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When Rural Resilience Came to the City: Libanios on Villagers Moving through Fourth-Century Antioch

Abstract

In the fourth century AD, the relation between the city of Antioch and its hinterland underwent significant change. In response both to environmental transformation and the consequences of human intervention, resilient rural communities in the Amuq plain north-east of the city took on new political, economic, and religious significance. From a distinctively urban perspective, the sophist Libanios criticized and deplored this development, most famously in his oration 47 from around the year 390 with regard to the emerging political and judicial independence of larger villages in the Antiochene. The same phenomenon was addressed roughly 50 years later by the Christian author Theodoret of Kyrrhos, who, however, appreciated the new rural self-confidence as a religious revival spearheaded by holy men. But just as the late antique realities of villagers and city-dwellers rarely met, neither physically nor intellectually or culturally, also the contrasting perspectives represented by Libanios and Theodoret remained largely disconnected. In one instance, however, Libanios related an account of hinterland representatives that moved through Antioch’s urban space, confronted the city with a specifically Antiochene type of rural resilience, and challenged, according to Libanios, much of what Antioch stood for. As such, this episode highlights the importance of mobility in city-hinterland relations and, pointedly, its significance for the study of rural resilience in late antiquity.

In his famous praise of Antioch from 356 AD, the so-called Antiochikos, the orator Libanios walks us, as it were, through the relation between Antioch and its hinterland, the Antiochene. Starting in the old city centre, we roam through Antioch’s splendour, the enormous colonnades, the hippodrome, the theatre, and the baths. The scene is both impressive and busy, for there are construction works everywhere. As we eventually leave the urban hustle behind, pass the Daphne gate, and enter “that which lies outside” (tà ἔξω), we find ourselves in the world of villages (κωμώμα), caravanserais, and estates hidden among the trees – in short, in a rural environment, bucolic and splendidous to be sure, but still rural. Libanios reminds us

1 Lib. or. 11.218-229.
2 Lib. or. 11.230-234.
that this also is Antioch. The outskirts’ magnificent conditions alone “show quite clearly that they belong to this city (πόλις) of ours”. Indeed, it seems, as if “a likeness has passed on from the city to what lies outside the walls”, and that not only entails the beauty of the buildings but also the societies that populate Antioch’s hinterland, its surpassingly fertile χώρα. Libanios mentions “large and populous villages” (κόμμα μεγάλα καὶ πολυάνθρωποι) whose inhabitants independently of Antioch conduct trade with other villages, celebrate their own festivals with visitors from outside, and indulge in the same relaxations and pleasures as the urban populace within the walls. Thus, by presenting the Antiochene as being made up of reflections of the city – many Antiochs en miniature, as it were – Libanios seemingly evokes the idea of an ancient polis as an internally differentiated complex of city and hinterland.

For the greater part, by considering the Antiochene through the purview of the city, the latter’s influence upon, and its domination of the hinterland, modern historiography of late antique Antioch, has adopted a similar perspective. As Andrea De Giorgi states, perhaps in a slightly too unambiguous manner, the scholarly attention on the city has overemphasized its prominence and neglected “the complexity of its relation with a vast territory”. In consequence, De Giorgi’s seminal study from 2016 takes on an alternative perspective by putting the hinterland centre stage, “the men and women who shaped this region, with attention to their mobility, resilience, and ultimately competence in tapping into a variety of resources”. The political, economical, social, and ecological history of the fourth-century Antiochene, indeed, motivates this approach, as it provides evidence for a well-defined adaptation to ecological change, subsequent transformation, and ultimately resilient rural communities that in turn challenged the polis-complex just as much as the city proper.

This article, now, tries to cover a middle ground between an urban and a rural perspective, albeit to a modest scope. Its centrepiece is one single episode of villagers moving through the city as reported by Libanios around the year 386 from a distinctly urban point of view. However, by focusing on the meaning of this movement, I shall supplement Libanios’ representation of it with the perspective of the moving subjects, and ultimately undercut the orator’s urban perspective. In doing so, my discussion rests upon two more general assumptions. First, I consider movement to be meaningful. While any movement implies a displacement from one point to another, the actual act of moving is much more concrete, as it plays out in between those points in space. It is here where movement articulates its meaning and becomes what has been classified as mobility. People that move, therefore, are mobile people, that is, they move as somebody, in our case as villagers. And second, as if in a triangle of mobility, the concrete physical spaces it proceeds through, and of witnesses – be it people seeing and reacting to it, material remnants, or written accounts –, movement inscribes itself into space and thereby constructs, reconfigures, or even constitutes the latter. In other words,

