

ANTIOCH - THE PEARL OF THE ORIENT

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Abstract

Since its appearance, Antioch has become one of the most important cities. It was the capital of the Seleucid Empire, and after its conquest by the Romans, Antioch became the capital of the province of Syria. Antioch had Greeks, Athenians, Macedonians, Cretans and Cypriots as its first settlers. They imprinted a Greek tradition on the city, as it was at a crossroads of civilizations, peoples and languages. In a short time, Antioch managed to reach a high spiritual and commercial peak, being among the most important centres of Hellenism in the East, thus rivalling with Alexandria. Antioch also benefited from an important strategic position, as it stood at a major crossroads of trade routes linking the East to the West and the North to the South, bringing much to Venice from the late Middle Ages. Although it was placed on a geological formation, which was constantly exposed to earthquakes, this disadvantage proved to be more often than not, a major one for a city, as it started to become more and more flourishing and prosperous. At the end of the Hellenistic period, Antioch had between three hundred thousand and four hundred thousand inhabitants. The architecture of the city, its economic significance, its geostrategic position, but also its political institutions make Antioch a real polis/citadel, which can behave, if necessary, like a real sovereign state. After the occupation of Antioch and the whole of Syria by the Roman power, in 64 BC, the city began to enter an upward slope again, due to the intensification of trade in this region. Pompey made Antioch the capital of the new Roman province of Syria, keeping its reputation as the "Beautiful Crown of the East", but also as the Pearl of the Orient. The city had about five hundred thousand inhabitants, making it the third largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria.

Key words: *Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Syria, Orontes, Pearl of the Orient.*

Introduction

Antioch was one of the most important and famous cities of Antiquity. This city, also called the Pearl of the Orient, was founded by the Seleucids. Throughout history they founded dozens of cities (Roberts, J. M., Westand, Odd Arne (2018), *History of the world from prehistory to the present*, Iași: Polirom: 183), but the most important of them was Antiochia/Antiochia Syriai/Greater Antioch or Antioch from the Orontes (in Greek Ἀντιόχεια ἢ ἐπὶ Ὀρόντου or Antiócheia he epì Oróntou, Antiócheia hê Megálê, in Latin Antiochia ad Orontem). Due to the fact that twenty-three cities named Antioch were built, it was called Antioch the Great (Sotirios, Metropolitan of Pisidia (2019), *Paul, apostle to the Gentiles*, Galați: Egumenita: 54). Likewise, she was also called the Beautiful (ἡ καλῆ) (Mircea, I. (1995), *Dictionary of the New Testament*, Bucharest: Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian

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Orthodox Church: 35), and the emperor Justinian (527- 565) called a City of God (Theopolis) (Kaplan, M. (2010), *Byzant*, Bucharest: Nemira: 28). At first it was called Antigonía, because it was founded in 307 BC by Antigonos I Monophthalmus (the one-eyed 382-301 BC), a former diadoch/general of Alexander the Great/Macedonian (356-323 BC). After his death, Antigonos I Monophthalmus proclaimed himself king in 306 BC and founded the Antigonid Dynasty.

