

# »Urbanised« Villages in Early Byzantium. An Overview

In the last few decades, a lot of attention has been devoted to the development of the city in late antique and early Byzantine times, between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>, or in some regions 8<sup>th</sup>, century. Although it is very clear that there were wide regional differences and that the fate of one city did not necessarily parallel that of its neighbours within the same region, some general evolutions can be identified. They have been conveniently summarised by Lucy Grig's in her »Cities in the ›long‹ Late Antiquity, 2000-2012 – a survey essay«<sup>1</sup>. Changes in the late antique and Byzantine countryside have been receiving more attention too, with a multiplication of surveys in cities' hinterlands and territories as well as the introduction of new approaches to evaluate the productivity of the land<sup>2</sup>. Although the interdependency of city and countryside has been widely acknowledged, when urban and rural physical evolutions have been compared, the focus has generally been on urban contexts, which are said to have undergone a »ruralisation«. This particular evolution, which included phenomena as varied as a decrease in the number of public buildings, a growing privatisation of public space and the increase of open plots in the city centre, the cultivation of crops in the immediate vicinity of or even inside the urban core, the presence of cattle, the increase of refuse dumps and so on, is often considered a sign that the living conditions of the urban population had become less enviable than that of preceding centuries. Many pages have been filled with descriptions of such changes and especially their pertinence to value judgements of »decline« or »transformation«, entering an unusual Dark Age or returning to a more indigenous settlement pattern that was not dependent on cities<sup>3</sup>.

In this article, I would like to revisit urban-rural relations, but I will move the focus to rural settlements, which in many regions of the eastern Mediterranean seem to have been do-

ing very well. Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century, villages grew in size and number and played an important part in the late Roman economy as producers but possibly also consumers. I will refrain from making general statements on rural versus urban »prosperity« in late antique centuries – something that is exceptionally hard to determine – but instead will put three noticeable developments in urban-rural relations in the spotlight<sup>4</sup>. Each of these show that villages not only were sizable and numerous, but also that they adopted practices that are much better known from urban contexts. At the end of Antiquity, the integration of these practices in rural contexts was as intense as or even more frequent than parallel occurrences in neighbouring urban centres. Next to an urban »ruralisation«, some village settlements indeed seemed to have been »urbanised«, though the extent of urban characteristics was rarely so substantial that they led to confusion between a village settlement and a »real« city in Roman tradition<sup>5</sup>. The content of this paper is inspired by the book of Lindsey Dossey, *Peasant and Empire in Christian North Africa*<sup>6</sup>. She argues, amongst others, that inhabitants of the countryside had much greater access to goods such as fine ware ceramics, metal and glass objects as well as textiles than had been the case in previous centuries. In this way, they had come to resemble their urban contemporaries.

After a quick look at the villages of the Aezanitis, where investments in rural architectural decoration match, or even outdo, those in the urban centre of Aizanoi, I will discuss some rural settlements in Cilicia that built late antique tetrapyla and arches, and then move on to the villages of Jordan where one of the most remarkable corpuses of 7<sup>th</sup>-century mosaics and epigraphy can be found. Finally, I will raise some questions concerning the initiators of building works in villages.

1 Grig, Cities with references to older studies. – For the regions discussed in this article, see also Jacobs, Maintenance. – Niewöhner, Urbanism (Asia Minor). – Walmsley, Syria. – Avni, Palestine (Near East).

2 One of the few positive effects of a worldwide cut-back in research funds indeed seems to have been a shift in attention from urban excavations to territory wide surveys. For a recent summary of research in the countryside of Asia Minor, see Izdebski, Economy. – Hirschfeld, Farms, for the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. – Magness, Palestine, for early Islamic Palestine. – The volume edited by Lefort/Morrison/

Sodini, Villages contains a lot of pertinent overviews of eastern Mediterranean regions with references to older literature.

3 Stephen Mitchell assumed that the settlement pattern of Asia Minor was and is until today based on rural communities (Mitchell, Anatolia 9).

4 For a detailed analysis of this very difficult and multifaceted topic Terpo, Anatolia.

5 Walmsley, Village 515 on the different perceptions on what makes a city.

6 Dossey, Peasants.

## Rural investments and workshops: Aizanoi and the Aezanitis

A first noteworthy case-study is the research done on architectural decoration in Aizanoi, a medium-sized town in the Anatolian highlands, and its territory. As both have been the subject of research, most recently by Philipp Niewöhner, a preliminary comparison of their development in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century in particular is possible. In the city, all imperial-period buildings were reused in these centuries. They were either put to new uses in their totality or they were at least partially dismantled to recuperate useful building materials. For instance, the building components of a temple of Artemis as well as a section of the main colonnaded street were reused in around 400 in a new and shorter colonnaded street that connected the previous main axis with the area near the Temple of Zeus<sup>7</sup>. The stadium was reused as a quarry around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In its substructures a chapel was installed<sup>8</sup>. Another bath complex was converted into a church in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It was decorated with both locally produced and imported liturgical furniture of the best quality<sup>9</sup>. Considering that Aizanoi remained the residence of the bishop and therefore a central place in a flourishing late antique region, there is no real reason to suspect a demographic or economic decline<sup>10</sup>. In other words, this town remained the religious centre of the region, and very likely also fulfilled additional political and social roles. Nevertheless, there can be no denying that it had lost quite a bit of its previous lustre and that the distinctions between urban core and surrounding settlements had become less distinguishable.

