2 Life in City and Country

CLIVE FOSS

Cities were the cornerstone of the Roman empire. They were centres of population, trade, manufacturing, and all forms of culture, as well as the basic building blocks of the administration. Virtually the entire empire was divided into the territories of cities, which maintained order locally and collected taxes. These tasks fell on the willing shoulders of a landowning aristocracy, whose members competed for the high municipal offices that would bring them distinction. As magistrates or members of the council that ran the city, they provided the public works and services characteristic of Roman urban life. In return for benefactions or constructions paid from their own pockets, they received honorific inscriptions or statues in a system that essentially put the burden of maintaining civic life on those who could best afford it. Cities also had endowments from legacies or investments, and managed the substantial funds that belonged to the local temples. The cities needed a great deal of money, since they had to maintain streets, markets, and other amenities, notably (and most expensive) the public baths. This voluntary and co-operative system functioned well for two hundred years, but began to break down in the crisis of the third century, when political chaos, invasions, civil war, and enormous financial demands put intolerable burdens on the local administrators and caused the former surplus of candidates for high office to dry up.

Late Antiquity maintained many elements of the Roman system, but with changes that gradually became more profound. First, the newly Christian government confiscated the property of the temples, then the endowments of the cities (though the latter were partially remitted). Local treasuries became notably poorer, but the same obligations still existed and people had to be found to meet them. The government typically resorted to compulsion. Councillors were obliged to pay in adequate sums when they assumed office to ensure continuation of public services, and the council as a whole had to make up any deficit in the tax collections. Members of the classes that normally provided the councillors, therefore, made every effort to evade their

burdensome obligations. A favourite method was to gain some high rank, especially that of senator, that brought immunity from local burdens. Others joined the clergy, but that escape was soon closed. As a result, the poorer or weaker members of the local aristocracies were left to shoulder a burden that soon became unbearable. Consequently, the central government came to take an ever more active role. Its officials tended to take control, and the provincial governors constantly intervened. Eventually, by the sixth century, a regular system developed in which the governor, bishop, and great landowners took over the municipal administrations.

Officially, the local governments were run by the council and people, but the people had only an insignificant role to play in the autocratic system of Late Antiquity. Their formal role had long since disappeared (no elections were held), but they could make their opinions felt in very direct ways, peaceful or violent. Assembled in the theatre, the people could cheer or boo the governor or other officials. The cheering usually took the form of ritualized acclamations led by organized claques. The central government took note of these public reactions, which could play a role in the promotion or failure of high officials. Less formally, the people could and often would riot for or against an individual or policy. In the Christian empire, these often involved the partisans of the circus factions (the over-enthusiastic supporters of teams of chariot racers) or heresies who would demonstrate vociferously, and sometimes cause considerable damage, in support of their side. Local bishops could be a focus of disturbance, and even ecumenical councils were not immune. At the other extreme were the local landed aristocracies whose members, whatever office they held, exercised considerable influence on civic life and on the empire as a whole through their extensive networks of connections. These were often the people who had escaped municipal obligations and thus had wealth and leisure. Still pagan in the fourth century, most had converted to Christianity by the fifth.

Council and people alike lived in cities that preserved a basic Roman image and structure. Cities had a core of monumental public buildings—most of them dating to the first centuries of the empire—connected by paved streets and adorned with paintings, mosaics, statues, and monuments. If a Roman from the time of Hadrian could have seen a late antique city, it would have looked familiar, but with some notable differences, that mark the late antique city as the product of both continuity and change. These concern the city walls, new religious buildings, expanding small-scale commercial activity, and a new aesthetic that placed less emphasis on classical regularity.

Roman cities had normally been open; their defences were the legions of the frontier. In the crisis of the third century when no place was safe, cities began to be fortified, surrounded by high walls with towers and elaborate

gates, taking on an appearance that was to be characteristic of urban life until modern times. Some of these were makeshift structures, slapped together from whatever materials were at hand. They normally incorporated the entire ancient urban area, often following an irregular trace to accommodate existing buildings or incorporate especially substantial ones into their circuit. Some, like the walls of Nicaea, were carefully designed along the most modern lines and so well built that they functioned for over a thousand years. Characteristically, when Diocletian established his new capital at Nicomedia, and Constantine his at Constantinople, powerful walls were considered a necessary element. The walls not only served for protection, but sharply segregated city and country and allowed greater control over the population by restricting entry and exit to a few well-defined points.

The rise of Christianity and its adoption by emperors brought another fundamental change. Ancient cities had been distinguished by their temples, some of them world-famous. They owned huge tracts of land and vast wealth. Their funds were confiscated early in the fourth century, and their structures soon succumbed. As the pagan cult was suppressed, its temples were largely abandoned or put to new uses. Those outside the city became quarries for stone, while those in the centre were often converted into churches. In some places, though, the pagan cult proved surprisingly resistant: the great temples of Athens, for example, were not converted to Christian use till the end of the period. Concurrently, the cities were adorned with churches, often displaying a magnificence appropriate to a triumphant religion. Although the majority were of the basilical plan, there was a striking variety of style throughout the eastern empire. Many churches grew up on early cult sites in cemeteries at the edge of the city, but soon most city centres also featured large churches, whether newly built or converted from pagan structures. This was especially the case of provincial capitals where the metropolitan bishop necessarily needed a large and impressive cathedral.

Cities of the East, the products of Greek or Hellenistic civilization, normally had a market place in the centre. It often served also as seat of the local administration, with civic buildings around the open market square. Market places continued to function, but were increasingly supplemented by rows of shops built along the major streets. Typically, the streets were lined with roofed colonnades for protection from the elements, paved with mosaics or cut marble. These opened to small shops which offered a great variety of products and normally consisted of two stories; the retail or manufacturing space below, and the residence of shopkeeper or artisan above. As commercial activity increased, the shops often expanded out into the street, a nuisance frequently denounced in imperial legislation. On a smaller scale, wooden booths or stalls would be set up on the pavement or between the