Seleucus I Nicator (Σέλευκος Νικάτωρ, Seleucus the Conqueror 358-281 BC), another diadoch of Alexander the Great after defeating Antigonos I Monophthalmus at the Battle of Ipsus in 301 BC, rebuilt Antigonía. Seleucus I Nicator named an Antioch in memory of his father Antiochos/Antiochos (*Universal Church History* (2021) Vol. I Second Edition, Revised. Coordinator: Ioniță, V., Benga, D., Chifăr N., Gabor, A., Leb, I. V., Pătuleanu, C., Bucharest: Basilica: 238-239). This was a general in the army of Philip II (382-336 BC), father of Alexander the Great/Macedon (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Seleucus-I-Nicator>, accessed on 31.12.2023). The city spread over an area of about one and a half kilometres by three kilometres, between the Orontes River to the west and Mount Silpio to the east. It was built according to a rectangular Hippodamian² scheme (with intersecting roads forming right angles and buildings placed inside these rectangles), typical of Hellenistic cities, with rectangular blocks of one hundred and ten meters by about fifty-seven meters. Thus, the plan of the city was copied from that of Alexandria (Dîncă, Lucian (2023), *Alexandria and Antiochia, Two catechetical schools in ancient Christianity*, Târgu-Lăpuș, Galaxia Gutenberg: 228.). Antioch was surrounded by a wall, which was built by Seleucus I Nicator (311-281 BC), extended most likely by Antiochos Epiphanes (175-164 BC) and rebuilt by the emperor Tiberius (14- 37) (*Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, a cura di G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, D. G. Reid, edizione italiana a cura di Romano Penna, (2000), Milan, San Paolo: 80).

Antioch the imperial capital

Since its foundation, Antioch experienced rapid development thanks to the twinning of several neighbouring cities: Lopolis, Jope, Meroe and Bottia. To these are added about three thousand five hundred Macedonian and Greek families displaced from Antigonía, the old capital of his rival, located about nine km upstream on the Orontes river (Dîncă, 2023: 227). So, Antioch had Greeks, Athenians, Macedonians, Cretans and Cypriots as its first settlers. They imprinted a Greek tradition on the city, as it was at a crossroads of civilizations, peoples and languages.

² The name comes from the architect Hippodamus of Miletus (498-408 BC), whom Aristotle said "invented the art of planning cities". Cf. <https://engines.egr.uh.edu/episode/2542>, accessed on 3.01.2024. For more details on this plan or construction scheme see: Georges Vallet, François Villard, Paul Auberson, (1976), *Megara Hyblaea. 1. Le quartier de l'agora archaïque*, Rome, École française de Rome.

In a short time Antioch managed to reach a high spiritual and commercial peak, being among the most important centers of Hellenism in the East (Sotirios, 2019: 55), thus rivalling Alexandria (Dîncă, 2023: 228). It was the capital of the Seleucid monarchy and the imperial residence (Rus, Remus (2003), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Christian Literature from the First Millennium*, Bucharest, Lidia: 55). The city was located in the heart of the East, thirty-five km from the Mediterranean Sea, in the north of Phoenicia, the Silpius and Stauris mountains, in a ten-kilometer-wide fertile plain watered by the Orontes River (Mircea, 1995:35). Also, Antioch had sumptuous buildings: baths, thermae, theaters, hippodrome (*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 1 A, (2006) Barcelona, Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau: 767). and a library (*Nouvo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane*, diretto da Angelo Di Bernardino, A-E, (2006) Genova Milano, Marietti S.p.A: 340).

So this metropolis was built in a fertile region that was well irrigated in the southwestern corner of the Amuk plain. Here the Orontes River (which originates in central Lebanon and is four hundred kilometers long) (<https://www.britannica.com/place/Orontes-River>, accessed on 31. 12. 2023), carves a valley among mountains to follow the road to the sea. Antioch also benefited from an important strategic position, as it was located at a major crossroads of trade routes linking the East to the West and the North to the South, bringing much with Venice since the late Middle Ages (Wright, N. T. (2020), *Paul, the Apostle to Jesus the Messiah a biography*, Sibiu, Deisis: 104). Although it was placed on a geological formation, which was constantly exposed to earthquakes this disadvantage proved to be more often than not a major one for a city, as it began to become more and more flourishing and prosperous.

