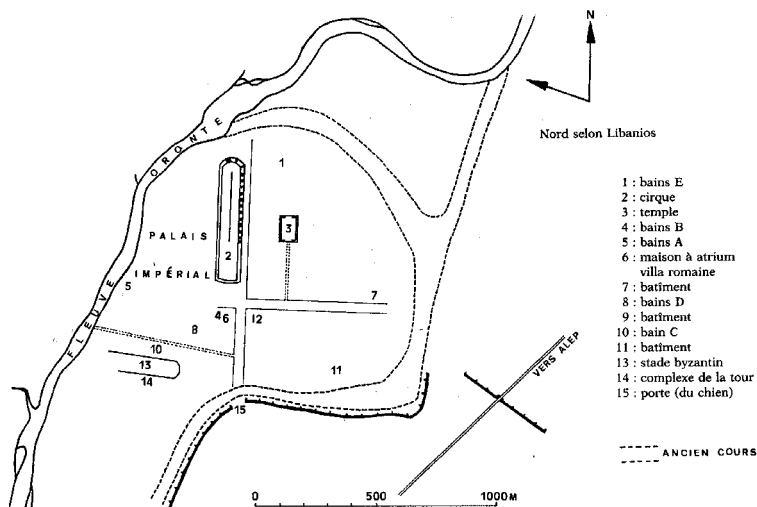
Evagrius informs us in detail about the effects of the earthquake of AD 458 in this area, which was probably the richest in monumental buildings in the whole city. He tells us that «this earthquake destroyed almost every building in the New City, which had become densely populated without any empty or abandoned area, but on the contrary had been considerably embellished thanks to the emperors' search for glory through emulation

called 'Atrium House', with its celebrated mosaics.

15 On Diocletian's building activity in Antioch we are pretty well informed thanks to Jo. MAL. *chron.* 12,38 (pp. 306,21-308,5 Dindorf).

16 LIB. *or.* 11,203-208 (I, pp. 506,17-509,6 Foerster).

17 We know the names of these monuments thanks to a passage in Jo. MAL. *chron.* 13,19 (p. 328,4 Dindorf): ὁ λεγόμενον Τετραπύλον τῶν ἐλεφάντων πλησίον τῆς Ῥηγίας [scil. ὁδοῦ].



Map of the 'New City' on the island, ca. AD 300-458 (from Poccardi 1994)

of one another. The first and second buildings of the Palace were thrown down; the other ones kept standing, and so did the nearby bath, which was not previously in use but in the moment of need was now opened to the people, because of the damage that had affected the other baths. The earthquake destroyed also the colonnades in front of the Palace with the tetrapyle built on them, and also the towers of the circus with some of the colonnades leaning on them»¹⁸. After having reported some minor damage in the rest of the city, Evagrius explicitly states that he used John Malalas as a source, and goes on to say that the emperor Leo helped the city with the remission of taxes and gave money for the accomplishment of liturgies

18 EVAGR. *h.e.* 2,12 (pp. 63,25-64,5 Bidez-Parmentier): Οὗτος τοίνυν ὁ σεισμός τῆς καινῆς τὰς οἰκίας ἀπάσας σχεδὸν καταβέβληκε, πολυανθρώπου ταύτης γεγεννημένης, καὶ οὐδὲν ἔχουσης ἔρημον ἢ ὅλως ἡμελημένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν ἐξησκημένης τῇ φιλοτιμίᾳ τῶν βασιλέων πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀμυλλωμένων. Τῶν τε βασιλείων ὁ πρῶτος καὶ δεύτερος οἶκος κατεβλήθησαν, τῶν ἄλλων σὶν τῷ παρακειμένῳ βαλανεῖῳ μεινάντων, τῷ γε καὶ λούσαντι τὴν πόλιν παρὰ τὴν συμφορὰν ἐκ τῆς πρότερον ἀχρηστίας, ἀνάγκη τῶν τοῖς ἄλλοις βαλανείοις συμβεβηκότων. Κατέρριψε δὲ καὶ τὰς στοὰς τὰς πρὸ τῶν βασιλείων καὶ τὸ ἐπ' αὐταῖς τετράπυλον, καὶ τοῦ ἵπποδρομίου δὲ τοὺς περὶ τὰς θύρας πύργους, καὶ τινὰς τῶν ἐπ' αὐταῖς στοῶν.

and the reconstruction of public buildings¹⁹.

What were the changes in the quarter on the island after the reconstruction? One exceptional source we possess about the urban appearance of Antioch in the mid-fifth century is the famous Megalopsychia mosaic, found in 1932 near the village of Yakto, in the area of the ancient suburb of Daphne²⁰. This pavement is decorated in the main field with mythological hunt scenes, but its most studied section is the outer border, which depicts some monuments and buildings located in Daphne and probably in Antioch, with inscriptions bearing their names [fig. 4]. The date of the mosaic is known thanks to one of the inscriptions, which defines one building as «the villa of Ardaburius»²¹ [fig. 5]. The owner of this villa is known from many literary sources: Ardaburius was the *magister militum per Orientem* from AD 453 to 466, when he was charged with conspiracy against Leo and fell into disgrace²². Therefore, the name of this building allows us to date the mosaic around the middle of the fifth century, surely before AD 466. The most probable interpretation is that the pavement was made during some restoration work following the shocks of AD 458.

