

Simone Eid Paturel, *Baalbek-Heliopolis, the Bekaa, and Berytus from 100 BCE to 400 CE: A Landscape Transformed* (*Mnemosyne Supplements* – 426), Brill, Leiden–Boston 2019, 343 pp., 68 figs.;  
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The name of the city of Berytus (today Beirut) appeared even in Assyrian sources. But only in those from the period of the Late Empire did it become much more common. The paucity of all earlier sources means that our knowledge of the history of the city until Roman times is limited. We know that during Seleucid rule over Palestine, Berytus experienced a brief period of revival, which ended with Diodotus Tryphon's sacking of the city in 140 BCE (Strabo 16.2.19). A new resurgence came with Emperor Augustus' decision to locate a veteran colony in Berytus (*Colonia Iulia Augusta Felix Berytus*). Only from this moment is it possible to trace more precisely its history as well as that of Baalbek-Heliopolis and the Bekaa Valley, both of which fell within its borders. Until recently, the history of Berytus in the period between its destruction at the hands of Tryphon and the foundation of the colony was the subject of speculation and conjecture. This situation has now changed as a result of widescale archaeological excavations in the historic centre of Beirut carried out in 1995–1999, 2000–2006 and later. Unfortunately, to date only partial results of these works are available, mostly from concise preliminary reports published in Lebanese archaeological journals. These do not give a clear indication of the extent to which the archaeological material obtained provides new information on Berytus' past. To learn about this, it is worth looking at Simone Eid Paturel's book, which arranges and analyses the data to provide a fuller archaeological picture of Roman Berytus as well as Baalbek-Heliopolis and the Bekaa Valley.

This book was based on the PhD dissertation submitted by the author in 2014. Its bibliography suggests that no works published thereafter were used. Paturel's research had several objectives. First, to establish the extent to which the foundation of the colony influenced the transformation of the cultural and religious landscape of the city itself as well as Baalbek-Heliopolis and the Bekaa Valley (including certain centres of worship in the area: Niha and Hosn Niha). Second, to assess whether in the whole area influenced by the colony the existence of relics of earlier local cultures can be discerned: Semitic, Punic and Hellenistic (p. 1). Third, she aimed "to understand the nature of the deities worshipped at Berytus, Baalbek-Heliopolis, Deir el-Qalaa, Niha and Hosn Niha and whether or not they were related to preexisting deities in the Near East" (p. 2).

The “Introduction” (pp. 1–11) and the chapter “Sources, Historiography, Method & Theory” (pp. 12–57) contain information concerning the book’s aims, structure, the geography of the area, the chronological framework, the history of previous research on the problems the author is interested in, and the theoretical and methodological foundations of her studies. The next three chapters feature an outline of the history of the region and the political centres existing there (with an emphasis on the problem of the presence of Itureans and their statehood, pp. 63–78) in the period preceding the appearance of the Romans in the area (“From Hellenistic Kingdoms to Roman Authority in the Levant,” pp. 58–78); an overview of the history of Berytus from ancient times to the foundation of a colony of Roman veterans there (“Pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic Berytus,” pp. 79–94), including the results of archaeological work; and the history of Baalbek and the Bekaa Valley in the pre-Roman period, also presented from the perspective of the latest archaeological discoveries (“Pre-Hellenistic and Hellenistic Baalbek and the Bekaa,” pp. 95–117).

The archaeological data shows beyond any doubt that Tryphon’s destruction of Berytus did not by any means cause a mass exodus of the city’s inhabitants. It continued to function, although the pace of its development slowed significantly (cf. pp. 89–93, 93–94). The archaeological digs also demonstrated that the beginning of Baalbek’s development as a religious centre took place only in the final quarter of the 1st century BCE, and not, as was commonly thought, in earlier historical periods (pp. 99–112, 115–117, 293).

The author presents the urban layout of Roman Berytus and various aspects of its residents’ lives in Chapter 6 (“Roman Berytus,” pp. 118–153). Foundation of a veterans’ colony in this city caused a change in its urban shape. This entailed a new grid of streets and construction of typically Roman buildings: a theatre, hippodrome, baths etc. Many of these were erected in the place of the earlier, Hellenistic buildings, although these were not completely destroyed.<sup>1</sup> The presence of Roman veterans contributed markedly to Berytus’ economic growth and importance in the region, confirmed by the presence of numerous shops and production workshops. The Romanisation of the city concerned not only the sphere of public life, but also the religious one. The changing ethnic and cultural face under Roman rule is confirmed by burial practices, although it is difficult to determine the moment when they changed (pp. 146–151, 153).

Of the book’s five remaining chapters, as many as four are devoted to discussing the problems of religious life and describing the architecture of centres of worship in Berytus’ territory—the temple of Deir el-Qalaa (“Deir el-Qalaa,” pp. 154–164), the temples of Niha and Hosn Niha (“The Sanctuaries of Niha and Hosn Niha,” pp. 165–193), and Baalbek (“The Religious Landscape of Baalbek in the Roman Period,” pp. 194–246)—as well as their influence on the religious landscape of the region (“Landscape and Religious Architecture in the Colonia,” pp. 278–285).