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3 Lib. or. 11.230.
4 Lib. or. 11.232.
5 Lib. or. 11.270.
6 Lib. or. 11.230.
7 Mordechai’s outstanding article on Antioch’s urban resilience in the sixth century AD (Mordechai 2018) is an example of this trend.
8 De Giorgi 2016, 3.
9 De Giorgi 2016, 178. See below for more on “Social-Ecological-Systems”.
10 Cresswell 2006, esp. 2-4.
movement considered in this triangle has an impact on real, perceived, or even imagined space.\textsuperscript{11} If villagers, hence, move through the city, it must be assumed that on one level or another their movement has an impact on it. In our case, the impact was a concrete challenge to the city and its institutions. In its most forceful variation, this challenge arose in resilient rural communities that became known as κώμαι μεγάλαι, the same ones as mentioned by Libanios in the passage discussed above. Not all of them, however, were as integrated a part of the Antiochene polis as the harmonious vision of the Antiochikos is suggesting.

To be sure, the Antiochikos is, first and foremost, a masterpiece of rhetoric and must therefore not be taken at face value.\textsuperscript{12} Yet, the oration’s point that there were town-like κώμαι μεγάλαι outside of the city does reflect a reality confirmed by material and geoarchaeological evidence from the Amuq plain – Antioch’s breadbasket northeast of the city – and the limestone massif south of the plain and east of Antioch.\textsuperscript{13} The town of Imma (a southern district of today’s Reyhanlı), situated at the fringes of the Amuq plain, roughly 40 kilometres northeast of the city, is a case in point.\textsuperscript{14} In former times not much more than a waypost on the road connecting Antioch with Beroea, Imma rose to economic, political, and religious prominence in the third and fourth centuries, as is evidenced by large public buildings, religious epigraphy, economic infrastructure such as canals and watermills, and the sprawl of lesser villages on the northern slopes of the limestone massif, just south of the town, which constituted an economic and political network with Imma itself.\textsuperscript{15} Imma’s upgrading from a waypost or village to a town represents a more general transformation of Antioch’s hinterland during late antiquity, a process that has been summarized as a reduction in the number of existing villages in the Amuq plain and their consolidation into larger settlements on the limestone massif and its slopes.\textsuperscript{16} This reorganization of the Antiochene seems to have been critical for the relation between city and hinterland, as it changed during late antiquity.

An important factor contributing to the transformation was environmental change in the plain, whose most distinctive feature until its drainage in the middle of the twentieth century was the so-called lake of Antioch. The lake was originally formed by the confluence of a number of rivers, the largest being the Orontes from the south, the Afrin from the east, and the Kara Su from the north. Over the course of centuries, roughly from the second millennium BC well into Roman times, the lake’s ecosystem provided rich opportunity for farming and settlement. In late antiquity, however, the lake and its marshlands grew, rendering agriculture in the plain much harder. The reasons behind this environmental change were both of a natural character and induced by human intervention. Geoarchaeological evidence suggests that the Orontes riverbed, which had been the lake’s natural run-off, eventually debouching into the Mediterranean, aggraded to such an extent that the incoming water from the Afrin

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[11]{Hölkeskamp 2015, esp. 47.}
\footnotetext[12]{Saliou 2018.}
\footnotetext[13]{Dagron 1979. See Catherine Saliou’s commentary on Lib. or. 11.230 in Libanios 2016, 173-175 for a discussion on terminology. In addition to the references given in Saliou’s commentary it should be noted that Eusebius used the term κώμη μεγίστη / μεγάλη extensively in his Onomasticon. See Eusebius / Hieronymus 2017, 354-355.}
\footnotetext[14]{On Imma as a κώμη μεγάλη see Theod. H.R. 7.1.}
\footnotetext[15]{Gerritsen et al. 2008, 254 and 264-265.}
\footnotetext[16]{De Giorgi 2016, 92.}
\end{footnotes}
and the Kara Su probably did not efficiently drain anymore. As a consequence, the lake grew.\(^{17}\)

As what regards human intervention, extensive deforestation and cultivation on the slopes of the limestone massif south of the lake may have contributed to erosion and, subsequently, to additional water flowing into the plain. In this context, the construction of canals in the plain, probably used for aggradation as well as drainage, attests to adaptation by human intervention. Yet, also these canals seem to have contributed to the formation of further marshes.\(^{18}\) The transformation of settlement structures in the plain, that is, the abandonment of smaller settlements in the lake’s vicinity and their consolidation on the slopes of the massif, as in the case of Imma, may thus be best understood as a consequence of adaptation to environmental change.