One section of this border has been interpreted as a depiction of the quarter on the island, being bounded on both sides by two bridges. In the centre of this section we find a group of three monuments: a riding track bordered with trees, in which a horseman is depicted; a building with a tower and a lower structure, both with colonnades on the upper floor, in front of which there is a column supporting a statue, with a fragment of inscription never

19 *Ibid.* (p. 64,11-15 Bidez-Parmentier): Ὡν τὸ καθ' ἑκάστον περιέρχων Ἰωάννη ἰσότηται τῷ ῥήτορι. Φησὶ δ' οὖν ὡς χίλια χρυσίου τάλαντα πρὸς τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκ τῶν φόρων ἀφείθη τῇ πόλει, καὶ τοῖς δὲ πολίτευταῖς τῶν ἡφανισμένων τῷ πάθει τὰ τέλη· ἐπιμελήσασθαι δὲ τοῦτον καὶ τῶν δημοσίων οἰκοδομῶν. Evagrius evidently could read a fuller version of Malalas' *Chronography* than the one preserved to us, in which the account of this event is much less detailed: JO. MAL. *chron.* 13,36 (p. 369,5-9 Dindorf).

20 J. Lassus, *La mosaïque de Yakto*, in *Antioch on-the-Orontes I*, pp. 114-156; D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements* (Princeton 1947), pp. 323-345; J. Lassus, *Antioche en 459, d'après la mosaïque de Yakto*, in *Apamée de Syrie: bilan des recherches archéologiques, 1965-1968*, actes du colloque (Bruxelles, 29-30 avril 1969), éd. par J. Balty (Bruxelles 1969), pp. 137-147 (Fouilles d'Apamée de Syrie. Miscellanea, VI).

21 Τὸ περιβάτων Ἀρδαβουρίου

22 *PLRE*, II, pp. 135-137, s.v. Ardabur iunior 1.



Drawing of the Megalopsychia mosaic (from Antioch on-the-Orontes I)

convincingly interpreted²³ [fig. 6]; and, finally, a polygonal building with dome and colonnaded entrance, with a person on its right side, depicted in what seems a praying gesture [fig. 7]. Even if Doro Levi, the main scholar of Antioch mosaics, was skeptical about this²⁴, the prevailing opinion up to now has been the one expressed by Jean Lassus, the first publisher of the

23 As has been rightly pointed out by Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, p. 332, note 47, the preserved letters]PIANA can only constitute the ending of a neutral plural word, which makes the precedent reconstruction attempts (Lassus' στήλη Τιβεριανὰ and Eltester's Πόρτα Ταυριανὰ, with a simple transcription of the Latin name) unacceptable.

24 Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, pp. 332-333.



Detail from the topographical border of the Megalopsychia mosaic: the villa of Ardaburius (photo: Author)

pavement, who recognized in these monuments the so-called ‘Byzantine stadium’, the Imperial Palace and the Cathedral of Antioch²⁵. I personally agree with this interpretation, but the use of this source to reconstruct the appearance of the island after the rebuilding remains problematic. We are not really sure whether the mosaic was actually made before or after the earthquake; and even in this case we do not know if the sketch used by the artists depicted the situation before or after the earthquake.

But most of all, none of the monuments mentioned by Evagrius as having been destroyed in AD 458 (the colonnaded streets, the tetrapyle of the elephants, the circus with its towers) appears in our mosaic. There is a

25 Lassus, *La mosaïque de Yakto*, pp. 143-149 e nn. 36-46; Id., *Antioche en 459*, pp. 145-146. On the Cathedral of Antioch see W. Eltester, *Die Kirchen Antiochias im IV. Jahrhundert*, *ZNTW XXXVI* (1937), pp. 251-286: pp. 254-270, and more recently F.W. Deichmann, *Das Oktogon von Antiocheia: Heroon-Martyrion, Palastkirche oder Kathedrale?*, *BZ LXV* (1972), pp. 40-56.



Detail from the topographical border of the Megalopsychia mosaic: the riding track and the Imperial Palace (photo: Author)

probable depiction of the Imperial Palace, but what has been represented is its rear facade, described by Theodoretus in his *Ecclesiastical History* as a monumental colonnade built on top of the city wall and enclosed by two towers²⁶. Now, this part of the Palace suffered no heavy damage from the shocks: Evagrius tells us that «the first and second buildings» were thrown down, meaning those closer to the main entrance along the *uia regia*, which was also destroyed together with the tetrapyle. The relationship between the mosaic and Theodoretus' description is not without problems, and I will discuss it in detail in another paper. What is important here is that this sec-

26 THDT. *h.e.* 4,26,1 (pp. 264,22-265,1 Parmentier): Βορρᾶθεν μὲν Ὁρόντης ὁ ποταμὸς παραρρεῖ τὰ βασιλεία, ἐκ δὲ μεσημβρίας στοὰ μέγιστη διόροφος τῇ τῆς πόλεως ἐπωκοδόμηται περιβόλῳ, πύργους ὑψηλοὺς ἐκατέρωθεν ἔχουσα. The same anecdote in ID., *h.rel.* 8,8 (PG, LXXXII, coll. 1372D-1373B). See also LIB. *or.* 11, 206 (I, p. 508,2-5 Foerster): τὸ τεῖχος ἀντ' ἐπάλξεων κίονας δεξιᾶμενον θέα βασιλεῖ πρέπουσα κατεσκευάσται τοῦ ποταμοῦ μὲν ὑπορρέοντος, τῶν προαστείων δὲ πανταχόθεν εὐωχοῦντων τὰς ὄψεις. On the Imperial Palace on the island see Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 643-647, and also pp. 608-611 for the traditional local orientation, used by Libanius and Theodoretus, based on a conventional north broadly corresponding to the geographical north-west.



Detail from the topographical border of the Megalopsychia mosaic: the Cathedral (photo: Author)

tion of the mosaic cannot be used as proof for a monumental reconstruction of the island after the earthquake in AD 458, because it shows none of the buildings destroyed by the shocks as having been restored. The island was certainly reconstructed in some way, but we are far from sure that after the earthquake this area of the city was as monumental as it was before.