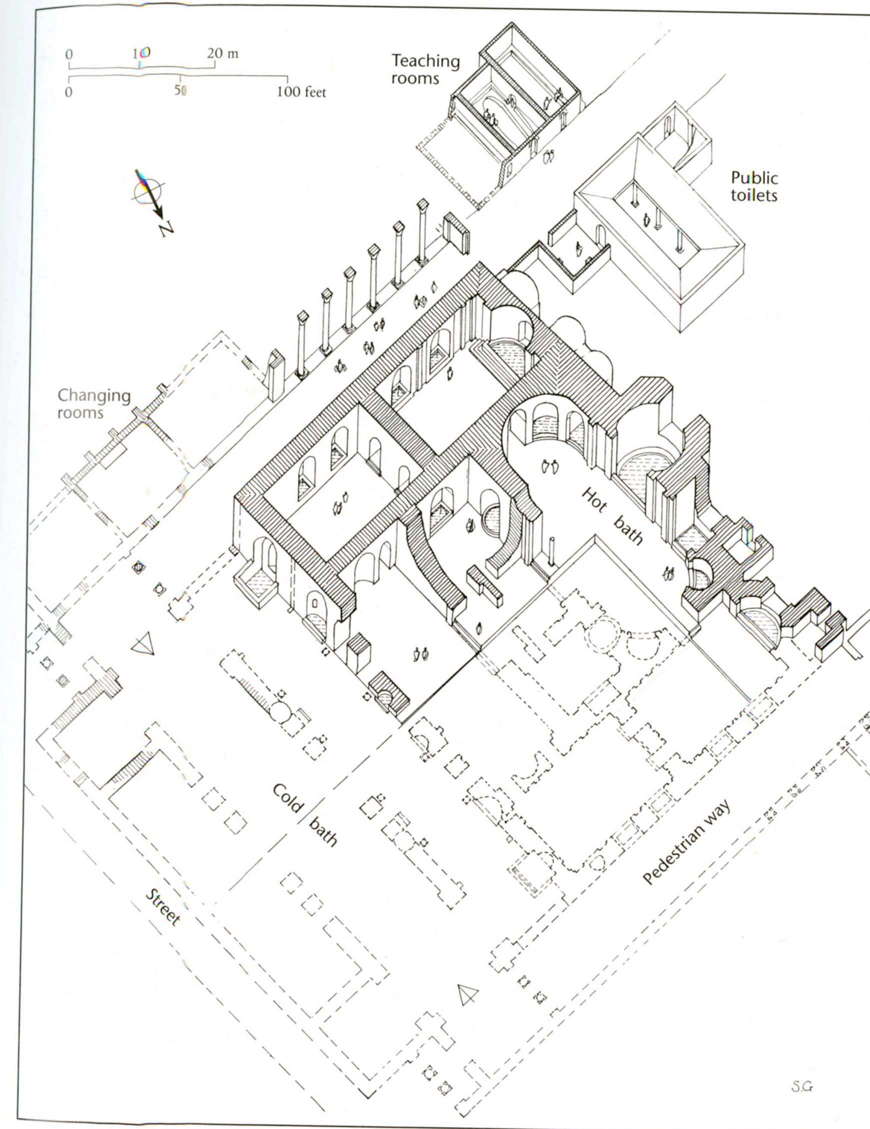
An entrance into a large walled space in the centre of Edessa, a provincial capital in Mesopotamia. The space, today the courtyard of the main mosque, may have been the principal market of the city. Fifth/sixth century.

columns that lined the streets. As time went on, the life of the street and market merged to produce something like an oriental bazaar.

Finally, the cities took on a new appearance as builders made increasing use of reused materials. Unlike the Romans who built as far as possible of solid stone or concrete, late antique builders employed rubble or stones abstracted from disused or ruined buildings (the wars of the third century and the demise of paganism produced them in abundance) and stuck them together with mortar. They often used courses of brick to level the material. This produced a rough, heterogeneous surface that needed to be covered. Layers of plaster disguised the new material and even imitated the old by being incised with rectangular lines to resemble ashlar masonry. More often,

they were painted in bright colours and geometric patterns. Combined with the mosaics that lined the pavements these produced a bright and gaudy appearance that might have seemed alien to a classical Roman. Colonnades added to the effect, by employing marble columns of different colours, often of varying height, and levelled by higher or lower bases. Irregularity and colour came to mark the cities.

Literary sources and physical remains enable us to visualize the aspect of these cities. Although most written texts have little to say about an urban environment that was taken for granted, a curious saint's Life gives a living



Public baths at Alexandria. These large baths built on a symmetrical plan in imperial style have adjoining teaching rooms. The positioning of the pools in recesses rather than in the centre of the rooms is considered a late feature. An elevated cistern to the east of the baths provided the water. Second half of the sixth century AD.

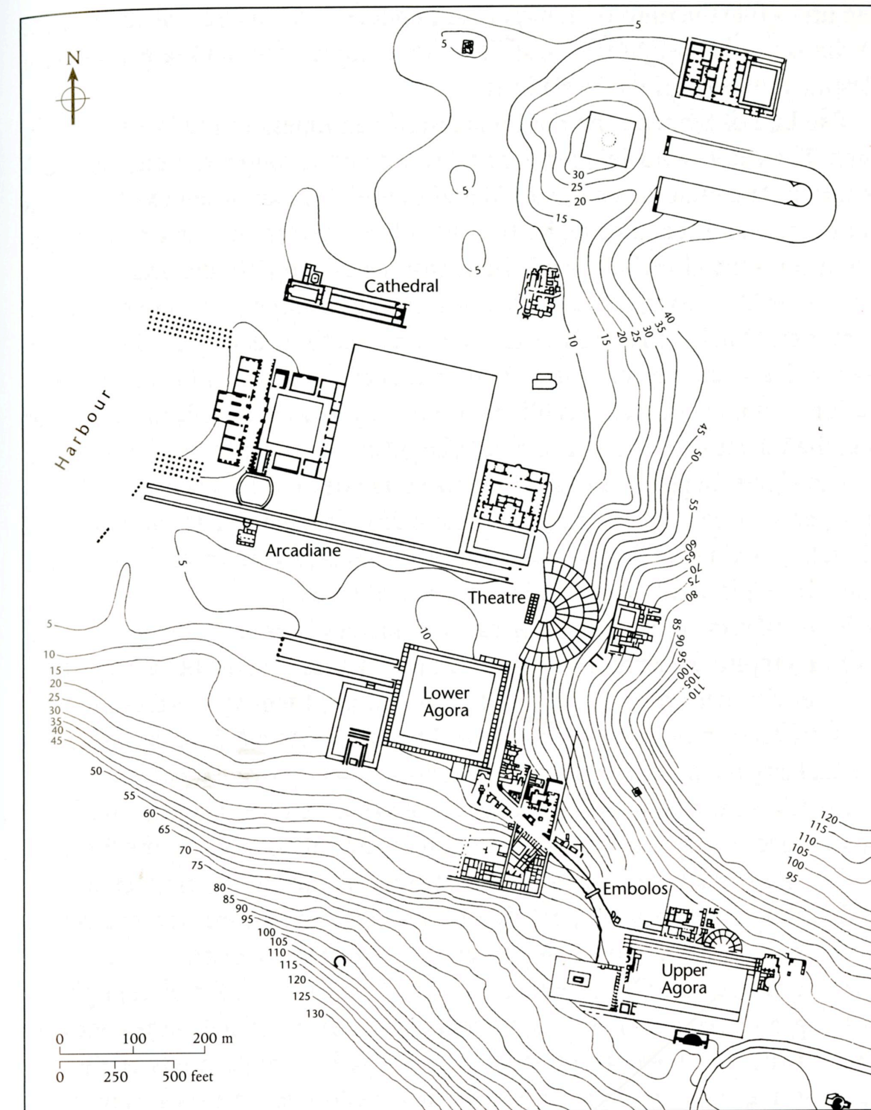
picture, while the ruins of numerous sites put the texts into a real context and at the same time illustrate the striking similarities of urban life everywhere, despite notable regional variations.

The Life of Symeon the Fool is set in Syrian Emesa in the late sixth century. The saint, who feigned lunacy, wandered through the city. His Life mentions the buildings still considered essential for an urban existence: the walls, market place, theatre, baths, and colonnaded streets, as well as an innovation—the churches—and the mansions of the rich and shacks of the poor, with the shops, stalls, workshops, and cookshops so prevalent in these centuries. Outside the walls were tombs, places for washing clothes (Emesa is on a river), open space where children played, rubbish dumps, and the execution ground. The city was filled with people as well as buildings. Symeon met the full range, from local officials, large and small businessmen, and doctors to slaves, beggars, idlers, and whores. He dealt with teachers, sellers of food and drink, bakers, jugglers, musicians, fortune-tellers, lunatics, and churchmen. Emesa, like its counterparts in Greece, Anatolia, and the Levant, was a busy place full of life and every kind of activity.