The location of the city was spectacular as it was placed between Mount Silpius (which was five hundred and six meters high) on the eastern side and the Orontes River (which was located about a hundred meters above sea level) on the western side. Beyond the right bank of the river was a plain, which was never systematically settled, and therefore it was never enclosed within the walls of the city. In the 4th century AD, this plain was used as a military training ground (Campus Martius). Mount Silpius, which watched over the city, presented an imposing spectacle with its walls and citadel, with its contours, terraces, and slopes. On the side towards the city, the mountain was terraced in places, where the slope was gentler, so that villas and public baths could be built here. Nearby was a steep ridge that gave the mountain the appearance of a giant wall. On the opposite side of the city, Mount Silpius had very gentle slopes, and so the ascent from that direction was very easy. If Antioch was attacked by the barbarians, the enemies could easily reach the walls at the top of the mountain, and if they were breached, then the city was conquered very quickly and thus, the inhabitants were at the mercy of the attackers. This is what happened in the 3rd and 6th centuries, when the Persians conquered Antioch through this route (Dușe, 2022: 228-230).

One of the great attractions of the region was the suburb of Daphne, which was located about ten kilometres SW of Antioch on a plateau higher than the level of the city. This area was of remarkable natural beauty, dotted with springs, forests and steeped in mythology. Thus, she was associated with Hercules, Apollo, the maiden Daphne³ and the episode of the judgment of Paris⁴. Natural water springs from Daphne supplied the villas, public baths and gardens here. They also provided a significant amount of water to the city, which was carried through aqueducts that were built on the less steep slopes of the mountain. Over time, a stadium was also built at Daphne for "Olympic" games, rivalling those in Greece.

Antioch was protected by a defensive wall, and the entrance to the city was through strong gates. Some of these were named after the place where they were located. Such was the case with the Daphne gate, which was located in the south of the city and opened the way for the inhabitants to the suburb of the same name. A majestic main street crossed the entire city for a length of four kilometres. In the centre, the street was paved with marble slabs, being bordered on both sides by colonnades, which housed many shops and stores. This majestic street was cut in the middle of its length by another street, arranged perpendicular to the main road. At this intersection were four magnificent gates (Tetrapylon), which were decorated with reliefs, statues and mosaics. This place was the centre of the ancient city; and according to the belief of the Greeks, he was the very centre of the world, the omphalos (after the famous omphalos of Delphi⁵). Therefore the Seleucids placed here a large piece of stone on which Apollo sat. Also here they built the Nimphaion, a monument that was dedicated to the nymphs. He had artesian wells from which water gushed constantly.

³ Daphne, whose name means "laurel," had been a nymph with whom Apollo fell in love. Pursued by him, she ran away, and when she was about to be caught, she asked her father (either the river-god Ladon or, according to another version, the river-god Peneu) to save her. Thus it was transformed into laurel, the beloved plant of the god Apollo.

⁴ Paris, the son of the king of Troy, Priam, and his wife, Hecuba, was assigned by Zeus to be the judge of the beauty contest between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. The winner was to receive a golden apple that Eris (Discordia) had offered as a prize. Each of the three goddesses promised Paris special gifts in hopes of winning the contest. Hera promised him the rule of all of Asia, Athena offered him wisdom and victory in all battles, and Aphrodite was content to promise him the love of Helen of Sparta. Paris decided that Aphrodite was the most beautiful. Later, he kidnapped Helen, which led, according to legend, to the outbreak of the Trojan War (1258-1180 BC).

⁵ This omphalos at Delphi was a large piece of stone placed in the temple of Apollo. It is said that Zeus would have sent two eagles from the two ends of the world to find out where the center is, and the eagles would have met in this place. The stone marked the "navel of the earth".

Antioch was also known for its abundance of water, which was piped to every house. Public baths dotted the city, which was distinguished by its splendid temples, by its library, called the Musaion, by its amphitheatre, whose rows of seats were cut into the rocks of the acropolis, on the top of which stood a citadel. In the beginning, Antioch was not destined to be the capital of the province of Syria, but its strategic geographical position, the wealth of the region, but especially the development that this city took eventually led to this outcome. Over time, Antioch took over the function of the capital of Syria (Sotirios, 2019: 54) from Seleucia Pieria, the city on the Mediterranean coast that also became the port of the new capital. Thus, Antioch will be the administrative and military centre of this province for the rest of its history, with some exceptions, these meaning the short periods of disgrace during the Roman occupation, when the city was deprived of its dignity following moments of civil insubordination⁶.