The island certainly maintained some of its monumental appearance after the earthquake. In its eastern section the excavations recovered some high-quality mosaics of the mid-fifth century or later²⁷. But in this period, some industrial areas too are attested in the vicinities of the Imperial Palace and the Patriarchate. A location of these activities on the island is not surprising, since the two branches of the river could afford a continuous supply of running water for their needs. However, the presence of production establishments in these areas is important for our knowledge of the urban organization of Antioch in Late Antiquity. During the early imperial

²⁷ Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements*, pp. 320-323 (mosaic of the biblical inscription, mosaic of Ananeosis, mosaic of the striding lion), pp. 345-346 (fragment of topographical border).

period, industrial activities had been concentrated outside the city walls. Two inscriptions published in 1985 by Denis Feissel attest the existence of a craftsmen and industrial quarter on the west bank of the Orontes, through which a canal flowed, dug under Vespasian to satisfy the water needs of the *fullonicae*²⁸. But from the late 5th century *fullonicae* are attested in the very centre of the city. John Rufus tells us that a *fullonica* existed around AD 470-480 in the vicinity of the entrance to the Imperial Palace²⁹, which was closed but not abandoned, in case the Emperor wished to visit the city³⁰.

Other sources seem to refer to leather factories: they relate a famous story concerning the death of the patriarch Euphrasius during the earthquake of AD 526. According to the Syriac chroniclers, the floor of the room in which the Patriarch was staying collapsed and Euphrasius fell into a cauldron of boiling pitch, used to waterproof leather bottles. His body was burned in the pitch, while his head fell on the rim of the cauldron and was preserved, thus allowing the survivors to recognize the corpse³¹. Such a

- 28 D. Feissel, Deux listes de quartiers d'Antioche astreints au creusement d'un canal (73-74 après J.-C.), *Syria* LXII (1985), pp. 77-103; the inscriptions celebrated the construction in AD 73/74 of a canal for the *fullonicae*, provided with banks and protection barriers (ἔργον διώρυγος γναφικοῦ καὶ φραγμάτων τῶν ἀποστραφέντων τοῦ αὐτοῦ ποταμοῦ): the canal was 14 *stadia* (ca. 2.5 km) in length and flowed towards the north-west (local north) from the river Orontes till the slopes of mt. Amanus (ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀμανὸν ἀνοίγματός ἐστιν μήκους σταδίων ἰδ').
- 29 I can't understand the objections on this point expressed by Poccardi, *L'île d'Antioche*, p. 157 and notes 12-13; in particular, I can't see the difference between a *foulon* and an *artisan-foulon*, since a fuller is of course an artisan, unless it can be intended as 'the owner of a *fullonica*': but nothing in the passage seems to authorize this interpretation.
- 30 Jo. RUPH., *pler.* 88 (*PO*, VIII, pp. 142-144, transl. Nau); being strongly anti-Chalcedonian, the text of John Rufus is preserved only in Syriac translation, while the Greek original is lost. Downey, *History of Antioch*, p. 646, and all other modern scholars relying on him, states that this account by John Rufus depicts a situation datable to the early sixth century. Indeed, we know that John Rufus wrote his *Plerophories* while the monophysite Severus was patriarch of Antioch (that is, AD 512-518); but at this time the author was living in the Palestinian city of Maiuma, where he had been appointed as bishop. This account about Antioch, which is presented as a personal memory, must refer to the period which the author spent in the metropolis of Syria, in the circle of the monophysite patriarch Peter the Fuller. Therefore, John Rufus' departure for Palestine in AD 485 (where he entered another influential monophysite circle, that of the bishop of Maiuma Peter the Iberian, finally becoming his successor) constitutes a *terminus ante quem* for the date of this anecdote.
- 31 The most detailed account is provided by the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, composed around AD 775; for our period of interest, its anonymous author explicitly recognizes as his source

story implies that some installations for the production or at least the water-proofing of leather bottles existed on the lower floor of the Patriarch's palace, which had a good probability of being located on the island, close to the Cathedral. We cannot decide whether the anecdote is true, or was invented to show the exemplary punishment of an enemy of God (as the Chalcedonian patriarch Euphrasius was considered by monophysite Syrians). Indeed, nothing similar appears in the Greek sources concerning the same event³², and the pattern of the collapsing floor as a manifestation of divine punishment is well-known, at least since the biblical story of Core, Dathan and Abiron, swallowed up by the earth after their opposition to Moses³³. But this account cannot be simply dismissed as an invention of mediaeval Syriac chroniclers, because it was already known, even if with some confusion, to a contemporary source such as Marcellinus Comes³⁴.

(usually simply copying its text) the *Ecclesiastical History* by John of Ephesus, which for this section is now otherwise lost: *CSCO*, CIV (Syr. LIII), pp. 50-51 and DVII (Syr. CCXIII), p. 37 (transl. Hespel). See also A. Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān: Parts III and IV (A.D. 488-775)* (Toronto 1999) (Mediaeval Sources in Translation, XXXVI), pp. 72-73: the word meaning 'leather bottle' is a conjecture by Harrak, who for the first time tries to solve a corrupt passage in the manuscript; it certainly provides an acceptable explanation for a text which has always looked very strange to the interpreters. Other accounts of the same episode are to be found in *ps.-ZACH.* 8,4 (pp. 154,31-155,6 Ahrens-Krüger); *chron.* 819: *CSCO*, LXXXI (Syr. XXXVI), p. 9 and CIX (Syr. LVI), p. 5,25-27 (transl. Chabot); *chron.* 846: *CSCO*, III (Syr. III), p. 222 and IV (Syr. IV), p. 169,16-17 (transl. Chabot); *MICH. SYR.* 9,16 (II, pp. 182-183 and IV, p. 273 Chabot).