What turned this adaptation into a case of rural resilience, however, was not just the resulting reorganization of settlement structures but, more decisively, the ensuing political prominence and economic success of the newly formed towns, which was fuelled by the existing agriculture on the highlands.\(^{19}\) The refinement of olives and grapes became an ever growing industry, which catered to markets as far as Constantinople and rivalled the traditional economic hegemony of Antioch over its hinterland.\(^{20}\) But to an even fuller extent were these shifts in the hinterland bound to challenge the traditional relationship between city and countryside, that is, Libanios’ idea of the classical polis that we began with.

In contrast to an idealized relationship between city and village, it has been argued, the blunt reality in Syria was “a non-relationship”.\(^{21}\) Villagers engaged with the city only when they provided services to it, sold their produce on the market, or appeared in court, while urban interest in anything rural was framed and constrained by the collection of money: rent, interest rates, and taxes. Just as the city as a whole, therefore, “lay beyond the horizon of the village”,\(^ {22}\) so did the rural life with its own complexities escape the city dwellers’ attention. In the Antiochene, this traditional relationship rested upon urban ownership of land, such as was the case with Libanios himself. Yet, to his world beyond the Antiochikos, the simple peasants, “who live off the earth, far away from the cities and in company with oxen”,\(^ {23}\) remained utter strangers. They attracted his attention only in an urban perspective, such as to the extent that they honoured or neglected the relationship with their landlords. Otherwise, they appear as meek and submissive underlings, victims, and easy prey for those who used them for their own business.\(^ {24}\) When these people attended the city’s market they had to face abuse and insult, and as they were in no position to defend themselves, they were arrested.\(^ {25}\)

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\(^{17}\) This and the following paragraph are but a rough summary of the Amuq plain’s history. Fuller accounts are provided by Wilkinson 1997, Wilkinson et al. 2001, Gerritsen et al. 2008.

\(^{18}\) Wilkinson 1997, 574.

\(^{19}\) Lewit 2020.

\(^{20}\) Gerritsen et al. 2008, 265-266.

\(^{21}\) Brown 1982, 155.

\(^{22}\) Brown 1982, 155.

\(^{23}\) Lib. or. 47.22.

\(^{24}\) Lib. or. 47.34-35.

\(^{25}\) Lib. or. 47.33.
They hesitated to bring their assets to Antioch’s market out of fear they would be forced to move rubble within the walls.\(^{26}\)

Particularly illustrative for Libanios’ perspective on the hinterland’s populace is the case of his own tenants, who at some point attempted to redefine the conditions under which they worked for him. This Libanios denied and took them to court in Antioch, where they were arrested, while the judge ordered the hearing of witnesses. According to Libanios, the actual scandal arose when the tenants, while imprisoned, turned to the military general and used “the usual trick” with “barley and wheat and ducks and fodder for horses”.\(^{27}\) The result was that at the behest of the general the tenants were promised to be set free. But more gravely even, the judge subsequently argued the general’s case and pronounced a verdict that followed what “helmet and cuirass dictated”.\(^{28}\) In Libanios’ perspective, this event of corruption amounted to a subversion not just of the rule of law but of the very social fabric that held the polis – city and hinterland – together.\(^{29}\)

The background of this episode was a system of patronage that pervaded Antioch’s hinterland and undermined the traditional relationship between landlord and tenant.\(^{30}\) In this system tenants sought the protection of a military patron hoping, among other things, to gain independence from their urban landlords and relief from taxes paid to the city – a perverted protection, according to Libanios, as these strongmen installed their own system of rules and laws.\(^{31}\) His tenants’ corrupting behaviour in Antioch, then, was a continuation of this rural practice within the walls of the city. In the hinterland, however, the interposition of patrons between tenants and urban landlords was dwarfed by what happened in the κόμαι μεγάλαι, which, as we are informed by Libanios, were not owned by landlords but instead self-owned by the villagers.\(^{32}\) These large villages secured their protection by the military in the same way as the tenants did, but in these cases the villagers had “purchased complete licence”. The κόμαι μεγάλαι, which were fortified by the generals, raided other villages, incorporated them into their realm of power, thus depriving landlords of their property; they abused the women in those lesser places; they made the wells of the farmers they attacked useless, “rob[bed] them of their flow of river water”; and they completely refused to pay taxes. When a decurion went there on his mission to collect taxes and liturgies, he was turned away with brute force.\(^{33}\) In Libanios’ account of rural patronage in κόμαι μεγάλαι we may thus recognize a resilient town like Imma with its own network of dependent villages, its own social and political centre, and, within that network, its own infrastructure such as canals and watermills.\(^{34}\)