During the reigns of Seleucus II (246-225 BC), Antiochus III (223-187 BC) and Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 BC), Antioch expanded to the north and east, first to an island which the river Orontes forms by its separation into two arms, then to Mount Silpius. This expansion was due to the influx of Greek immigrants as a result of Rome's growing influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thanks to the Hellenizing zeal of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Antioch began to gain a reputation as a luxurious and sumptuous city. The eastward expansion of the city was done during this king's time and it was even named after him, Epiphania, having its own public square (agora), but also its own public buildings. So, we are dealing with a prosperous, flourishing city, respectful of the divinities of its inhabitants. At the end of the Hellenistic period, Antioch had between three hundred thousand and four hundred thousand inhabitants. The city's architecture, its economic significance, its geostrategic position, but also its political institutions make Antioch a true polis/citadel, which can behave, if necessary, like a true sovereign state. However, in 83 BC the Antiochians abandon the Seleucid dynasty asking for the protection of the king of Armenia, Tigranes II the Great (140-55 BC) (Dîncă, 2023: 229).

⁶ Septimius Severus was Roman emperor between 193-211. He is one of those who deprived Antioch not only of its status as a metropolis, but also of its status as the capital of Syria, granting them to its rival, the city of Laodicea. Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) did the same thing before, as punishment for the fact that the Antiochians had supported a revolt against the emperor. This revolt was started in 175 by Avidius Cassius, former governor of Syria in 165, entrusted with extraordinary powers over the entire eastern Roman Empire. Cassius had proclaimed himself emperor in 175. The revolt he started was crushed in three months and six days, and he was assassinated. Also, the emperor Theodosius the Great (378-395) deprived Antioch of its metropolis status for the third time, in 387, as a result of the revolt that ended with the overthrow of the statues.

Antiochos IV Epiphanes wanted to unite the entire Mediterranean Sea coast in a Hellenization project, which also involved the integration of the Jews. This plan did not lead to the expected results, as his failure to integrate the Jews led to the outbreak of an anti-Jewish riot in Antioch. This was the first of a long series of such revolts, which would stretch over a period of approximately seven centuries (Dușe, 2022: 230-234).

Antioch under Roman rule

Towards the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 1st century BC, Antioch entered a period of slight decline, due to the confused political situation (Podaru, Adrian, (2011) *John and the reformation of Antioch: a failed project*, in: *Ioan Gură de Aur, Homilies to statues I*, Bilingual Edition. Iași, Polirom: 18-21). Starting with 67 BC Quintus Marcius Rex and Pompei/Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106-48 BC) built many important buildings in Antioch, including a palace and a circus (*Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 2000: 80).

After the occupation of Antioch and the whole of Syria by the Roman power in 64 BC, the city began to enter an upward slope again, due to the intensification of trade in this region. Pompey made Antioch the capital of the new Roman province of Syria, preserving its reputation as the "Beautiful Crown of the East". The city had about five hundred thousand inhabitants, making it the third largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Unfortunately, many outstanding architectural works, which contributed to Antioch's fame, were badly damaged in the earthquake of 37 AD. In these conditions, the Roman emperors gave all their interest to restore the greatness of the city and thus, they will continue beautifying it with new monuments and constructions: thermal baths, aqueduct, theatre, temples, circus, etc. (Dîncă, 2023: 229-230).