32 Both *EVAGR. h.e.* 4,5 (p. 156,9-11 Bidez-Parmentier) and *THPHN. chron.* p. 172,30-31 De Boor simply state that Euphrasius was buried under debris.

33 *LXX nu.* 16,28-35.

34 *MARCELL. chron.* p. 102,22-24 Mommsen (*MGH, a.a.* XI,2): «EufRASiUM quoque totius urbis episcopum adempto eius capite combusto [*fortasse combustum coni. Mommsen*] simul obruit [*scil. terrae motus*] sepulchro: obelisco circi inverso et humi defosso». Marcellinus, a native of Illyricum, was active in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian, having been in his service as a chancellor before his accession to the throne (*CASSIOD. inst.* 1,17,2). In this passage he seems to overlap two different accounts of Euphrasius' death: in the first one we can certainly recognize the anecdote of the boiling pitch cauldron, thanks to the detail of the selective burning of body *vs.* head; but we cannot say if Marcellinus properly understood his sources: we do not know, in other words, if *combusto* instead of *combustum* is the author's or the copyist's mistake (and this is why Mommsen didn't emend the text). The other story, according to which the patriarch was struck by the obelisk of the circus, is considered by Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 521-522, note 81, as being more plausible, but in my opinion it remains nevertheless somewhat problematic. It is true that 'during an earthquake people naturally took refuge in open spaces such as the circus', as Downey states; but if so, why should Euphrasius have entered the circus *before* the shock (a second shock being not attested by our sources)?

In any case, all these authors certainly meant the story at least to be likely, and this implies that the presence of a cauldron of boiling pitch on the lower floor of the Patriarchate at this time was expected to be considered quite normal by their readers. The evidence we possess is scanty, and we cannot say whether this industrial facility was controlled by the Patriarchate itself, perhaps to satisfy its own needs, or if it was an independent activity whose spaces were leased out by the Church. But these sources attest an important change in the functions of different areas of the city. During the early empire, and probably up to the fourth and mid-fifth centuries, the residential and production areas were very well defined and divided, while in this later period they seem to overlap in the same quarters of the city. In particular, the presence of production activities on the island, along with the destruction of the colonnades and the closing of the Imperial Palace, gives some evidence for the beginning of a radical change in this area, which now started to lose its role as a prestigious public and residential quarter, as it had been in the former centuries.

A series of tragic events subsequently changed in an irreparable way the appearance of the city. Antioch was struck by an impressive sequence of disasters during the second quarter of the 6th century: a great fire in AD 525³⁵, the two terrible earthquakes in AD 526³⁶ and 528³⁷, and finally the sack and destruction by the Persian king Chosroes in AD 540³⁸. This succession of events was so pressing that every catastrophe overthrew any preceding attempt at reconstruction. While describing the shocks in AD 528, Theophanes attests that «every building was thrown down from the

And, most of all, in the context of an open space such as the circus, what does the reference to the patriarch's burned head (or body) mean? Were there fires or something else burning in the circus? Perhaps it can be a fascinating hypothesis to identify this account of the obelisk falling on Euphrasius and killing him as one of those stories invented, according to the Syriac sources, to justify the disappearing of the patriarch's body after the earthquake.

35 Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 519-521.

36 Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 521-526.

37 Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 527-530.

38 Our main source for the event is the detailed account by PROCOPIUS, *Pers.* 2,5-9; see also Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 533-546.

very foundations, and the same happened to the city walls, and some of the old buildings which had not fallen during the first earthquake [scil. that of AD 526] were destroyed now; and all the monuments in the city, both those built by the emperors and those paid for by the citizens of Antioch, all of them collapsed»³⁹. After the Persian conquest, Antioch no longer existed at all: as Procopius tells us, Chosroes ordered the city to be systematically burned. Only the Cathedral was spared, by intercession of the ambassadors who negotiated peace with the king, in reward for the enormous quantity of booty that the church had offered⁴⁰.

After these events a total rebuilding of the city was needed, which was planned and funded directly by the imperial government. Our main source about this rebuilding is the description of the refoundation of the city by Justinian included in Procopius' *De aedificiis*⁴¹. The city maintained its new name of Theoupolis, 'the city of God', which had been given to it after the second earthquake in AD 528 in the hope of some supernatural protection⁴². The most striking feature of this new city was probably its dimensions, considerably smaller than those of the great fourth- and fifth-century metropolis. The population had shrunk because of the enormous loss of lives due

39 ΤΗΡΗΝ. *chron.* pp. 177, 22-178,7 De Boor; see especially p. 177,25-30: καὶ ἔπεσον πάντα τὰ κτισθέντα ἕως ἐδάφους καὶ τὰ τεῖχη, καὶ ἐκ τῶν μὴ πεσόντων παλαιῶν κτισμάτων ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ σεισμῷ κατηνέχθησαν νῦν· καὶ πᾶσα ἡ εὐπρέπεια, ἡ γενομένη ἐν τῇ πόλει ἐκ τε τῶν τοῦ βασιλέως φιλοτιμιῶν καὶ ὧν ἐξ ἰδίων οἱ πολῖται φοκοδόμησαν, πάντα κατέπεσον.