Physical remains put such stories into a material context. The lands of the eastern empire preserve many large excavated sites that enable a way of life to be envisioned in some detail. Notable among them as representing two very different types of settlement are Ephesus in Asia Minor, a busy commercial city on major trade routes by land and sea, and Apamea in Syria, the home of a wealthy landed aristocracy. The evidence these places provide can be rounded out by casting a glance at other sites of Greece and the East.

Ephesus had all the elements of a Christian Roman city. Monumental public buildings, connected by richly decorated streets, dominated the centre, while the signs of the new religion were everywhere evident.

Most cities of the Greek East had a central agora or market place; Ephesus was so grand that it had two: the upper agora that functioned as the civic centre, and the lower agora, the main market. Both were products of the first century, and contain characteristic Roman buildings. The civic centre featured an open space for ceremonial, with a temple in the centre. Around it on the north were the council house (which resembled a small theatre), the town hall or prytaneum, and the temple of Rome and Caesar; on the east, a bath–gymnasium complex; on the south, a massive fountain where the waters of the aqueducts were gathered and distributed; a street lined with shops formed the west side. A long portico gave access to the buildings on the north side. The fountain represented one of the basic characteristics of both Roman and late antique cities: provision and maintenance of a dependable water supply, often brought from great distances by aqueducts, and distributed throughout the city in public fountains and the baths.



Plan of Ephesus.

In Late Antiquity, the specifically pagan aspects of this square disappeared or were transformed: the prytaneum, where the sacred fire of Vesta was kept burning, was closed, the temple of Rome and Caesar built over, the central temple demolished, and signs of the cross carved on statues of Livia and Augustus that stood in the portico, and over the entrance of the senate house that still functioned. Since demons were commonly believed to dwell in the fabric of ancient buildings or statues, the cross was a useful prophylactic. Thus, the ancient urban fabric was maintained, but Christianized. The new age made its presence felt in another way in the street west of the square,

Facing: The theatre of Side was built in the second century AD and later adapted for gladiatorial and wild animal shows. Its continued use into the Byzantine period is indicated by inscriptions on the seats and the addition to the auditorium of two chapels.

where some of the shops added walls that extended out over the pavement, forcing the ancient classical regularity to yield to the unaesthetic demands of commerce.

The lower agora, a large open square lined with two-storey buildings built behind colonnades, maintained its shape and function. The square was used for markets, where goods could be brought by a street that led directly down to the harbour. Christianity did not affect business that continued unabated in this dynamic port city. On the other hand, the towering temple that rose on the slope above the market was transformed into a church, and the library of Celsus near the market's entrance, a benefaction of the first Greek who had entered the Roman senate, changed completely. Its interior was filled with rubble and its façade became the backdrop of a monumental fountain, a popular feature in this period. Not that the people of this age ceased reading or writing, but the entire harbour district had been devastated by a Gothic invasion in 262, and many buildings lay in ruins for a century or more. When the structure was eventually rebuilt, fashions or needs had changed.

Roman cities had a monumental core connected and adorned by an 'armature' of streets and squares. Late antique Ephesus was no exception, maintaining the principle but not the appearance. The most active street, the Embolos (the 'colonnaded street' *par excellence*), connected the two agoras. Colonnades, statues, old as well as new and transformed monuments, and lavish housing adorned it. Ephesus was so rich that its main streets were paved with marble, much of it abstracted from ruined—usually pagan—buildings. Typical of Roman cities, this was a pedestrian street, blocked to wheeled traffic by steps at its upper end. People walked, shopped, read inscriptions, scratched graffiti onto the marble, or simply loafed and played a game like *tavla* on the boards incised into the pavement. The colonnades, which often yielded to public buildings, were paved with mosaics, featured a mixture of reused columns of different coloured marbles, and had painted walls. Along their length were numerous statues of ancient and modern worthies, notably provincial governors honoured for their real or imagined benefactions. Monumental inscriptions contained the text of recent laws. Here, too, Christianity made its presence felt. A large cross bore an inscription celebrating the triumph of the cross over the 'demon' Artemis, while adjacent fountains (which replaced tombs of legendary heroes) were decorated with marble plaques with crosses in relief. On this street as elsewhere, fountains were a prominent element of the urban landscape.

Strollers along the Embolos could buy food in the restaurants that occupied part of the ground floor of a massive block of elegant dwellings, an *insula* flanked by streets that turned into steps as they climbed the slopes above

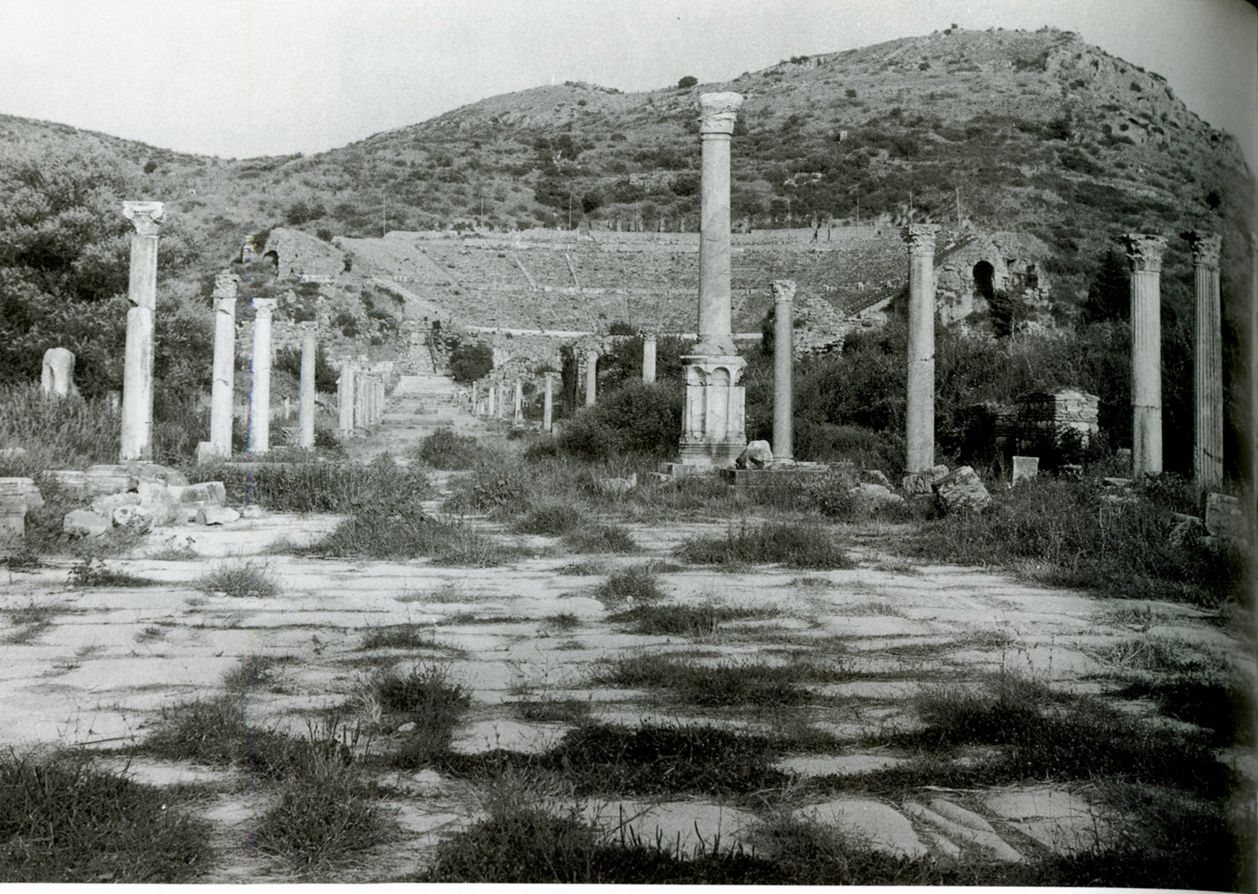
This silver gilt paten was presented by the bishop Eutychianus to the church of Sion built in rural Lycia in the mid-sixth century. The paten, 60.50 cm in diameter, is part of the largest known hoard of Byzantine church silver plate. It was discovered at modern Kumluca in Turkey.