The contrast between the κόμαι μεγάλαι here – resilient towns that essentially claimed independence from the polis – and the ones mentioned in the Antiochikos – outside reflections of the glory inside the walls – could hardly be starker. One explanation for these dissonant accounts could be that there lie roughly 35 years between them. When Libanios wrote on the

\(^{26}\) Lib. or. 50.23-25.
\(^{27}\) Lib. or. 47.13.
\(^{28}\) Lib. or. 47.15.
\(^{29}\) Lib. or. 47.18-19.
\(^{30}\) Carrié 1976 and Dagron 1979, 36-39.
\(^{31}\) Lib. or. 47.11-12.
\(^{32}\) Lib. or. 47.4.
\(^{33}\) Lib. or. 47.4-8.
\(^{34}\) For a similar suggestion see De Giorgi 2016, 84.
patronage systems around the year 390, it has been argued, the empire was recovering from the Gothic victory at Adrianople in 378 and taxation “was certainly high”, thus driving peasants into the hands of rural patrons. Another no less plausible explanation would point out the differences in rhetoric: a praise of the polis here, a calling on the emperor to end corrupt practice in the military there. The most straight-forward reason, however, may be that these simply were two contemporary realities. In Libanios’ view, there may have been good κόμματα μεγάλα under an aristocracy that operated in accordance with the law and bad, resilient ones under a patron that engaged in raids and sought independence from the polis. Be that as it may, here and elsewhere Libanios remained the man of the city that he was, and his writings, by and large, consistently reflect his urban perspective.

Thus, it is not surprising that whenever villagers come to Antioch and move through the urban space in Libanios’ vast oeuvre, they do so as underlings, just like Libanios’ own tenants and those poor marketeers that had to face abuse and exploitation in the city. Beyond such stereotypes we hear from Libanios neither about simple villagers nor rural patrons interacting with Antioch’s urban space. This is all the more unfortunate, as the often ostentatious movement of patrons and other aristocrats with their cortèges, urbanites to be sure, through streets and fora was a distinctive part of the experience of living in the late antique city – and Libanios extensively reflected upon these appearances.

One notable exception to his silence on villagers moving through the city, however, is a scene most probably from the year 386 that played out in the colonnades in front of the temple of Dionysos. Apparently, a makeshift courtroom was set up there, with the provincial governor hearing the case of some heirs to a farmer who had been murdered. The heirs had already asked for an investigation of that crime, presumably in the village of the property in question, but were turned away, their request being dismissed as irrelevant. Seeking judicial refuge in the city, now they had put pressure on the governor, who eventually heard their case. Yet, just as the case was due to begin, [the governor] heard the chanting of hymns from the cave-dwellers, who had then come [to the city], as they usually do in summer. Up he jumped from his seat and made of right away, claiming that it would be improper to conduct any judicial procedure, once they had made an appearance.

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35 Liebeschuetz 1972, 73.
36 Stenger 2009, 307-308 (summarizing on or. 11) and Carrié 1976 (on or. 47).
37 According to the law, Libanios tells us, the landlord would provide the protection people seek from the patron, Lib. or. 47.19. Thus, if there were good patrons, they would have been landlords.
38 This would, in any case, be a worthwhile reminder of the fact that not all forms of rural patronage were as negative as Libanios portrayed them, cf. Brown 1971, 85-87.
39 This is also true for Libanios’ encomium on farming. Shepardson 2014, 134.
40 Lavan 2021, 1:191-196.
41 Saliou 2015 and Lavan 2021, 2:298.
42 Lib. or. 45.25-26. Probably, the governor was Tisamenus, a Christian, who ruled over Syria in 386, cf. Libanios 1977, 185, n. b. Libanios wrote or. 33 against him.
43 Lib. or. 45.26: μελλούσης δὲ εἰσίν τῆς δίκης ἄκοινε μὲν ἄδοντον τὰ αὐτῶν ἰσομετὰ τῶν ἐν τοῖς σπηλαίοις οἰκούντων δήπορο τότε ἥκοντο, ὡς ποιήσατο τῷ δήμῳ ἀναπλάσας δὲ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ταχίστην επήλθεν, ὡς τὸ δίκαιον ἐκεῖνον φανέντων τῶν δικαιῶν τι ποιήσας. My translation after Norman’s in Libanios 1977.
Eventually, the plaintiffs, again, stood there empty-handed, just as before when they had argued their case in the hinterland.