40 PROCOP. *Pers.* 2,9,14-18: Αὐτὸς [scil. ὁ Χοσρόης] δὲ ξὺν τοῖς πρέσβεσιν ἐς τὸ ἱερὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ἄκρας κατέβαιναν, ὅπερ ἐκκλησίαν καλοῦσιν. ἐνταῦθα κειμήλια χρυσοῦ τε καὶ ἀργύρου τοιαῦτα τὸ πλῆθος ὁ Χοσρόης εὗρεν, ὥστε τῆς λείας ἄλλο οὐδὲν ὅτι μὴ τὰ κειμήλια ταῦτα λαβὼν πλοῦτον τι μέγεθος περιβεβλημένος ἀπὼν ὦχετο. καὶ μάμαρά τε πολλὰ καὶ θανατοσὰ ἐνθένδε ἀφελὼν ἔξω τοῦ περιβόλου ἐκέλευε κατατίθεσθαι, ὅπως καὶ ταῦτα ἐς τὰ Περσῶν ἦθι κομίσωνται. ταῦτα διαπεπραγμένους ξύμπασαν τὴν πόλιν ἐμπροῆσαι Πέρσας ἐπέστελλε. καὶ αὐτοῦ οἱ πρέσβεις ἐδέοντο τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀπέχεσθαι μόνης, ἥς τὰ λῖτρα κεκομισμένοι διαρκῶς εἴη. ὁ δὲ τοῦτο τοῖς πρέσβεσι ξυγκεχωρηκῶς τάλλα καίειν ἐκέλευε πάντα. See also *ibid.* 2,10,6: ἡ μὲν οὖν ἐκκλησία καθαιρεθείσης τῆς πόλεως ἐλείφθη μόνη, πόνῃ τε καὶ προνοίᾳ Περσῶν, οἷς τὸ ἔργον ἐπέκειτο τοῦτο.

41 PROCOP. *aed.* 2,10,2-25.

42 EVAGR. *h.e.* 4,6 (p. 156,22-23 Bidez-Parmentier): Τότε καὶ Θεοῦ πόλις ἡ Ἀντιόχου προσηγορεύθη πόλις. Evagrius is always very precise in using the new official name of the city when referring to events after AD 528.

to natural disasters⁴³, but also because of the taking of captives by the Persians and the voluntary emigration of many inhabitants, who tried to escape God's wrath by going to live in other cities or even in huts in the mountains⁴⁴. However, Michael Whitby's works on Procopius⁴⁵ have quite reconsidered the traditional 'pessimistic' view which had been dominant since Downey's studies in the late 1930s⁴⁶ about the ineffectiveness of the Justinianic rebuilding of Antioch and the unreliability of Procopius' panegyric description. The historical truth probably lies in the middle between the contrasting positions of the two scholars. The seismic events attested for the period AD 550-560⁴⁷ must certainly have affected in some way the reconstruction: when the Persian general Adarmaanes invaded Syria in AD 573, the inhabitants of Antioch fled the city, fearing that the damaged walls could not offer safe protection. But, as Whitby points out, the new wall provided a successful defence, at least psychologically, since the Persians did not attempt to capture the city, restricting themselves to sacking and burning the suburbs⁴⁸.

43 John Malalas gives the figure of 250,000 dead in the earthquake of AD 526 (JO. MAL. *chron.* p. 420,6 Dindorf), Procopius that of 300,000 (PROCOPIUS *Pers.* 2,14,6). These figures are not so exaggerated as it would seem at first sight, since at the moment of the shock Antioch was crowded with pilgrims and visitors, gathering in the city for the festival of the Ascension: see DOWNEY, *History of Antioch*, p. 521 and note 80.

44 THPHN. *chron.* p. 177,32-33 De Boor: οἱ δὲ σωθέντες ἔφυγον εἰς τὰ ἄλλας πόλεις καὶ εἰς τὰ ὄρη ἐν καλύβαις ὄκουν.

45 L.M. Whitby, *Procopius and Antioch*, in *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire*, proceedings of a colloquium held at Ankara in September 1988, ed. by D.H. French and C.S. Lightfoot (Oxford 1989) (Monographs of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, XI; BAR. International Series, DLIII), pp. 537-553.

46 G. Downey, *Procopius on Antioch: A Study of Method in the De aedificiis*, *Byzantion* XIV (1939), pp. 361-378; see also Id., *History of Antioch*, pp. 546-553.

47 The chroniclers record an earthquake in AD 551, which caused heavy damage especially in Palestine and Phoenicia and affected Antioch only at a lesser degree: JO. MAL. *chron.* p. 485,8-23 Dindorf; THPHN. *chron.* pp. 227, 21-228,4 De Boor; G. CEDR. 1,674 (PG, CXXI, col. 733D). Other earthquakes are attested in AD 557: G. CEDR. 1,676 (PG, CXXI, col. 737A) and 560/1: THPHN. *chron.* p. 235,10-11 De Boor. See also Downey, *History of Antioch*, p. 558.

48 EVAGR. *h.e.* 5,9 (p. 206,6-16 Bidez-Parmentier): "Ἐπεισι δὲ [*scil.* ὁ Ἀδαρμαάνης] καὶ τῇ Θεουπολιτῶν διὰ τῶν ἀμφ' αὐτόν, οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀφίκετο. Οἱ καὶ παρὰ πᾶσαν ἐλπίδα ἀπεκρούσθησαν, μηδενὸς ἐναπομείναντος τῇ πόλει ἢ λίαν κομιδῇ εὐαρίθμων, καὶ τοῦ ιερῆως πεφευγότες καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ ὑπεξαγαγόντες κειμήλια, διότι καὶ τὰ πολλὰ τοῦ τείχους διερροῦν, καὶ ὁ δῆμος ἐπανάστη νεωτέρων πραγμάτων ἀρξαι θέλων, οἷα φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι

We can trace the urban history of Antioch in the late sixth century through the fate of one of its most famous monuments: its Cathedral, the octagonal church founded by the emperor Constantine, which as we have seen was located, according to the Megalopsychia mosaic, in the ‘imperial’ quarter of the island. With the rebuilding of Antioch after AD 540, the Justinianic circuit wall left this whole area outside the newly founded city. The inhabitants of Theoupolis found themselves in the rather odd situation of living in a completely new city, whose monumental Cathedral was relegated outside the circuit walls. The church itself was actually brand new: it had been completely burned after the shocks in AD 526 and had been rededicated by the patriarch Ephraim shortly before the Persian invasion⁴⁹. But this celebrated monument was now left outside the new city, in the middle of an area which had not been properly repopulated, even if it was not completely abandoned, as the Princeton excavations showed⁵⁰. In the literary sources we find no mention of events taking place in the old Cathedral in the second half of the century. We have only Evagrius’ reports of damage to the church during the shocks in the 550s, and its final destruction in the earthquake of AD 588⁵¹. Evagrius

καὶ μάλιστα παρὰ τοὺς τοιοῦτους καιροὺς · οἱ καὶ αὐτοὶ πεφευγότες ἐρήμην τὴν πόλιν καταλελοίπασιν, οὐδενὸς ὅλως ἐπινοηθέντος εἰς ἐπιτέχνησιν ἢ ἀνεπιχείρησιν. Evagrius is probably a bit exaggerating the undefendable conditions of the city of Theoupolis: probably this exaggeration reflects his attempt to depict in a completely negative light the anti-Persian behaviour of Justin II and to justify his patron, the patriarch Gregory, for having fled the city. If a great part of the walls were really in ruin, Whitby points out, it would be unexplainable why the Persians renounced to sack without any difficulty an almost empty city. Evagrius, indeed, doesn’t tell what happened when the enemy reached Antioch, otherwise he would have contradicted what he had stated a few lines earlier. However, some other authors, less directly involved in these events, explicitly mention the devastation of the suburbs but not of the city itself: THPHN. *chron.* pp. 247,8-10 De Boor; JO. EPIPH. 4 (FHG, IV, p. 275 = HGM, II, p. 380,3-7); THPHYL. 3,10,8 (p. 131,8-11 De Boor). See also Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 561-562, who gives more credit to Evagrius’ version.

49 PS.-ZACH. 10,5 (p. 246,16-18 Ahrens-Krüger); MICH. SYR. 9,24 (II, p. 207 = IV, p. 288 Chabot).

50 The excavations in the area of the circus identified seven different building phases (interpreted as residential structures) dating after the Persian destruction: see Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, p. 456.

51 EVAGR. *h.e.* 6,8 (p. 227,8-18 Bidez-Parmentier): βρασμός καὶ κλόνος ἐπελθόντες τὴν πᾶσαν μὲν κατέσεισαν πόλιν · τὰ πολλὰ δὲ καὶ κατήγαγον αὐτῶν τῶν βάθρων ἀναβρασθέντων, ὥστε πάντα τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀγιοτάτην ἐκκλησίαν ἐς ἔδαφος ἐνεχθῆναι, μόνου τοῦ ἡμισφαιρίου περισωθέντος, ἐκ τῶν Δάφνης ξύλων πρὸς Ἐφραμίου

attests that the dome of the octagon was in precarious condition even before this final shock, so that it is difficult to believe that the church could have properly served as the Cathedral during this period.

The main religious services probably began to take place in other sanctuaries inside the walls, for example the round church of the Mother of God, rebuilt and luxuriously embellished by Justinian, or the church of Cassianus, which was to be the Cathedral in the mediaeval period⁵². The seat of the Patriarchate, too, was probably transferred inside the walls. Some important events during these years took place in other churches in Antioch. For example, it was in the church of the Mother of God that the patriarch Gregory gave the *magister militum per Orientem*, Maurice, the prophecy of his imperial accession⁵³. After its destruction in AD 588, we do not hear of any restoration and rededication of the old Cathedral. The fact that the Great Church was never restored, and was so easily abandoned, adds a strong argument in favour of its probable location in the island, that is, an area which was no longer considered properly a part of the city by the late sixth century. But this renunciation, by the citizens and the Church of Antioch, of what was probably the most celebrated monument built in the city during the Roman period, a veritable symbol of the Christian metropolis alongside the old civic symbol of Tyche, marks in an exemplary way the discontinuity between this new sixth-century city and the previous late Roman metropolis.

διασκευασθέντος, ἐκ τῶν ἐπὶ Ἰουστίνου σεισμῶν παθόντος· ὅπερ ἐκλίθη ἐκ τῶν ἐφεξῆς κλόνων κατὰ τὸ βόρειον μέρος ὥστε καὶ ἀντερείδοντα ξύλα βαλεῖν, ἃ καὶ πεπτώκασιν τῷ σφοδρῷ κλόνῳ ὑπονοστήσαντος τοῦ ἡμισφαιρίου καὶ ὥς ἕκ τινος κανόνος ἐς τὸν ἴδιον ἀποκαταστάντος χώρον. On the earthquake in AD 588 see also Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 568-569.

52 H. Kennedy, *Antioch: From Byzantium to Islam and Back Again*, in *The City in Late Antiquity*, ed. by J. Rich (London-New York 1992), pp. 181-198: pp. 185-188.

53 EVAGR. *h.e.* 5,21 (p. 216,16-24 Bidez-Parmentier): Πόρρω γὰρ τῶν νυκτῶν ἐπιθυμιῶντι γε αὐτῷ τῶν ἀνακτόρων εἶσω τοῦ ἱεροῦ οἴκου τῆς ἁγίας καὶ πανάγνου παρθένου καὶ θεοτόκου Μαρίας, ὃς πρὸς τῶν Θεουπολιτῶν Ἰουστινιανοῦ προσηγόρευται, τὸ ἀμφὶ τὴν ἱερὰν τράπεζαν παραπέτασμα πυρίφλεκτον γέγονεν, ὡς καὶ πρὸς ἐκκληξιν καὶ θάμβος ἔλθειν τὸν Μανρίκιον καὶ δεῖσαι τὸ ὄραμα· ὃ παρεστὼς Γρηγόριος, ὁ τῆς πόλεως ἀρχιερεὺς, εἶπε θειασμοῦ τινος εἶναι τὸ χρῆμα, καὶ μέγιστα καὶ ἔξοχα μὴνύει αὐτῷ. See also Downey, *History of Antioch*, p. 566.