In the year 48 BC Antioch was inspired to support Julius Caesar (100-44 BC) in his fight against Pompey. Thanks to this support, Antioch was raised to the rank of an autonomous city (Wright, 2020: 104). Thus, Julius Caesar, since the year 47 BC, continued the building program started by the Romans continued in Antioch. He built an aqueduct, intended to supply water to the residential buildings located on the slopes of Mount Silpio. Over time, ruins of these private homes, but also of some small bathrooms, whose construction was facilitated by the raising of the aqueduct, were discovered. At the foot of the mountain, Julius Caesar built a theatre right in the monumental centre of the city, but also an amphitheatre near the south gate. Most likely, near the centre of the city, Julius Caesar built the Kaisareion. This Kaisarion basilica was

⁷ So this was named Ammianus Marcellinus (325-395), the great latin historian originated from Antiochia, in *Res Gestae* 22,9,14: „at hic videre properans Antiochiam, orientis apicem pulchrum”; see. Podaru, A. (2011), *Ioan Gură-de-Aur, Omilii la statui*, introduction: 17, n. 2.

built in the centre of the city, being perhaps the oldest basilica of the East. It was to be used for the cult of Rome; and therefore it bore the name of Cesare, having also a statue of Julius Caesar. Also in Antioch, he also rebuilt the Pantheon, which was in a precarious state, but he also favoured the construction (or reconstruction) of a theatre on the slopes of Mount Silpio (Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere, 2000: 80). Julius Caesar wanted to Romanize Antioch, but his assassination on March 15, 44 BC. delayed this project (Podaru, 2011: 21).

King Herod the Great (73 BC-4 AD) built a colonnaded street that crossed the entire length of the city, from north to south, and cut it into two parts: *"And the main street of the city of Antioch in Syria, which was shunned because of its filthiness, did he not also take care to pave it with polished marble along its entire length of 20 stadia, providing for it also with a portico of the same length, as a pavement against the rains?"* (Iosephus, Flavius (2002), *History of the war of the Jews against the Romans*, 1.XXI.11, Bucharest, Hasefer: 88). Herod the Great also granted an annual income to increase the prestige of the Olympic Games: *"In Antioch, the most populated city in Syria, he built a broad street running through it in its entire length, and endowed it on both sides with a portico, paving it with polished marble, both for the adornment of the fortress and for the benefit of passers-by. Besides this, because they no longer rose to their former glory for want of money, Herodes assigned annual revenue to the Olympic Games, to increase their prestige, restoring to them by sacrifices and expenses the splendour which had secured their fame. Due to his generosity, by the feeling of most, he appeared on the lists as the perpetual president of the Public Games"*. (Iosephus, Flavius (2003), *Jewish Antiquities* II, books XI-XX, from the restoration of the Temple to the revolt against Nero, 16.5.3, Bucharest, Hasefer: 343-344).

The Pax Romana⁸, which was instituted by the emperor Octavian Augustus (27 BC-14 AD), created new opportunities for prosperity in Antioch. During this period, Syria became an imperial province ruled by a legate and a procurator, who resided in Antioch. Now two or three legions were brought to the city on the Orontes to guard this important strategic point. The new buildings that were built by Octavian Augustus, Agrippa⁹ and Tiberius (14-37)

⁸ The Pax Romana was a historical reality, a kind of "international" order system characterized by a state of relative peace and harmony throughout the Mediterranean area, inaugurated by the emperor Octavian Augustus and lasting until the death of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (180). The Roman Empire governed and protected individual provinces, allowing them to make and administer their own laws; in return, these provinces accepted taxation and military control.

⁹ Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa was born in 64 BC and lived until 12 BC. He was known as a Roman politician and general, being one of the closest friends and collaborators of the emperor Octavian Augustus. In the year 21 BC Octavian Augustus associated him in power and gave him his daughter Iulia as a wife. Agrippa is credited with the main military victories during the reign of Octavian Augustus, but especially the victory in the naval battle of Actium in 31 BC against Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Cf. (Dușe, Călin

made Antioch one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire. So now new temples were built and the old ones were restored. New theatres, public baths, gates and statues were also built. It was the emperor Octavian Augustus who instituted the "Olympic" games in Antioch, which were held once every four years, although this interval later varied (Podaru, 2011: 21).