For whatever reason the governor reacted as he did, it is clear from this episode that Libanios rendered the cave-dwellers – one of his many epithets for Christian monks from Antioch’s hinterland – as people who by way of appearing in and moving through the city disrupted urban civic life and much of what the city stood for, such as, in this instance, the application of law. However, the monks did not purposefully attack urban institutions such as the provincial governor or the open-air courtroom. Rather, they came chanting, in what may be conceived of as an annual procession, anything but unexpected, much like a thunderstorm on a summer night. The governor’s reaction, thus, seems to be as habitual as the monks’ procession. Their coming was his running.

In more than one way, this episode highlights how the city struggled in the face of the challenges posed to it by the hinterland. First, the city as represented by the governors’ courtroom failed to make good, in Libanios’ view, the neglect of the law and judicial system in the hinterland. In the scene in front of the Dionysos temple the hopes of rural plaintiffs to find in the city the justice that they were denied by those in power in the hinterland, were shattered, not, as was the case with Libanios’ tenants, because of corruption within the city, but rather as a result of the presence of rural actors in Antioch’s streets. Second, in fourth-century Antioch, monasticism was an exclusively rural phenomenon, as the city did not boast any permanent monastic presence. Monks, therefore, had to move to the city, just as any other villager would do. In this instance, however, Libanios emphasized that these villagers were also moving through Antioch – to my knowledge, the only such account in Libanios’ vast oeuvre. As he related the scene, the monks’ presence was only visible after it had been audible, their chanting being easily distinguished from the city’s more familiar soundscape. Then, having turned a corner, as it were, they also appeared visually, either while the governor was leaving or when he had left already. For Libanios, hence, the monks’ was a forceful and powerful movement that drove an urban institution of central importance out of the way, spatially and morally, I am tempted to say. Third, here and elsewhere, Libanios styled the monks as antitypes of urban civilization.

The last point deserves closer attention, as this seems to be the upshot of Libanios’ staging of the monks’ moving through Antioch: that they inscribed or, for lack of a better word, transposed their rural world into the city. The world of monastic life in the Antiochene was diverse. Throughout Antioch’s hinterland there lived both anchorites and cenobites, with some of the former residing immediately outside the city on Mount Silpios, and some of the latter in more distant places, such as the κόιμαι μεγάλαι of the Amuq plain and the limestone massif. For this diverse reality in the late antique Antiochene, our most comprehensive source is of course Theodoret of Kyrrhos, a Christian apologist of monasticism in the Antiochene writing in the middle of the fifth century. In some of the biographies of holy men in

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44 Nesselrath 2011b.
45 Hahn 2004, 155, n. 156 speculates that the monks came to the city for a Christian holiday, probably Pentecost.
46 There are, of course, accounts of such intra-urban movement of monks and other villagers in authors such as John Chrysostom or Theodoret, which cannot be discussed here. See Soler 2006, 216-218.
47 Lib. or. 11.218 and 227 as examples of Antioch’s soundscape.
48 Festugière 1959, 237-240.
49 Canivet 1977, 163-182.
his *Religious History* he distinguished single places in the countryside as κόμαι μεγάλαι. Yet, unlike Libanios who, as we have seen, used the title in order to highlight the large villages’ urban qualities or to distinguish them as self-owned from villages owned by an urban landlord, for Theodoret it was the monastic and religious significance of a place that elevated it from village to town, that is, to a κώμη μεγάλη. A town was where holy men settled down.50 Such was the case in Imma. Echoing Libanios’ words from the *Antiochikos*, Theodoret called Imma a “very large and populous village” (κώμη μεγίστη καὶ πολυάνθροπος)51 and used the suggestion of a buzzing town in order to prepare the stage for the ascetic Palladios who in the second half of the fourth century settled down outside of it. As Theodoret related it, Palladios, by performing a miracle on a murdered man in front of Imma’s inhabitants, found one of the villagers guilty of the crime and thus effectively adjudicated the case.52 Like Palladios, also other monks acted, within their rural environment, as mediators, judges, or small-scale diplomats, fulfilling essential functions of rural patrons.53