The last decades in the history of Roman Antioch are dominated by the figure of the patriarch Gregory, whose personality and activity we know in pretty good detail through the writings of his legal advisor Evagrius. Gregory represents a typical example of those powerful late antique bishops whose influence and prestige extended far beyond their ecclesiastical appointments⁵⁴. He was probably the most important man in the whole East together with the *magister militum per Orientem*, and personally undertook many diplomatic, military and even spying tasks⁵⁵. He was, however, a rather controversial man, whose career was often thwarted by slanderous accusations. In the end, he was summoned to Constantinople in AD 589 to defend himself before a court of bishops and senators, having been charged with performing human sacrifices to the pagan gods and with having had a

54 Examples of such figures are collected in Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, ch. 4 (*The Rise of the Bishop*), pp. 137-168: see p. 153 for a short account about Gregory's successes and difficulties.

55 In AD 574, according to Evagrius (EVAGR. *h.e.* 5,9), Gregory was the center of a real spying activity, sending to the emperor Justin II in Constantinople the information received from the bishop of Nisibis (at that time part of the Persian territory) about the ineffectiveness of the Roman siege of the town and the Persians' preparation to resume war against Rome; Evagrius tells us that Justin paid no attention to Gregory's letters, thus allowing the Persian army to enter the Roman territory without finding any resistance. In AD 590 Gregory, as the man of greatest authority in the whole East, was charged by the emperor Maurice to put an end to the rebellion of Eastern troops against the *comes Orientis* Priscus (EVAGR. *h.e.* 6,11-13; see also THPHYL. 3,5,10 (pp. 118,26-119,2 De Boor) and Downey, *History of Antioch*, p. 569). As Evagrius explicitly states, the Patriarch was highly respected and regarded by the soldiers, thanks to his personal politics of giving presents and provisions to the troops at the time of their recruitment; see EVAGR. *h.e.* 6,11 (pp. 228,30-229,6 Bidez-Parmentier): Ὅν μὴδὲ μέχρ' ὅτων ὑπομεινάντων τὸ κέλευσμα, ἐξ Γρηγόριον τὸ πρᾶγμα μετασκευάζεται, οὐ μόνον ὅτι τὰ μέγιστα ἐξεργάσασθαι οἷός τε καθεστήκει, ἀλλ' ὅτι καὶ πολλὴν ὥφλη τιμὴν αὐτῷ τὸ σφράγιον, τῶν μὲν χρήμασι δεξιωθέντων πρὸς αὐτοῦ, τῶν δὲ καὶ ἐσθλοῖς βρωτοῖς τε καὶ ἐτέροις, ὅτε στρατολογηθέντες ἐκ καταλόγου δι' αὐτοῦ παρήσαν. Gregory's authority, however, was summoned again immediately after this episode, to convince the troops not to abandon the difficult siege of Martyropolis, a stronghold in Armenia II which had been occupied by the Persians and needed to be immediately recovered: see EVAGR. *h.e.* 6,14 and Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 569-570. Finally, in AD 591 Gregory, together with Domitian bishop of Melitene, was sent by Maurice to welcome the Persian king Chosroes II, who had to flee from his reign because of the rebellion of the usurper Baramos: EVAGR. *h.e.* 6,17 and Downey, *History of Antioch*, p. 570. It is certainly not a coincidence that Gregory's activity as a diplomat and a politician on behalf of the Emperor himself began immediately after his definitive acquittal from the religious and sexual charges against him, granted by a special court in Constantinople in AD 589 (see note 56).

sexual affair with a married woman⁵⁶. But as a personal friend of the emperor Maurice, he was acquitted⁵⁷.

Among such rich evidence about Gregory's activities I will choose one passage by John of Ephesus, which I think can be of particular interest for the urban history of Antioch. After his journey to Constantinople, Gregory came back to Antioch with the emperor's permission to build a new circus with imperial funds, bringing to town even a troupe of pantomimes from the capital⁵⁸. The old circus, which as we have seen had already been damaged by the earthquake in AD 458, was certainly no longer in use after the disasters in the sixth century. The systematic dismantling of the monument, described by the Princeton excavators⁵⁹, cannot be explained as the initiative of private citizens. It must have been decided by some authority, probably (given the imperial nature of the building⁶⁰) someone belonging to the central government. This dismantling was probably connected with the construction of the new walls, in the area near the island, during the Justinianic restoration. With no circus available, it is not surprising that we do not hear anything about circus races during the forty years between the Persian

56 Probably not with his own sister (as stated by Downey, *History of Antioch*, p. 567), but rather his accuser's: see ÉVAGRE, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, traduction par A.-J. Festugière, *Byzantion* XLV (1975), pp. 187-488: p. 451 and note 13.

57 EVAGR. *h.e.* 5,17 and 6,7; Jo. EPH. 3,27-34 and 5,17. Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 563-564 and 566-567. The succession of the events during the anti-pagan outbreak under Tiberius II, and especially the background of the accusations against Gregory (which were obviously the consequence of political and religious struggle in the city of Antioch and the diocese of the East) have been carefully reconstructed by Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 262-269. Liebeschuetz is probably right in thinking that Gregory's summoning to the capital in AD 589 was intended to put an end to the whole series of accusations against him (which had started ten years before with the charge of paganism), and not just to decide about the most recent one: it seems indeed a bit exaggerated to call together all the patriarchs of the Christian world (or their deputies), the Senate of Constantinople and a court of metropolitan bishops only to discuss about a sexual affair. On the contrary, Downey states that Gregory went twice to Constantinople to defend himself from the two successive charges, but his supposed first journey under Tiberius II is not recorded by any of our sources.