The Second General Council (Constantinople, 381), presided over by the emperor Theodosius I, proclaimed the equal divinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while condemning both Arianism and the followers of the former bishop Macedonius. It is here shown in a miniature of cod. Paris. gr. 510 of c. AD 880.

the Embolos. This consisted of a series of houses, each of several elaborately decorated rooms. Reception rooms tended to have marble and mosaic on the floors and walls, while more private chambers were painted, often with landscapes or decoration that resembled marble. These were evidently the dwellings of the urban rich, occupying buildings in the centre of town that had seen relatively little change since they were first built in the early empire. Paintings and mosaics are so conventional that they are notoriously hard to date, for this civilization maintained a consistent style of decoration for centuries. Similar blocks, not yet excavated, lined the slopes in this part of the city. On the other hand—and this is true of all the great eastern cities—no one knows where the mass of the population lived. These rich houses hardly represent a typical urban life, and the people could not have lived in the monumental centre, for it was virtually filled with public buildings and spaces. They presumably dwelt in the outskirts, or in less substantial structures scattered around the centre, but their houses have not been discovered (though in St Symeon's Emesa they evidently lived within the walls). Consequently there is no way to calculate the population of such a city.

Much grander, and more formal, than the Embolos, was the Street of Arcadius which led in a straight line from the harbour to the square in front of the theatre, the very centre of the city. This boulevard, 11 metres wide and over 500 metres long, contained impressive monuments: a triumphal arch at the harbour, marking the entrance to the city, four huge columns in the middle that bore the statues of the four evangelists, powerful symbols of the triumph of Christianity. The colonnades, paved with mosaics, led to shops whose owners were obliged to maintain lamps to illuminate the street at night. Huge Roman bath–gymnasium complexes lined the north side of the street: the Harbour Baths, with their hot and cold baths and broad inner courtyard, damaged by the Goths and rebuilt in the mid-fourth century; a vast open exercise ground that was given up and built over in Late Antiquity, when the pressures of finance and space no longer allowed such an area to be maintained; and yet another gymnasium at the upper end of the street. Most cities had one or two of these complexes; Ephesus, a busy port thronged with visitors, had no fewer than five, all of monumental scale. These were all Roman constructions, but all were maintained in these centuries. Adjacent to one of them was a large public latrine. In addition, there was a smaller bath, without exercise ground, dedicated by a Christian lady on the Embolos. The fate of the nearby brothel, attested in a Roman inscription, is unknown, but texts that frequently mention whores in other large cities suggest that the profession was still active, especially in a busy port like Ephesus.

The Arcadian street led to the building that was usually the greatest in any city, the theatre. In this case, the vast semicircular open structure could



The street of Arcadius at Ephesus, named after the emperor, was 500 m long and was lit at night. It led from the harbour (now silted up) to the theatre (seen in the background). In the centre stands one of the four large columns that bore statues of the Evangelists.

accommodate some 25,000 people, but they did not come in this period to see classical drama. Performances featured singing and dancing and as often as not had a strong pornographic element. The theatres also served as the venue for public meetings, the only legitimate way the people could make their views known under despotism. Acclamations and riots that started in the theatre were frequent occurrences, especially during the two church councils held in Ephesus in 430 and 449, when mobs, stirred by speeches in the theatre, rushed through the streets in support of one faction or another. They were perhaps more concerned with the power and glory of their city than the abstruse theological doctrines involved. In any case, the theatre was such an essential building that it was constantly repaired and maintained, leaving its classical appearance unchanged.

Another venue of entertainment was the stadium, where athletic contests took place. It, too, kept its form and function, though the most popular activity, watching and supporting the teams of chariot races, could not have been accommodated in its narrow course. Graffiti on the public streets attest to Ephesian enthusiasm for the racing teams of Blues and Greens; their activity presumably took place outside the urban centre, perhaps in the open, for hippodromes were enormous buildings that few cities could afford. In

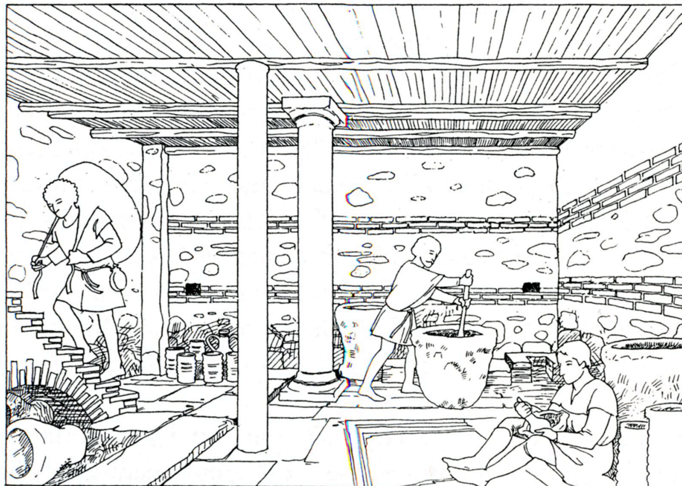
the late antique East, hippodromes were built to adorn imperial residences like Antioch and Thessalonica, where they stood adjacent to palaces, following the models of Rome and Constantinople. Several other cities in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, though, had older structures that were still kept in use.