In a separate chapter, the author depicts various aspects of the life of Baalbek-Heliopolis, although its title suggests that the topic will be the entire colonial territory of Bery-

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 291: “Although Strabo claimed that the Romans restored Berytus after it was razed by Tryphon, there is in fact no evidence for either abandonment of the city in the Hellenistic period or for wholesale reconstruction after the foundation of the colonia. There are some destruction horizons that might be associated with Tryphon, but there is no firm dating evidence. The construction of the Roman city after the colonial foundation proceeded with some sympathy to the existing Hellenistic city.”

tus (“Life in the Colonia from Epigraphic, Numismatic, and Iconographic Evidence,” pp. 247–277). The choice of Baalbek to illustrate these aspects is warranted, however, since the rather extensive corpus of epigraphical sources for the city help to understand them. A similar corpus for Berytus is only now being prepared. Based on analysis of the sources, the author arrived at several key conclusions, e.g. that there is no clear evidence showing that the building of temples in Baalbek-Heliopolis took place under the patronage of emperors, but it is likely that their construction could have been supported by vassal rulers (pp. 260–264), and that a certain role in the creation of Baalbek’s religious architecture was played by private donors (pp. 264–265). She also proves, contrary to the popular view, that the so-called Heliopolitan Triad that was supposedly the cult object at this sanctuary did not exist (pp. 249–260).<sup>2</sup>

The book’s “Conclusion” (pp. 286–294) summarises all the author’s most important findings. Regarding the temples that are the subject of her interest, she argues that the large temples and associated cults mainly had the Romans to thank for their development (Deir el-Qalaa, Baalbek-Heliopolis). In the case of those that existed before their arrival (Niha, Hosn Niha), alongside the appearance of Roman influences, one can also observe persistence of earlier religious traditions, although it is not always possible to ascertain which deities were being venerated. In Berytus too, the presence of an autochthonous population and traces of cultivation of local traditions are visible. The strongest interference of the Romans in the religious landscape takes place in Bekaa Valley, and is connected to the emergence of a complex of monumental temples in Baalbek. The author’s conclusions are supplemented by two appendices. The first (Appendix A: “Location Tables for Beirut Excavations,” pp. 295–300) contains lists of all 167 archaeological sites in Beirut, excavated in 1995–1999 and 2000–2006, each accompanied by a reference to publications containing information on their results. The second (Appendix B, pp. 301–303) is a translation of an excerpt from a work by Macrobius (1.23.10–26) with a description of religious practices in Baalbek.

There is no doubt that this book represents a very valuable contribution to knowledge on the previously little-known history of Berytus in the Early Empire. The author’s use of archaeological data unknown to most scholars is one of its undoubted values. Equally important are her findings, which cast new light on the circumstances and time of the building of the complex of temples in Baalbek and the nature of the cult conducted in the most important of them. But this commendation of the cognitive value of the book cannot be accompanied by an equally complimentary opinion on the editorial aspect. A major flaw is the lack of a precise archaeological map of Beirut including the names of contemporary streets to make it easier to identify the various sites. The maps marked as Figs. 2–5 are only slightly helpful in this regard. The same goes for Baalbek, a general map of which does not appear in the text at all. The small satellite photographs of large areas with scarcely visible legends are hardly useful in following the author’s arguments, especially the parts containing many topographical details which are completely invisible in these pictures.


<sup>2</sup> “In conclusion, the Heliopolitan Triad is, at best, an oversimplification of a complex system of deities that we little understand and, at worst, a fiction” (p. 260).

The author's very good understanding of archaeological issues is undeniable, yet she is clearly weaker when it comes to historical questions. The lapses and incorrect information in her interpretations of historical data are too plentiful to ignore. The most flagrant examples of this come in subchapter 10.5: "Veterans and the Roman Army" (pp. 265–270). Owing to the author's careless interpretation of cited inscriptions, incorrect interpretation of their contents, and even misunderstanding of the opinions of scholars she quotes, readers learn about the existence of legions that never existed in the Roman army, e.g. leg. VIII Gemina and VII Fulminata, and of acts of settlement of veterans that never took place, etc. Decimus Velius Fidus (p. 268), mentioned as a governor of Syria, was in reality the governor of a province of Syria-Palaestina. The number of wrong information and interpretations on these pages is so large that it is best simply not to read them.

More irritating still is the number of errors in ancient names as well as those of contemporary scholars. The list of examples is very long, and some of them are given here purely by way of illustration: p. 63: *Mathias* instead of *Mattathias*; p. 64: *Lutraean* instead of *Iturean*; p. 64: *au IVth* (sic!) *siècle* instead of *IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*; p. 70: *Salome Alexander* instead of *Salome Alexandra*; p. 76: *Gaulonitis* instead of *Gaulanitis*; p. 86: *Cyrus* instead of *Cyprus*; p. 125: *Julian Domna* instead of *Julia Domna* and *Gordien III* instead of *Gordian III*; p. 137: 2 × *Libanus* instead of *Libanius*; p. 222: *Shalmaneser* instead of *Salmanasar*; p. 257: *stelea* instead of *stelai*; pp. 266–267: *Quadrato* instead of *Quadratus*, with an incorrect date for his governorship of Syria, which took place in 114–117, not 116–117; *Rhaetia* instead of *Raetia*; *Bithinia* instead of *Bithynia*; p. 272: *Lucius Antoninus Naso* received only one *corona aurea*, not several, as the author suggests (*coronae aurae* (sic!)). It is also difficult to understand her obstinacy in giving the name Puchstein as Pushtein: pp. 18: 2 ×, 229 (especially since on the same page, a few lines earlier, she also uses the correct spelling), 263: 2 ×. Errors and inaccuracies can also be found in references to illustrations. On p. 181 there is a reference to Figure 8.13, which does not figure in the book at all; it should be Fig. 32 (p. 182). In the text (p. 182), when referring to Fig. 32, the author refers to references which are lacking in it.

So numerous are these shortcomings, and such is their character, that they detract from the overall assessment of Simone Eid Paturel's book, which is otherwise very interesting.

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