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Antioch II: the many faces of Antioch: intellectual exchange and religious diversity, CE 350-450

Silke-Petra Bergjan, Susanna Elm, *Antioch II: the many faces of Antioch: intellectual exchange and religious diversity, CE 350-450. Civitatum Orbis Mediterranei Studia*, 3. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018. 440 p.. ISBN 9783161551260 €139,00.

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A recent overview of the state of scholarship on late antique urbanism cautions against simplistic narratives of decline and fall and pleads for complexity and diversity: “there is no single, simple, straightforward story.”^[1] Studies of individual cities are key in providing insights into local variation and regional developments in Late Antiquity. The volume under review is a welcome addition to the growing literature on Antioch, the great eastern metropole of the later Roman world. In a short introduction, Susanna Elm outlines the state of research on Antioch, positioning the volume within a relatively recent surge of studies both on the city’s built environment and on individual authors—such as Libanius or John Chrysostom—who resided in the city during the fourth or fifth century. She explicitly acknowledges the work on Antioch by scholars like Pauline Allen, Gunnar Brands, Andrea De Giorgi, Wendy Mayer, Catherine Saliou, and Christine Shepardson, many of whom are indeed also contributors to this study. The explicit aim of the collective volume is to bring together scholars working on the topography and archaeology as well as on the literary production of the city, “with the hope of gaining new insights into old questions” (4). The interdisciplinary nature of the different contributions—written by archaeologists, historians, literary scholars, and theologians—is definitely a strength of the book. The introduction could perhaps have benefitted from an engagement with recent studies on late antique urbanism beyond Antioch.^[2] A broader outlook on existing

literature might then have highlighted the degree to which developments in Antioch were local or rather part of broader late antique trends.

The seventeen contributions to the volume are divided into four sections of varying length, all focusing on different aspects of the urban history: topography, imperial connections, textual representations, and urban communities. Together these essays present a wide array of topics from the history of late antique Antioch. The contributions pay ample attention to the diverse social and religious nature of the urban population and the on-going struggle for ownership of the cityscape. Despite its explicit aim to combine literary and archaeological sources, most of the individual contributions still mainly rely on textual material and oftentimes on the same specific texts. Overall, however, the volume succeeds in bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives on Antioch, which enrich our understanding of the late antique city.

The first section “The many layers of Antioch: topography” opens with an overview by Gunnar Brands of the current state of knowledge of the archaeology of late antique Antioch. Reconstructing the exact topography of the city is difficult, because of the continuous transformations of the cityscape. Antioch was an administrative and military hub of importance to the broader region; as such, it was home to several successive imperially sponsored building projects that reconfigured both the secular and the religious urban topography. Catherine Saliou brings text and topography together in her analysis of Libanius’ Oration 11. She describes the speech as a ‘magical mirror’, which presents an ideal image of Antioch to which a diverse audience could relate. At the same time, Saliou is able to connect some of the descriptions to actual landmarks in the urban landscape. Johannes Hahn carefully analyses the survival and the transformation of the Olympic Games at Antioch throughout the late antique period. He demonstrates the secularisation of the games and their survival as an important constituent of civic life. Additionally, until the prohibition of the games in 520 CE, emperors continuously sponsored and used the games as means of political communication with the urban population.

In the following section “The many layers of Antioch: the imperial city”, Jorrit Witjens draws our attention to the role of the army in fourth-century Antioch, especially when the city served as an imperial residence. The military presence is an often overlooked aspect of the city’s history. However, Witjens rightfully argues for a closer inspection of the social and economic impact of the soldiers stationed in Antioch and its immediate

hinterland. Claudia Tiersch and Gavin Kelly both zoom in on the relationship between individual emperors and the city. Tiersch analyses the mismatch between emperor Julian's Hellenism and the Hellenism of the Antiochians and their resulting failed relationship. Kelly dissects Ammianus Marcellinus' highly selective account of the emperor Valens in Antioch. The historian is silent on many of the emperor's dealings in the city, but rather highlights the emperor's cruelty in the treason trials of 371 as a foreshadowing of his eventual demise. Susanna Elm asks whether a distinct Antiochene perspective can be distilled from later Roman historiography. She examines the treatment by Libanius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Eutropius, and Festus of the death of the emperor Julian at the river Tigris. Despite their different aims, all four authors deemed Julian's Persian campaign excessive. Antioch's relative closeness to the Persian border may have led them to recognize the importance of restraint and diplomacy in dealing with the eastern neighbour.