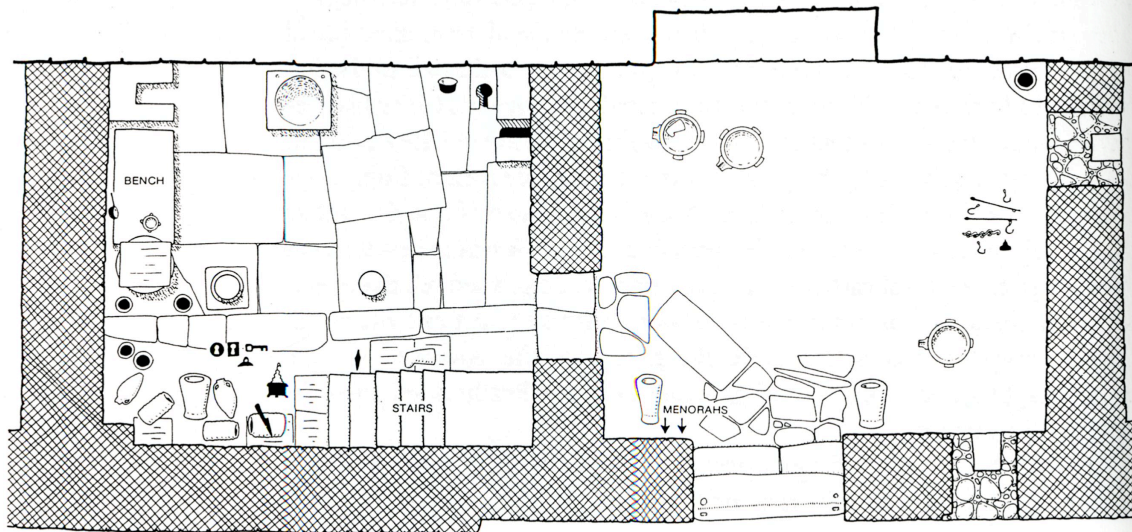
Finally, Ephesus was a great centre of Christianity. The most important church within the city was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. This enormous basilica, 75 metres long, had an atrium and baptistery and adjoined the bishop's palace. All were accommodated in what had been one wing of the precinct of the grandiose temple of Hadrian. This was the site of two church councils. More revered, though, was the church of St John, on a hill a mile outside the city. Built over the Evangelist's tomb, it was famed throughout the empire for an annual miracle in which sacred dust, capable of healing all kinds of ills, issued forth from the tomb. The all-night service when this took place coincided with a fair that brought buyers and sellers from a wide region. Pilgrimage was a main factor in the fame and prosperity of the city.

The baths of Scholasticia at Ephesus bordered the Embolos leading from the lower to the upper agora. The baths were rebuilt at the end of the fourth century by a Christian woman of that name, whose statue was set up near the entrance.

Justinian rebuilt the church as a magnificent domed cruciform structure richly decorated with marble and mosaics and prominently displaying his name and that of his less than saintly consort Theodora. It significantly overlooked the ruins of what had been one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Diana of the Ephesians. In Christian times, this became a major quarry, the source of the stones used in many public buildings. Its fate was typical of temples that lay outside cities.

Tradition made Ephesus the home of St John, St Timothy, Mary Magdalene, the Seven Sleepers, and many other holy figures. Their shrines, which became important centres of international pilgrimage and attracted huge throngs, lay outside the city. The Seven Sleepers, whose miraculous 200-year sleep ended in the fifth century, were eventually buried in a cave that had been part of the necropolis, for here as elsewhere, the city of the dead stretched outside the gates that separated it from the city of the living. This, too, became a site of great renown for pilgrims.



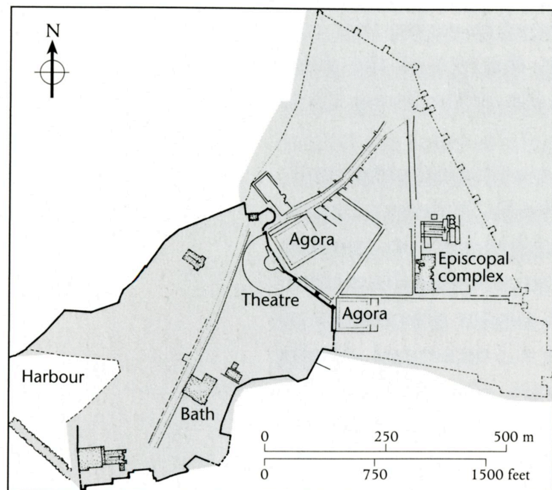


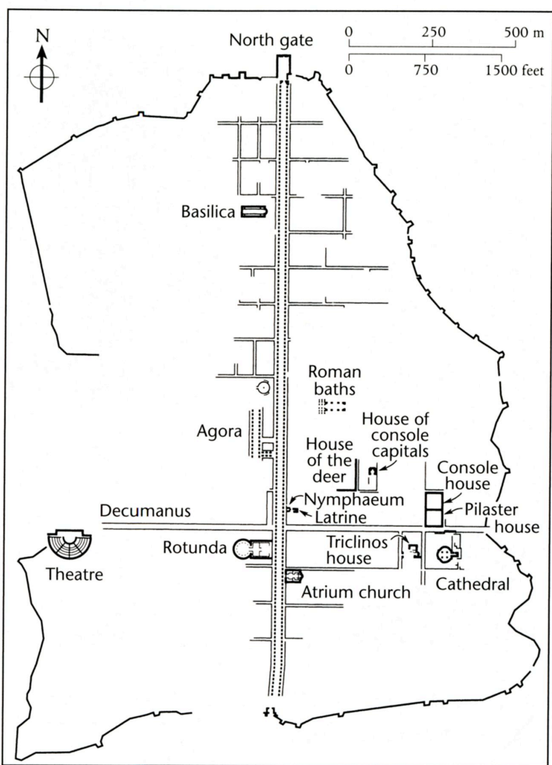
Plan of the ground floor and reconstruction of a dyer's shop on the colonnaded street by the synagogue at Sardis. When the shops were destroyed by fire in *c.*616 the upper storey collapsed onto the lower and pinned down the contents (containers with dye, mortars, steelyards) as shown on the plan.

Ephesus illustrates urban life at its most prosperous, with a colourful environment that can easily be envisioned populated like St Symeon's Emesa. Other cities show the universality of such places, though usually on a smaller scale, but their remains often add variations that help to complete the picture. In Asia Minor Sardis, Aphrodisias, and Side present similar phenomena of a flourishing urban life, recognizably Roman yet Christianized. Sardis brings a new element: an important Jewish community. The massive bath–gymnasium complex at the west end of the city included two long structures that projected from the main façade. One of them became a synagogue in the third century and so remained throughout the period. In plan, it closely resembles a basilical church, with a typical rich decoration of marble and mosaics, and numerous inscriptions identifying the donors. It is much grander than the synagogues that formed an important element of the rural landscape in the Holy Land (though in many cities synagogues were converted into churches). Outside the complex, the wall is lined with shops whose Christian and Jewish owners dyed clothes and sold hardware as well as other goods. They did business primarily with copper coins, which have been found there in large numbers. The shops flank a colonnaded street whose mismatched columns and bases display a disregard for symmetry that was common in Late Antiquity.

Aphrodisias was originally a temple city built around the great shrine of Aphrodite. Under the Romans it acquired the usual complement of public buildings, richly decorated with the marble that was quarried nearby. They included the theatre, odeon, baths, monumental fountains, broad marble-paved porticoes, and a remarkable passageway dedicated to the imperial cult. At the edge of the city was a vast stadium, adjacent to the marble-faced walls of the fourth century. All these were put to use in Late Antiquity, with the usual transformations, but still leaving the city a more Roman appearance than most. Since the temple stood in the centre of the city, unlike those of Ephesus and Sardis that lay outside the walls, it was necessarily put to new use as the local cathedral, a conversion accomplished relatively late, in the fifth century. On either side were two extensive late antique villas with apsidal reception rooms, evidently the palaces of the governor and the bishop. In this case, religion and government symbolically dominated the central urban space.