For Libanios, however, these were unlawful and immoral acts. The harshest instance of this judgement is his oration *For the temples* and against monks from roughly the same time as the episode outside of the Dionysos temple,54 where he accused the holy men of the destruction of pagan sanctuaries and forcefully aligned them with the unruly patrons he so deeply abhorred.55 Both were, in his eyes, of the same breed: peasants who had run away from farming and had become brigands;56 they and their underlings were drunks and gluttonous conmen;57 in their specific ways they abused women;58 and their immediate victims were always the simple peasants.59 The greatest damage, however, patrons and monks inflicted upon the polis was the erosion of the law and the application of pseudo-legal proceedings. Not without coincidence, therefore, Libanios used the same judicial topos and its mishandling as in the case before the temple of Dionysos in order to exemplify how the monks were breaking the law in the hinterland.60

Back in the city, the episode in front of the Dionysos temple was not as exceptional as it appears from Libanios’ oeuvre. For in actual fact, the monks’ presence within the walls of the fourth-century city was both a perceived and an actual social, religious, and political reality. By the 380s, for instance, many aristocratic sons of the city felt attracted by ascetic ideals and went on to become followers of the holy men that resided on Mount Silpios, just beyond the city walls. Many in the city felt that this threatened the existence of individual families and even the social fabric of the city as a whole.61 In religious matters the monks were seen as partisans of the anti-Arian faction within Antioch’s Christian community and, in this function, were occasionally called or sent to the city. And when Antioch in 387 stood at the brink

51 Theod. H.R. 7.1.
52 Theod. H.R. 7.2-3.
54 Nesselrath 2011a, 33-38.
55 On the role of monasticism in this context more generally Wallraff 2011.
56 Lib. or. 30.48 and or. 47.6. See also or. 2.32.
57 Lib. or. 30.8 and 12 and or. 47.5.
58 Lib. or. 30.46 and or. 47.5
59 Lib. or. 30.10-11 or. 47.5 and 17.
60 Lib. or. 30.25.
61 Hahn 2004, 153-154 with reference to John Chrysostom.
of an existential political catastrophe, monks played a decisive role in averting the city’s virtual annihilation. On occasions like these it was rare, yet common to see and hear them moving through Antioch’s streets, sometimes in a similar way as reported by Libanios about the scene in front of the Dionysos temple. To him, however, the monks from the hinterland remained the ‘Other’, embodiments of what was morally wrong and unlawful in Antioch’s χώρα.

According to Formal Resilience Theory, a resilient Social-Ecological-System, such as the Antiochene, goes through a set of stages that are formalized in the Adaptive Cycle. A phase of growth (r-Phase) is succeeded by a phase of stability (K-Phase). Then follows a catastrophic shift (Ω-Phase), in which the system is challenged to respond to profoundly destabilizing events, whereupon an α-Phase of resilience and reorganization closes the circle. The Amuq plain with its κόμα μεγάλαι had completed the circle, it seems, by having gone from a centuries long K-Phase through an Ω-Phase characterized by the growth of the lake of Antioch and the accompanying environmental change to an α-Phase, when settlements such as Imma had acquired new significance and effectively strengthened the system. Different factors seem to have played key roles in the resilience of the Antiochene communities. For besides economic success the new system of rural patronage was an expression of political and religious power, claims that may very well have resulted from rural resilience.

Rural patrons could be seen both as positive and negative forces. According to Theodoret, the holy men of the Antiochene were incomparably good patrons, whereas for Libanios any exponent of resilient communities in the Antiochene was a bad one. In his account, the monks-patrons’ movement through Antioch amounted to a clash between two systems, which in the orator’s ideal world would still have constituted one single polis – city and country. Now, however, when rural resilience came to the city, the city was profoundly destabilized. In Libanios’ perspective, the strong men from the hinterland, just by moving through Antioch, dispersed urban civilization and prevented the application of law within the city. Hence, for Libanios’ idea of an Antiochene polis, occurrences like these must have had the meaning of catastrophic events that challenged the city to respond with resilience. In the centuries to come, Antioch’s resilience was to be put to the test many more times. For the city’s perhaps most famous orator, already the fourth century brought about such challenges. In our case, they came from the hinterland.

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63 Haldon/Rosen 2018, 277 with the literature given there.
64 Mordechai 2018.
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