Emperor Octavian Augustus visited Antioch twice, where he carried out a vast building program that he financed with the treasure he had found in Egypt after the defeat of Cleopatra (69-30 BC) and Mark Antony (83- 30 BC), following the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. Some temples and other projects, which were originally attributed to Tiberius, would only have been completed by him, since they had been started by Octavian Augustus. Part of the construction activity carried out in Antioch would have been caused by a fire, which broke out in AD 23-24. Emperor Tiberius built the baths in the eastern part of the city and probably on the island formed by the Orontes. Its merits increased with the construction of the theatre, the construction of monumental gates at every major intersection of the city's streets, the completion and decoration of Epiphaneia, the southern sector of the city built by Antiochus Epiphanes, from which it took its name (Dușe, 2022: 234- 238).

During its history, Antioch was hit several times by earthquakes, two of which occurred during the time of Saint Paul the Apostle. The first happened on April 9, 37, under the rule of Caligula (37-41), who intervened immediately and generously, investing the reserve that Tiberius left in Rome. On this occasion, the city enjoyed a serious rebuilding and a substantial restoration. The second earthquake occurred during the reign of Claudius (41-54) producing damage even in Ephesus, Smyrna and other cities in Asia Minor.

The "*Silver Chalice of Antioch*", which was said to have been found in this city about 1910, consisted of an ordinary silver inner cup set in a silver-gilt outer container. It was considered that the reason why such a beautiful external container was made for an ordinary cup would have been that said cup would have been used by the Savior Jesus Christ at the Last Supper. However, experts believe that this cup dates back to the century. II-VI AD (*Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere*, 2000: 80-81).

Syria belonged to the Prefecture of the East, which was divided into five parts and was the seat of the commissar of the East, which did not have a political-administrative but a moral-cultural supremacy. Also, in Antioch, which was the most cosmopolitan metropolis on the vast Elinophone and Syrophone Hellenistic Syrian space, there was also a very important Jewish community from the diaspora (Sotirios, 2019: 54). Ever since the founding of the city by Seleucos I Nicator, the Jews had privileges, being able to organize their socio-religious life in total freedom. They seem to have dominated economic life, owing to their great licentiousness and habits. Thus, the Jews had as a centre,

Ioan, (2020), *The Roman Empire and Christianity during the time of Saint Clement the Roman*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press: 59).

two impressive synagogues, Kerateio, which was located in the centre of Antioch, and one at Daphni. Therefore, they were able to exert a strong and diverse influence, which sometimes reached the point of proselytism (Papadopoulos, Stylianos, (2013), *Theological Thought of Saint John Chrysostom*, Bucharest, Byzantium: 274-275). Thus, through their synagogues, the Jews managed to attract a significant number of proselytes. They were idolaters at first, and then after being catechized in the Mosaic law, they received circumcision and became members of the Jewish religion (Sotirios, 2019: 55).

At the beginning of the Christian era, Antioch was an architecturally splendid city, but also an important military centre of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. At the same time, Antioch was the balance point of a diplomatic balance that knew how to maintain peaceful relations with Armenia, the Parthian Empire, but also with the eastern states that were tributary to Rome.