At Side, the theatre and agora occupied the centre, connected by broad colonnaded streets to the city gate and to the harbour. One entire district was





Above: Plan of Side.
Below: Plan of Apamea.

devoted to the cathedral and a vast complex of bishop's palace and related buildings. Another massive basilica towered over the harbour where it replaced two small temples dedicated to Apollo and Artemis. Inscriptions reveal that the city was divided into four districts, each named for a prominent monument, and each with its own council of elders. Inscriptions in the major cities of the East commonly name the provincial governor as a main benefactor. Governors, who served relatively short terms in a notoriously corrupt system, were anxious to leave monuments of their administration in order to win approval and gain ever-higher rank. Since they were in control of the civic revenues, they were in a position to become prime patrons in an age when the local councils were impoverished and the private benefaction of the Roman past had virtually died out. Governors carried out most of their activity in the cities where they resided. Consequently, places like Ephesus, Sardis, or Aphrodisias flourished while others enjoyed far less patronage. Laws actually admonished governors from taking stones or decorations from minor cities in order to adorn their capitals. Cities like Side, though, that were the seats of metropolitan archbishops, also shared in the government's generosity.

Other sites add other details or follow different developments. In Athens, for example, third-century invasions reduced the city to a small fraction of its ancient area. Eventually, it acquired buildings for its still-famed philosophical schools. Long a centre of paganism, its main temples were only converted into churches in the sixth century. Thessalonica, on the other hand, flourished thanks to its massive walls and its role as a regional capital. A whole district was given over to the palace of Galerius (305–11) and associated buildings, including a grand rotunda, a triumphal arch, and a hippodrome. Later, there was a burst of building activity when the city became the headquarters of the diocese of Illyricum in the mid-fifth century. This included rebuilding and expanding the walls and building two

The north–south street (*cardo*) of Apamea in Syria was built in the course of the second century AD and was nearly 2 km long. Behind the colonnades were shops, some of which still exhibit painted inscriptions specifying prices of wine and other commodities.

large basilicas, one of which, dedicated to St Demetrius, became a major centre of pilgrimage. Philippi, likewise, was adorned with huge new basilicas, some of unusual plan. Its richly decorated octagonal cathedral, dedicated to the apostle Paul, became the centre of an ecclesiastical quarter, as at Side. In this case, ecclesiastical buildings were dominant; but in all regional capitals, church and government left a powerful mark on the urban landscape.

Apamea in Syria was a very different kind of city, dominated more by a rich aristocracy than by public life. This city had a more regular plan than

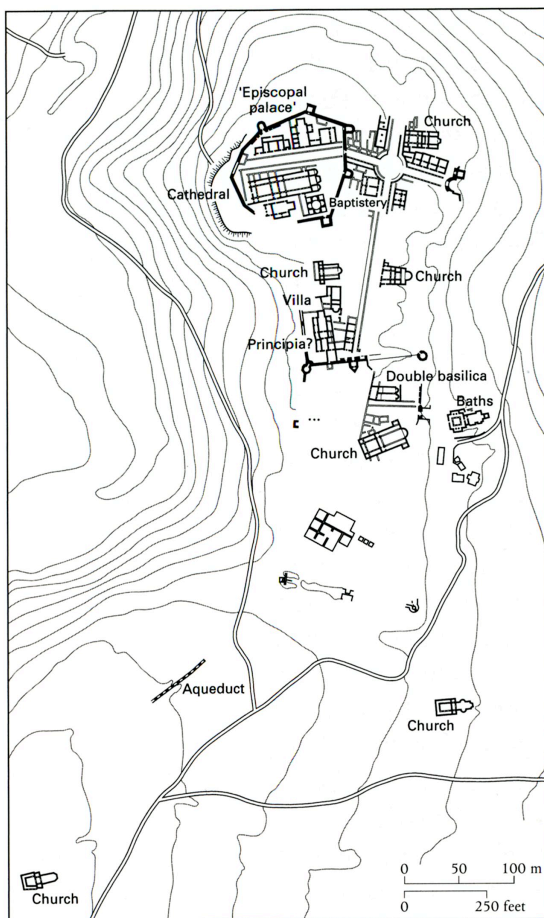
Facing: Hunt mosaic which covered the floor of one of the three reception rooms of a large mansion at Apamea believed to have been the palace of the provincial governor. AD 539.

most, with streets crossing each other at right angles to form regular blocks or *insulae*. A grand colonnaded street, two kilometres long and 20 metres wide, formed the axis of the city. Paved with limestone and decorated with mosaics in the colonnades, it provided access to the major public buildings: the agora, baths, a monumental fountain, a large latrine, and, via another broad intersecting boulevard, the theatre. Shops lined the two boulevards whose intersection was marked by a vast rotunda. With its rich decoration of cut marble, it appears to have been the shrine where Apamea's most sacred relic, a piece of the True Cross, was kept. Opposite was a large church, while nearby on the intersecting boulevard stood the cathedral, approached by a monumental staircase and a colonnaded courtyard. This massive domed tetraconch was the centre of a complex with numerous rooms, courts, and a bath, which appears to have been the bishop's palace. All three of these churches manifested novel plans and a rich sixth-century décor.

The remains that give Apamea its distinctive character are the enormous aristocratic mansions that fill much of its centre. Typically, they occupied entire blocks of some 55 by 110 metres. These were inward-looking structures, focused on internal courtyards; they presented blank walls to the streets, and their entrances gave little hint of what was inside. Apsidal reception and banquet rooms flanked the main colonnaded courtyards, reflecting the entertainment that was a central part of an aristocratic lifestyle. Smaller rooms on the ground floor were perhaps used for service and storage, but functional rooms like kitchens, baths, and toilets seem completely absent. The bedrooms were apparently on an upper floor. One large house, which has three apsidal halls and numerous smaller rooms, stood near the cathedral and may have been the palace of the governor.

Rare texts and abundant remains enable urban life to be visualized, and in one case inscriptions reveal the variegated life of the people. The necropolis of Corycus in southern Asia Minor contains nearly 400 epitaphs that name the occupations of the deceased. They reveal a vast range of occupations ranging from public and ecclesiastical officials to sausage-sellers, barbers, and dancers. Prominent among them are merchants and artisans (often overlapping categories). Manufactures included clothes, linen, leather, shoes, pottery, hardware, glass, and purple dye. People worked gold, stone, and marble and produced and sold many food products: fruit, vegetables, nuts, fish, bread, wine, oil, cakes, pastries, and drinks. Bankers, carpenters, architects, lawyers, tailors, cleaners, and keepers of shops, taverns, restaurants, and inns added to the complement of activities. All these need to be imagined in the context of such buildings and streets and harbours as those of Ephesus.

The cities were not static, but each followed its own and regional



Among Justinian's many building projects was the new city of Justiniana Prima erected in *c.*530 at his birthplace (modern Caričin Grad in Serbia). Although built on a small scale, it had traditional urban features including a forum, porticoed streets, shops, baths, an aqueduct as well as a cathedral, and a military *principia*.

developments. Those of Asia Minor flourished throughout Late Antiquity, but in Syria, the great cities of Antioch and Apamea suffered severe disasters in the sixth century, while many places in Greece were devastated in the third and succumbed to further invasions in the late sixth. In most places, the heights of prosperity were reached in the late fifth and early sixth centuries; the work of Justinian was especially evident in many. Almost all, however, succumbed to the invasions and economic changes of the early seventh century to yield, in Greece and Asia Minor, to fortresses, and in Syria to the new centres of Islam.