At least, this is suggested by a comparison of both the quality and especially the quantity of architectural decoration in city and countryside. The Aezanitis, as elsewhere, saw the introduction of rural churches, both in the fertile plain and the more marginal mountains<sup>11</sup>. They are attested by finds of late antique architectural decoration, all of them church-related items. A small portion of these, mainly smaller columnar supports and capitals, could be recognised as high-quality imports from the quarries at Dokimeion. All bigger and thus heavier architectural fragments belonged to local workshops from the plateau<sup>12</sup>. Imported marble decoration in the city and countryside was very similar. The quantity of architectural decoration in the countryside is much bigger than in the city though<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, in imperial times a workshop was based

centrally in Aizanoi. Architectural decoration remained limited to the urban core alone<sup>14</sup>. For the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, a separate workshop producing church decoration could be pinpointed in a sub-region of the Aezanitis (area of Ortaça)<sup>15</sup>. Both the local workshops of the Aezanitis and the Central Phrygian workshops from Dokimeion must have mainly earned a living by working for projects in the countryside.

A similar development, obviously tightly connected to the proliferation of churches in the countryside, has been recognised in other regions as well. Within Asia Minor, some of the better researched instances of similar investments in high-quality churches include Milesia, the territory of Miletus<sup>16</sup>, and the coastal hinterlands of both Lycia and Cilicia. Archaeological surveys in the hinterland of Myra in particular have uncovered high quality church structures in the villages that feature in the *Life of Saint Nicholas*, including the church at Karabel, which Harrison has identified as the church of Holy Sion<sup>17</sup>. Although the exact organisation of the countryside continues to elude us, the proliferation of rural churches as a new type of communal building worthy of additional decoration in settlements where these had been a lot less common in the past, indicates a change in mentality among the rural population or at least among some of its members<sup>18</sup>.

## Building types and decoration

The second phenomenon to be discussed in the context of urban characteristics penetrating the countryside is maybe geographically less widespread, though equally telling. In the southeast of Turkey, villages built tetrapyla and arches, often at their borders<sup>19</sup>.

In the late antique province of Isauria (the area of Rough Cilicia), especially in the area between Seleukia and the Lamos river in the east, a large amount of late antique settlements can be found. They have been researched in depth by Günder Varinlioğlu, who was able to show that these settlements were well connected to the harbours on the coast, have remarkably well preserved remains and were doing very well between the early 5<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>20</sup>. In two of the settlements along one of the rural roads, Karakabaklı and İşıkkale, tetrapyla were constructed. This may have happened already in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, as the road and northern tetrapylon at Karakabaklı were apparently con-

7 The chronology of this colonnaded street is based on coin finds. They date its construction between 395 and 408. A following phase has been placed in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century or later. In this period, encroachment already occurred. Further coin finds imply that the pavement of the road was re-laid at a higher level at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> or the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. See von Mosch, Replik 741-744. – Rheidt, Aizanoi 1993, 699-715. – Rheidt, Aizanoi 1994. – Rheidt, Archäologie 243-247.

8 Niewöhner, Städte 221. – Niewöhner, Aizanoi 74.

9 Naumann, Aizanoi 339. – Niewöhner, Städte 221. – Niewöhner, Aizanoi 75.

10 Niewöhner, Städte 226.

11 Niewöhner, Städte 223. – Niewöhner, Anatolia 243.

12 Niewöhner, Städte 224.

13 Niewöhner, Städte 226. – Niewöhner, Anatolia 243.

14 Niewöhner, Aizanoi 242 f.

15 Niewöhner, Anatolia 246.

16 Lohmann, Survey 1996. – Niewöhner, Steinmetzarbeiten.

17 Foss, Coast. – Foss, Cities 303-339. – Harrison, Churches. – More recently Severin/Grossmann, Lykien discuss the church remains in this area at length.

18 The amount of churches in the countryside of course cannot be taken as a direct indicator of prosperity. It could for instance take a rural community several decades to complete a church, as was the case in Akören II, where it apparently took almost seventy years to complete the South Church. See Wulf, Akören 300.

19 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 52 f. – Eichner, Wohnhäuser 2. – Eichner, Wohnhäuser 9-11 for a short exposé on the provincial borders in this area.