During the stay of the emperor Trajan (98-117) in Antioch (114-115), the city he chose as the centre of his operations in the East, a powerful earthquake destroyed the city. It led to significant loss of human life, but also to the destruction of numerous buildings. The earthquake was interpreted as a punishment from the gods, who were angry at the growing influence of Christians in the city. This event led to the start of a persecution as a result of which many Christians lost their lives. Among them, the most important was Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, who received the martyr's crown in the Colosseum in Rome, being torn by wild beasts (Podaru, 2011: 21-22) on December 20, 107. The earthquake of 115 severely damaged the architectural masterpieces, and some were knocked to the ground. During this earthquake the emperor Trajan, being in Antioch, risked his life, because the roof of the palace he was in risked collapsing on him and his dignitaries. Nevertheless, the emperor Trajan, but also his successor, Hadrian (117-138), rebuilt Antioch. It becomes more and more grand and imposing with wide streets, side porticoes of impressive sizes, modern squares with demountable stands, two temples: for Artemis and Trajan, who was deified by Hadrian. Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), restores the baths and builds the Nymphaion, a kind of pool that collects the water of a spring, which was originally considered sacred, and later became a monumental public fountain (Agusta-Boularot, S (2008) «*Le lacus de la rue romaine: an example of "mobilier urbain" antique?*», in P. Ballet, N. Dieudonné-Glad, C. Saliou, *La rue dans l'antiquité*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes: 93-95). Also, the emperor Commodus (177-192) builds new baths, two temples, one for Zeus and one for Athena, but also the Xystos, a kind of huge gymnasium, but also a covered stadium, where athletes could train on capricious time (Curl, Jamens Stevens, (2006), *Dictionnaire d'architecture et d'architecture paysagère: Xyste*, Oxford University Press: 305).

Emperor Septimius Severus (193-211) punishes the city of Antioch in 194 because its inhabitants had allied with the governor Pescennius Niger

(140-194, Roman usurper). Thus, Antioch becomes a simple burgh of the territory of Laodicea. However, Antioch recovers very quickly and occupies the leading place in the Roman Empire, as well as the capital of Syria. Due to its geographical position, it was the residence of several successive emperors, who had to hold their own in the conflicts against the invaders of all kinds: Caracalla (211-217), Macrinus (217-218), Heliogabalus (218-222), Alexander Severus (222-235), Gordian III (238-244), Philip the Arab (244-249), Valerian (253-260), Aurelian (270-275), Diocletian (284-305), Galerius (305 -311), Maximin Daia (310-313) and Julian the Apostate (361-363) stayed in Antioch. During the invasion of Syria by the Sassanids of Shapur I, from the year 252, the city collaborated for a while with the Persians. They are only destroying everything that the Antiochenes had in the city, and many of the inhabitants will be deported to Iran. The city will be rebuilt by the emperor Valerian (195-260), but it is recaptured by the Persians a little later.

In the 4th century, Antioch regains its former glory. It becomes the residence of Caesar Constantine Gallus, around the year 350, who installs an atmosphere of military terror. The Antiochenes showed their discontent by repeated popular revolts against their tyrannical rulers. Everything will culminate in the year 387, during the reign of the emperor Theodosius the Great (379-395), when the Antiochians, being at the height of despair due to the tyrannical policy, knock down the statues of the imperial family to the ground (Dîncă, 2023: 230-231). This revolt would have led to the disappearance of Antioch from the world map, if there had not been a Christian preacher like Ioan Gura-de-Aur, who in his famous Homilies on statues (*Ioan Gura-de-Aur, (2011), Homilies to the statues*, bilingual edition, 2 volumes, introductory study, translation and notes by A. Podaru, Iasi, Polirom), defends the Antiochians.

So, as we have seen, over time, Antioch managed to be the third largest and most important city (McGuckin, Pr. John Anthony, (2014), *Dictionary of patristic theology*, Iași, Doxologia: 19) within the Roman Empire/Byzantine, after Rome and Alexandria (Sotirios, 2019: 54). It was the capital of Syria for a long time (Mircea, 1995: 35). Although in 64 BC, Antioch was conquered by the Romans, it continued to be one of the most important cities in the world, rivalling the other great metropolises of the ancient world (Telea, Marius, (2021), *History and the spirituality of the Byzantine Empire* Vol. 2. Civilization, culture and spirituality of the Byzantine Empire, Alba-Iulia, Reintregirea: 72). According to Strabo¹⁰, in the first century of the Christian era Antioch had approximately three hundred thousand inhabitants (Strabo, Geografia. 16.2.5) (Dizionario di Paolo e delle sue lettere, 2000: 79). In this rich and powerful city there were all social categories: landowners, merchants, artisans, beggars and slaves, between them there was an important difference at the class level and thus people were slightly dissatisfied (Nouvo dizionario patristico e di antichità