Agriculture was the main occupation of the Roman empire, and villages, market towns, and scattered small settlements contained the vast majority of the population. Life in such places was very different from that of the cities, with few if any of the public works and services that characterized urban life; yet an active community life still flourished in highly varied settings. Texts and remains present a detailed image of this life, but focus on only a few regions. The most important texts are the Lives of two saints from sixth-century Asia Minor, Theodore of Sykeon and Nicholas of Myra. Remains illustrate the environment of St Nicholas, as well as that of several marginal areas in Syria and Palestine. In these cases, remarkably well-preserved villages and towns reveal a high standard of living and an unexpected degree of wealth, even in remote areas. Nevertheless, they also show that rural life was far poorer than urban, both materially and culturally.

Theodore of Sykeon passed most of his life in the villages of Galatia in central Asia Minor, where the accounts of his miracles allow considerable insight into conditions of the time. They reveal the prevalence of religion and superstition, the problems that afflicted country life, the organization of a communal existence and its relations with the sometimes distant but always powerful government. The country contained a dense network of prosperous villages, with wheatfields and vineyards, cattle, mules, and oxen. Each had one or more churches or chapels and a population attentive to the teachings of a local holy man. The people, overwhelmingly farmers, also included

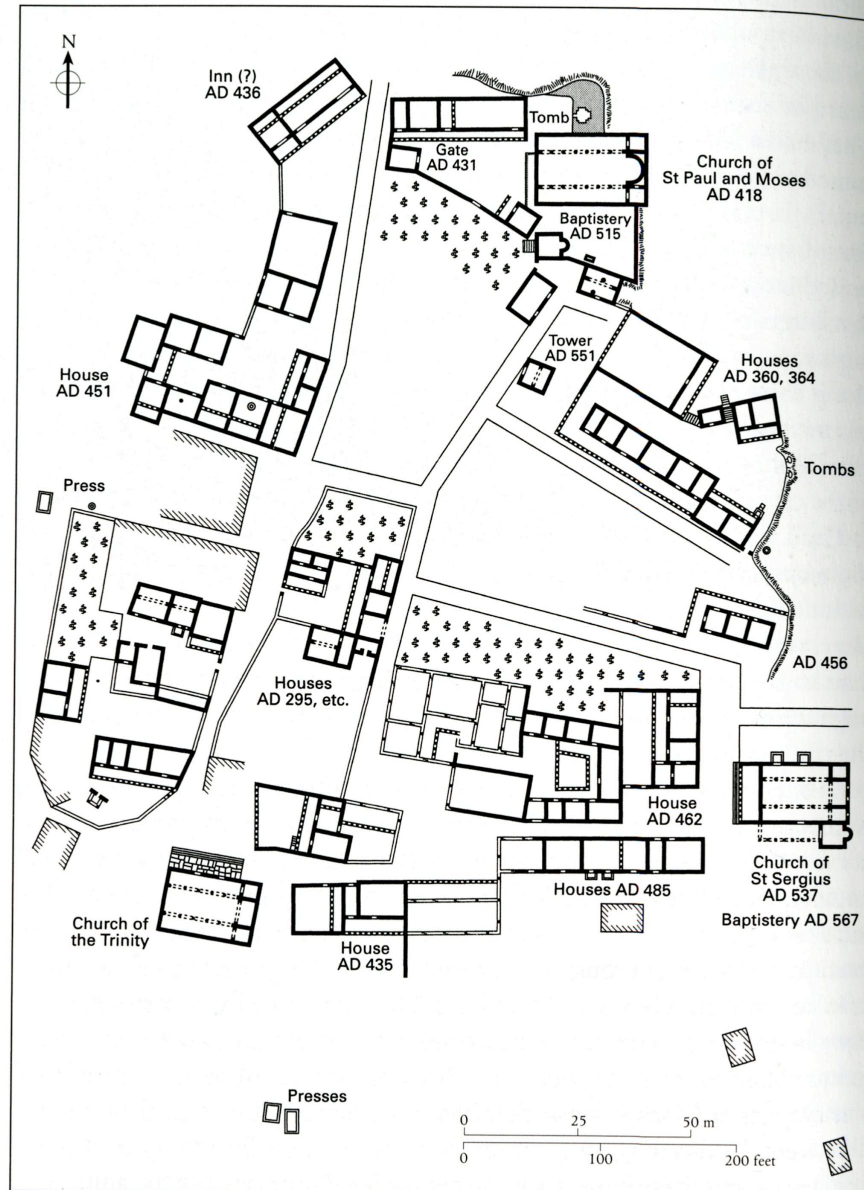
smiths, lime-burners and builders as well as teachers, sorcerers, fortune-tellers, and real or quack doctors. Protection from disease and other afflictions was a constant need, for the countryside suffered from drought, floods, hail, locusts, worms, and beetles, while the people had a variety of ills of which the most feared was the plague. There were frequent cases of chronic or temporary madness, whose cause was believed to be demonic possession. Demons dwelt everywhere, notably in the ancient pagan ruins that abounded. They could only be driven out by the potent exorcism of a holy man, in a public ritual that stirred local emotions.

These villagers were free and evidently in possession of their land (little is heard of the tenants of the large estates that predominated in other areas). They had a local administration run by the landowners and elders, who assumed various titles. Normally they ran their own affairs, but the strong and usually brutal hand of the government would intervene to quell any serious disturbance or investigate violation of the laws, which included digging for buried treasure. News would reach the central authorities via the highways that intersected this countryside and formed a separate environment. The highways were part of the state. Armies, high officials, messengers passed along them, changing horse at the posting stations, sleeping in the inns and consorting with the prostitutes who often worked there. Like the great estates of the aristocracy that dotted the countryside, especially in the vicinity of the cities, they were more closely tied to the cities than to the countryside.

The Life of St Nicholas presents a similar situation in a different setting, the mountains instead of the plains. In addition to grain and wine, products include timber, so that wood and stone cutting are important local activities. Here, too, each village has its own church, and the villagers rely on the holy man to cure their ills and drive out evil spirits. In this more remote region, pagan practices survived longer, as they did in other mountainous parts of the country. Nevertheless, the Life makes it clear that the villages were closely connected with the city, and that trade was an essential element of their existence, allowing a high level of prosperity to be maintained. The prosperity is evident in the remains of numerous villages in the hills above Myra, where compact groups of fieldstone houses, many built on terraces, surrounded the local stone church, itself often elegantly built and decorated. Among them was the monastery of Holy Zion founded by St Nicholas himself. Its structure has survived, along with its spectacular treasure of silver plate that attests the surprising wealth of a remote church. The shrine evidently attracted pilgrims and rich patrons from the prosperous coastal cities, for Lycia included a shoreline full of small towns and villages that continued eastwards into Cilicia.

This maritime region formed another environment, prospering not so

much from agriculture—many of its sites occupy rocky promontories or offshore islands that could never have been self-sufficient—but from the trade that flourished in the entire eastern Mediterranean, especially districts on the coastal routes between Constantinople and the Near East. These coastlands contain extensive remains of stone houses and churches. They prospered while interior districts, particularly mountainous ones without fertile land or far from trade routes, were seriously afflicted by banditry or revolts that be-



Plan of Dar Qita, a village in the limestone hills of Syria.

