CHAPTER TEN

THE ANTIOCHENE AND THE APAMENE

The cultural mechanisms of Christianization began to operate in Syria with the migration of the monks into the *territoria* of the cities in the mid-fourth century. The new religion could not take root, however, without the establishment of permanent village churches staffed by presbyters and deacons. This second stage of Christianization did not get under way until the second half of the fourth century. The Limestone Massif to the east of Antioch provides striking evidence for this process in the form of archaeological remains that permit the historian to trace the advance of the new religion through this district. These consist of the ruins of churches, baptistries, martyria, and dated Christian inscriptions which in different ways proclaim the victory of the new religion, and quite often using the "one God" formula. These documents turn up on the door lintels of dwellings, in the *nekropoleis*, and on the church buildings. None of these predates the fourth century, the earliest dating from 336/7, the last regnal year of Constantine the Great. They turn up in small but increasing numbers between 337–363. The main period of Christianization for the villages of the Limestone Massif was, however, c. 363–425, with a trickle of conversions continuing thereafter until down to c. 500. It is important in this connection to avoid the supposition that some few Christian inscriptions here and there reflect the religious allegiance of the whole district. It will be necessary rather to examine the evidence on a site by site basis, and to attempt generalizations only thereafter.

The central point of the Limestone Massif is the Dāna or Sermada plain, through which the Roman post road running from Antioch to Beroia goes. The massif is divided into roughly four separate

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2 Georges Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord: Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*, (Paris 1953), 145f. This work (3 vols., Paris 1953–58) is hereinafter cited as Tchalenko, *Villages antiques*. 
areas, which are known by the names of Djebel Simān, Djebel Ḥalaqah, Djebel Barisha, and Djebel Rīḥa. We shall examine the late pagan and early Christian sites on and around each of these eminences in turn. The Dāna plain, like many smaller depressions in the Massif, had well-watered bottom lands that produced cereal grains and the vine, whereas the hillsides abounded in olive plantations. According to G. Tchalenko, the fourth century proved to be an era of agricultural and demographic expansion in the Limestone Massif, the accumulated wealth coming largely from the marketing of the olive-oil surplus. The profits seemingly went into the construction of impressive buildings of locally cut stone, including churches and multi-storey houses. These were first examined by H.C. Butler during the Princeton University archaeological expeditions of the early twentieth century.

This period of economic growth coincided with the spread of Christianity into the Limestone Massif. Some twenty-one pagan temples or local cults have been identified in the district. Most of the temples were erected in the early centuries of the Christian era, and most probably resembled in one way or another the typical small Syro-Roman temple, with a rectangular cella and a colonnaded porch. The extant list of temples and cults is certainly incomplete. These structures underwent systematic destruction during the era of Christianization, and the structural and epigraphic remnants are disappointing with some few exceptions.

The pre-Christian residents of the Dāna plain had constructed at least three temples on the heights round about in the previous centuries. Of these, the temenos of Zeus Madbachos (the local Baal) atop the pinnacle of Djebel Sheikh Berekāt dominates the plain from the north. The monk Ammianus and his colleague Marianus occupied a glen near the temple and the village of Teledan (present-day Deir Tell ‘Adeh). Theodoret of Cyrrhus, who records the event in his Historia Philotheos, fails to indicate whether the village was yet Christian, nor is there any definitive epigraphic evidence on that question. The event seems to have occurred before or during the patriarchate of Flavian of Antioch (381–404).

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3 Tchalenko, Villages antiques 2, Pl. XXXI, XXXII, XLV.
4 See the summary in Liebeschuetz, “Conversion of Syria.”
5 Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria in 1904–5 and 1909, Division II: Architecture, Section B: Northern Syria, ed. Howard C. Butler (Leiden 1920), passim. This volume hereinafter cited as Butler, PAES II B.
6 Tchalenko, Villages antiques 2, Pl. VII.
7 Tchalenko, Villages antiques 2, Pl. VIII.
8 Supra, Ch. VIII, Sect. 2.