¹⁰ Strabo was a famous Greek geographer and historian who lived between 63 BC-23 AD.

cristiane, 2006: 341), due to the fact that wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few people (Papadopoulos, 2013: 18). The famous pagan rhetorician Libanius (314-393), who was the teacher of Saint John Chrysostom (354-407), in the year 359 on the occasion of the sports games at Daphne, delivered an encomium dedicated to his city, called Antiochikos, in which he said: "*There is no city among the cities of the earth in which the grandeur and the beauty of the place are interwoven to the same extent. The one who comes here forgets the city in which he was before, and that who leaves here will never forget this city*" (Libanius, Oratio 11, 271).

In the same period, Ammianus Marcellinus (325-395), who was the last great Latin historian, also originating from Antioch, called the city "*the beautiful crown of the East*" (Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae 22, 9, 14: "*at hinc videre properans Antiochiam, orientis apicem pulchrum*". Cf. Podaru, 2011: 17). Also, in the 4th century of the Christian era, i.e. the era in which Saint John Chrysostom lived, contemporaries called Antioch, "Golden City", "Pearl of the Orient", "Beautiful Antioch", "Voluptuous Antioch", "Antioch pleasures", "Sensual Antiochie" (<https://www.ioanguradeau.ro/657/antiohia/>, accessed on 2. 01. 2024).

In the 4th century of the Christian era, there were still eight pagan temples in Antioch, which were located six kilometres away in Daphne. It is not known with certainty what the number of inhabitants of this important city was, and therefore opinions are divided. Thus, according to some opinions, Antioch would have had between five hundred thousand and eight hundred thousand inhabitants in the 4th century, being a cosmopolitan city, which was dominated by the Greek spirit and culture. This was the official language and Syriac was the popular language (Nouvo dizionario patristico e di antichità cristiane, 2006: 340).

Conclusions

From what was presented, we could observe that throughout time Antioch was a centre of Greek life and culture, which was famous for its literary and artistic tradition (Rus, 2003: 55). Also, education became so developed that Antioch came to be considered the Athens of the East (Papadopoulos, 2013: 18). It was one of the great Hellenistic centres, and in the Roman and Byzantine era it was called the "Pearl of the Orient", being compared, in the east of the Mediterranean basin, with Alexandria, and from May 11, 330, with Constantinople. Also, Antioch was one of the most important cities on the Silk Road.

Antioch is in the southeast of Turkey, and today it is called Antakya, (Universal Church History, Vol. I 2021: 239), being located in Hatay province (Duşu, 2022: 238-242). Antakya is today a modern city, with a population of over four hundred and seventy thousand inhabitants (<https://ro.db-city.com/Turcia-Hatay-Antakya>, accessed on 2.01.2024). The city is a real attraction for many tourists, thanks to its many vestiges. Antakya is the capital of Hatay province, in southern Turkey, on the Mediterranean coast, thirty

kilometres from the sea. Unfortunately, due to the fact that Antioch/Antakya is located at the meeting of three tectonic plates, it was destroyed over time by several earthquakes, such as the one in 147 BC, 37, 115 and 458. In the earthquake of 526, two hundred and fifty thousand people died, and in that of 1054, ten thousand died (<https://life.ro/unul-dintre-cele-mai-frumoase-orase-turistice-din-turcia-antakya-no-mai-exista/>, accessed on 2.01.2024). Unfortunately, the devastating earthquake of February 2023 must also be remembered. It destroyed 80% of the buildings in Antakya, and in Hatay province the number of victims is approaching 85% of the population (<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/85-of-the-residents-of-hatay-died-or-are-injured-after-earthquakes-nato-sent-to-turkey-1,000-containers-for-the-victims-2257501>, accessed on 4 01. 2024).

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