In the third section "Visions of Antioch Painted with Words", textual representations of the city are the primary concern. Edward Watts explores Libanius' perspective of Antioch at old age, when he struggled with a decline in social relevance. Examining a dossier of 272 letters written between 388 and 393, Watts shows that Libanius consciously strove to retain his influence, even though the imperial presence was now fixed on Constantinople. While a new generation took office, the influence of Antioch waned, but old men such as Libanius could still draw on their substantial personal networks. In an imaginative contribution, Blake Leyerle turns to the fictional spaces of Antioch. She compares the constructed representations of space in the work of Libanius and John Chrysostom, while also drawing on iconographic material of the topographical border of the Yakto mosaic. Both authors create fictionalised images of the city for their audiences. Libanius' image of the city in Oration 11 caters to the urban elite, foregrounding the monumental architecture and relegating artisan workshops to the periphery. In his homily *On the Statues*, John Chrysostom rather turns his attention to the alleys, where the beggars, the poor, and the destitute live, reminding his listeners of the lived experiences behind the urban facades.

Jaclyn Maxwell opens the fourth section "The Antiochenes—Creating Communities", but her essay nicely complements Leyerle's study, as she also focusses on the work of Libanius and John Chrysostom. Maxwell analyses the voice of the people in their orations and sermons respectively. She is interested in finding out more about the concerns and interests of the common people of the city, whose voices are so often absent from our

source material. Maxwell concludes that—despite their different religious convictions—both authors return a sense of agency to the urban population. The citizens of Antioch could address political problems or complain about economic structures or the conditions of daily working life. Rudolf Brändle turns his attention to the series of anti-Jewish homilies of John Chrysostom, written between 386-387. Brändle sets out to contextualise the eight homilies *Adversus Judaeos* against the backdrop of the multi-cultural environment of late fourth-century Antioch. These polemic homilies must be seen as a reaction against the popularity of Jewish celebrations and religious customs. Chrysostom saw this popularity as a threat to Christian identity and therefore he laid out clear boundaries between Jewish and Christian communities in his preaching. At least until the fifth century, the Jewish community continued to occupy an important position in Antioch's religious landscape. Silke-Petra Bergjan also addresses the topic of religious competition, but between Christians. She extensively reconstructs the fourth-century schism of the Nicene Christians at Antioch from the accounts of church historians such as Sozomen, Sokrates, and Theodoret and she carefully locates them within the context of the city. Bergjan pays specific attention to the so-called *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, a mediation document written under the leadership of Athanasius of Alexandria, which she dates to the 370s rather than the early 360s. The doctrinal dispute arose in a time when different Christian factions competed and co-existed in Antioch, a feature of the multifaceted religious environment of the city. This continued to be the case well into the fifth century. A cumulative bibliography and two extensive indices conclude the volume.

The edited volume succeeds in highlighting the close relationships between urban landscape and social identities. The variety of topics discussed testify to the social and religious diversity of late antique Antioch and show how such diversity could foster both competition and cohesion. It should therefore be of interest to specialists working on the history of Antioch specifically, as well as scholars of urban history or religious studies of the late antique period more broadly.

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[1] Mark Humphries, *Cities and the Meanings of Late Antiquity*, Brill Research Perspectives in Ancient History 2.4 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 88.

[2] For example: Claudia Rapp & H. A. Drake (eds), *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World. Changing Contexts of Power and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Hendrik Dey, *The Afterlife of the Roman City. Architecture and Ceremony in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).