Two-storey houses at Serjilla in the limestone hills of Syria. The façade is enlivened by niches and well-carved mouldings surrounding the doors and windows. Sixth century.

came especially acute in the sixth century. Rapacious governors and tax collectors were one affliction for the peasant; large landowners, who even kept private armies, and the military, who often succumbed to the temptation to loot, were another.

Syria contains the best preserved remains of villages in the eastern empire. A network of some 700 villages forms a spectacular landscape in the limestone hills above the Orontes river. Each usually contains between twenty and fifty stone houses and one or more churches. The houses, irregularly laid out along alleys or enclosures rather than streets, present blank walls to the outside and are often roughly clustered around the perimeter of the village to keep out marauders or wild animals. They are normally two-storey structures with open verandas overlooking inner courtyards, with the rooms (most commonly two to four, but with great variation) on the upper floor. The elegance of their stonework misled early investigators into thinking that they were the dwellings of a rural aristocracy, but there is nothing aristocratic or urban about these houses, for the people lived upstairs and the animals on

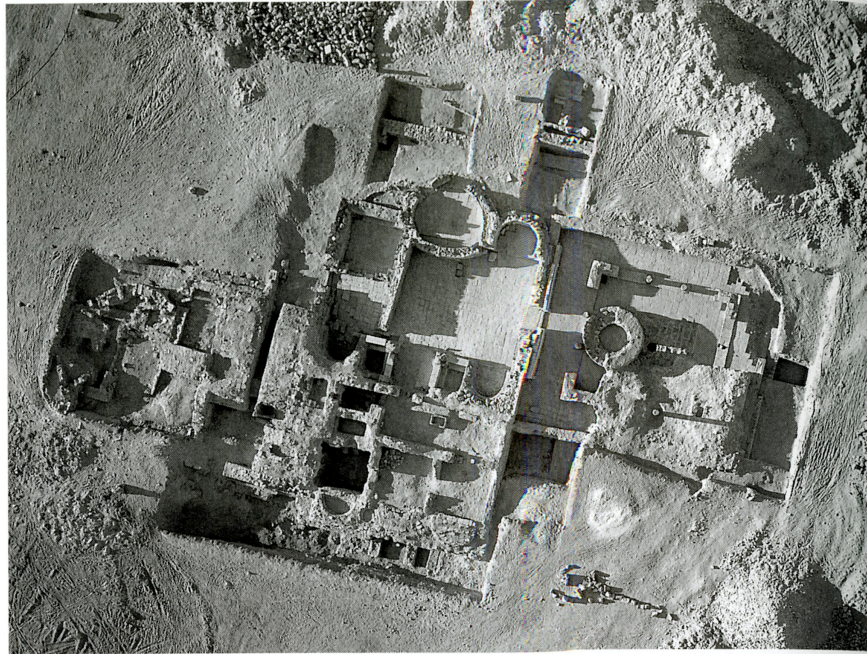
Two public buildings at Serjilla. On the left is the bath built in 473 by Julianus and his wife Domna for the use of the village, as stated in a pavement inscription. The porticoed building to the right may be an inn.

the ground floor, while the courtyards were used for animals and domestic activities, not receptions or ceremonies. The houses rarely have latrines or separate rooms for kitchens, and no baths or running water. Among the 700 villages, there are only five public baths, and virtually no public buildings. The amenities of the city were alien to the countryside whose inhabitants had to travel far to enjoy them.

These villagers lived from growing olives, a major cash crop which they turned into oil in presses located, like other industrial activities, on the periphery of the villages. This was overwhelmingly the most important activity, supplemented by orchards and livestock. These products were sold to the neighbouring cities, but evidence for local trade is scarce: the villages contain no buildings that can be identified as shops or bazaars. Temporary stalls or local fairs were presumably the mechanisms of local exchange. In any case, oil, wheat, and wool provided the surplus which enabled the locals to build their stone houses—and frequently to add rooms to them—and to contribute to the churches, whose elegant, even grandiose buildings also contained treasures or gold coin or silver plate that evidently represented the accumulated capital of the countryside. They show that the demanding late antique government did not, as sometimes maintained, drain the wealth of the country for the benefit of itself or the cities, but allowed such regions as this to grow and prosper.

Left: The large church at Qalb Loseh in the limestone hills of Syria preserves part of its stone roofing. The side aisles have been opened up by the use of widely spaced piers supporting broad arches, instead of the traditional colonnade. Fifth century.

Below: Remains of a large village at Sha'ib Shahr south-east of Edessa in Mesopotamia. The stone masonry of the two-storey houses resembles that of the limestone hills in northern Syria.



Right: Aerial view of the bath built in *c.*558 at Androna in the Syrian steppe. Although identified as a village (*kome*), this large site has two sets of circuit walls, a barracks, a dozen churches, and large water reservoirs.

Below: Situated close to Androna is Qasr ibn Wardan, a 'desert estate' of the type found in the Umayyad period. It had a church, a barracks (561), and, here, a palace with a large triconch reception hall, built in 564.

Many regions also featured much larger settlements, which did not have the municipal status or bishops that defined cities, but were on a different scale from the villages. These contained a hundred or more houses (sometimes larger, though usually of the village type), numerous churches, open spaces perhaps used as markets, and even an occasional bath. Some of these are on the frontiers, where they also feature fortification walls, towers, barracks, and military headquarters. Most remarkable among them are the large settlements of the Negev in the desert of southern Palestine which could easily be mistaken for small cities, except that they lack the characteristic urban amenities. Among them in the arid countryside are the remains of much smaller scattered settlements, some apparently used by transhumants or nomads.

The greatest monument of the Syrian countryside is not a village or city but a monastery. The cruciform church of St Symeon was built in the fifth century around the pillar where the saint had dwelt. Its scale and lavish decoration suggest imperial patronage, and its location near a major highway allowed it to attract pilgrims from far and near. They were lodged in hostels in the town below the church and were evidently a major factor in the local economy, especially since their great feasts attracted a wide public who came for business as much as piety. These festivals usually included a regional trade fair that could bring people together from great distances and contributed seriously to the local economy. Such shrines existed throughout the empire, sometimes in cities (most notably Jerusalem, as well as Ephesus and Thessalonica) or not far from them (as the grand complex of St Thecla near Seleucia in Isauria), and rarely in the remote countryside, as Mount Sinai. These sites, usually the most renowned of their region, often included monasteries which formed an important element of both rural and urban environments. Monks performed works of piety and charity, but could also play a role in local manufacture. The monasteries, which ranged from small desert cells to grand urban or suburban complexes, appeared everywhere, but most commonly in or near cities. They employed an essentially domestic architecture for most of their buildings.

Cities, market towns, villages, and monasteries all formed part of an interdependent system connected by trade and reinforced by the political and ecclesiastical system. However Christianized, they maintained the fundamental structures of the Graeco-Roman world, with its prosperous cities embedded in the vast countryside on which they depended, as much as the villages depended on them. Although amenities and public works sharply differentiated the worlds of city and country, trade and the economy bound them together. When the cities declined or collapsed, a different world was created.