58 Jo. EPH. 5,17.

59 Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, p. 456.

60 On the 'imperial' nature of circuses see also D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert* (München 1969) (*Byzantisches Archiv*, XIII), pp. 77-78: a circus could be neither built nor dismantled without imperial permission.

invasion and the construction of the new circus by the patriarch Gregory: if there had been races in the meantime, these must have taken place in an open area, without monumental facilities. However, the fact that Gregory's project needed the permission of the emperor allows the hypothesis that Maurice authorized not simply the reconstruction of a circus, but rather the resumption of the famous Antiochene tradition of circus races, which obviously could not take place without a monumental building⁶¹.

Gregory's interest in building a new circus can therefore be interpreted as a political move. Particularly in the preceding ten years, since the famous anti-pagan outbreak in AD 578, we find many accounts of disorders and popular riots in Antioch. On the occasion of the latest of these outbreaks, in AD 589, Evagrius explicitly states that the two circus factions were fighting together against the Patriarch's authority⁶². A reorganization of regular circus races, with the resumption of the rivalry between the two circus factions, by encouraging competition and preventing strong cohesion of the whole body of citizens, could make outbreaks more difficult and allow closer control by the authorities over the people (with 'the authorities' meaning, in this period, essentially the Patriarch). But, most of all, Gregory's idea had an important significance for civic identity: it testifies how persistent had remained the passion of the people and the ruling class of Antioch for spectacles and in particular for circus races. These were, as we know, far more than a simple athletic contest. In the late Roman Empire they were a fundamental element for a city claiming a leading regional role. We can say that holding regular circus races was one of the major features of a real metropolis, as opposed to 'normal' provincial cities.

61 Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, pp. 538-539 explains how the presence of proper facilities and technicalities connected with a monumental circus building could upgrade the whole quality of circus races: a proper circus was needed if 'professional' races were to be organized.

62 EVAGR. *h.e.* 6,7 (p. 226, 6-9 Bidez-Parmentier): Ἀμφὶ τοιαυτὸν τὸ δῆμον ἐς μίαν συνήτην γνώμην, καὶ κατὰ τε τὰς λεωφόρους ἀνά τε τὸ θέατρον τὰς κατὰ τοῦ ἱερῆως ὕβρεις ἐπεβόων, οὐδὲ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς σκηνῆς τούτων ἀποσχομένων. On this detail of the two demes fighting on the same side see also Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 249-257.

A well-known example of this tendency is the story told by Salvianus of Marseille, 150 years before Gregory, about the inhabitants of Trier. After their city had been destroyed by the barbarians, the notables immediately asked the emperor for permission to resume the organization of public spectacles, showing that for the reconstruction of civic identity these were even more important than the actual rebuilding of walls and houses⁶³. In the same way, Gregory's new circus represents the last witness of the vitality of late Roman Antioch in spite of the difficulties of the period. It testifies to the attempt, by its citizens and its ruling class, to resume that leading role which the city used to have before the disasters of the sixth century. Nevertheless, this attempt was destined to be deceived by subsequent outbreaks (mainly of religious origin), which our sources attest for the beginning of the seventh century⁶⁴, and most of all by new invasions, culminating in the last capture of the city by the Persians, in AD 611, and, after a brief recovery by Heraclius, the definitive Arab conquest in AD 637⁶⁵. The momentous change (for our city as for the whole East) from Roman to Arab rule marked the final decline of the role of Antioch as a metropolis and even as a regional centre, thus making those reconstruction efforts, both of the actual city and of its identity, after the catastrophes of the sixth century largely fruitless.

This continuous effort for the rebuilding of Antioch throughout the sixth century allows some final considerations on a much debated issue such as the problem of 'urban decline' in the late Roman world. If we look at Antioch not as a single urban context, but as part of a regional network of cities, the most striking aspect is, beyond any doubt, continuity. In spite of all the catastrophes and reconstructions, and of all the urbanistic, social and religious changes which affected the city, the role of Antioch as the main

63 SALV. *gub.* 6,87-89.

64 See for example the religious outbreak opposing Christians and Jews in AD 610, during which Gregory's successor Anastasius was murdered (Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 572-574 and especially note 39).

65 Downey, *History of Antioch*, pp. 575-578.

centre of the Roman East was clearly maintained⁶⁶. Up to the very last moment of the history of Antioch as a Roman city, its regional importance and its role as the administrative, religious and symbolic centre of Roman civilization in the East remained unquestioned.

On the contrary, the ultimate reason for the final decline of Antioch as a metropolis can be identified with the political change from Roman to Arab rule. The contrast is sharp between the obstinacy of the Roman government in reassessing the leading role of Antioch and the sudden decline in the importance of the city under the Arabs. After AD 634 these strong efforts to secure Antioch in the pre-eminent position it used to have disappeared, because the issues of religious and symbolic centrality, which had been so significant for the role of the late antique metropolis, had no reason to survive in the context of the new Muslim empire. Our city maintained its military importance as a stronghold, to control the roads going from the inland of Syria to Cilicia and the sea. But its leading regional role, from an administrative, commercial and economic point of view, was rapidly shifting to other cities, such as the harbour city of Alexandretta and especially Halep, which was to be the new capital of Muslim northern Syria.

66 On the importance of understanding cities within their regional networks, and not merely as isolated contexts, see Liebeschuetz, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 9-10: «significant developments in urbanization cannot [...] be identified by looking at one 'typical' city or even at a selection of 'typical' cities. It is necessary to look at the regional network as a whole, and also at its interaction with other networks» (p. 9).