20 Varinlioğlu, Environment. – Varinlioğlu, Landscape.

structed simultaneously<sup>21</sup>. The road lead towards the coast and the harbour of Korasion, which was fortified and rebuilt in the third quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. A date around the year 400 is therefore not unlikely<sup>22</sup>. The settlement of Karakabaklı was a wealthy oil producing village of about 4ha in size<sup>23</sup>, which, compared to the villages in Syria, Jordan and Palestine that will be discussed further on in this paper, was still fairly small. One tetrapylon was present in the north of the village, the second in the south. Although this latter has generally been interpreted as an exedra built simultaneously with the basilica, Aydinoğlu and Çakmak were right to point out that the tetrapylon structure predated the construction of the church<sup>24</sup>. It may originally have been intended as a marker for the border of the settlement, as there do not seem to be any houses to the south of this structure. At the time the tetrapyla were built, there was apparently no other communal building present in this settlement, which solely consisted of well-built, sizeable houses, some of them seemingly very luxurious. The church complex, a three-aisled basilica with galleries, eventually was built to the east of the structure in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>. An additional apse covered with a half dome was added to the tetrapylon's western piers. The tetrapylon from then on functioned as an elaborative church entrance, but also kept its primary function as a signaller of the settlement's border. Apparently, the northern tetrapylon was converted into a chapel at an unknown moment in time as well<sup>26</sup>. The same fate befell the tetrapylon in the second settlement at Işikkale, located only 800m to the north of Karakabaklı<sup>27</sup>. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the west façade of the church at Işikkale was faced by a half-round exedra, another monument that is very uncommon in rural settlements<sup>28</sup>.

In the course of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, other settlements opted for related, but different urban prototypes. Thus, a late Roman village near the modern Turkish village of Akören (Akören II), located much further inland than Karakabaklı and Işikkale, some 100km to the north of Adana in the late antique province of Cilicia Secunda, in its turn assimilated an arch into its built-up area<sup>29</sup>. In this case, the arch formed an integral part of the settlement's south church. This building, or at least its narthex, was placed to the south of the settlement's core, just next to the road coming from Anazarbos, the capital of the province of Cilicia Secunda. The arch eventually, possibly as late as 594, formed the narthex's south side.

It was large and richly decorated and, although its Christian iconography was very different from that of typical Roman arches, the prototype of the structure remained clearly recognisable<sup>30</sup>. As at Karakabaklı, this monument gave access both to the church and signalled the start of the settlement as a whole. Opposed to the previously discussed tetrapyla, the appearance of this arch outside an urban context was not an isolated case. Further to the east, the road connecting Tarsus to the Cilician Gates was articulated by a late antique arch, undecorated this time, where it passed a rural settlement<sup>31</sup>.

For both arches and tetrapyla, urban counterparts were found close-by. The main street of Anazarbos, capital of Cilicia Secunda, started at an honorific arch<sup>32</sup>. It may very well have served as a direct source of inspiration for villages such as those near modern Akören<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, the assimilation of architectural ideas from the capital into the village of Akören II was confirmed by the plan of the settlement's north church. This is not of the ordinary basilica type common for these provinces, but an ambulatory basilica. The only other example in these parts was indeed the Church of the Apostles in Anazarbos<sup>34</sup>.

Due to the close proximity of Karakabaklı and Işikkale – it is actually unclear how the two settlements relate to each other and whether or not they were really two separate communities – it is not very surprising to find similar structures in both. Karakabaklı and Işikkale furthermore distinguished themselves from other rural settlements in the area by the presence of paved roads and monumental basilicas. Where the villages gained their inspiration to construct tetrapyla is not clear. A *quadrifrons* (a domed tetrapylon) has been discovered at the outskirts of Korykos (Kızkalesi), just next to the Transept Basilica or Church G<sup>35</sup>. However, the date of this monument is not known. Although the alignment and building style of both buildings led to the assumption that they were contemporary, as demonstrated by the stratigraphic information obtained from trenches at the northern tetrapylon of Karakabaklı, only excavations can clarify the chronological relationship between tetrapyla and their surroundings. It is tempting to connect the tetrapylon to the construction of the church<sup>36</sup>, but the reverse relationship, whereby the church building was aligned with an existing monument, should not be excluded.

Moreover, it also remains unclear why rural settlements developed a desire to integrate »urban characteristics«. Varinlioğlu has carefully suggested a connection between Isaurian

21 Aydinoğlu/Çakmak, Karakabaklı 82.

22 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 56. – Varinlioğlu, Habitat 204. – Eichner, Wohnhäuser 285.

23 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 64f.

24 Aydinoğlu/Çakmak, Karakabaklı 77.

25 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 56f.

26 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 56f. – Varinlioğlu, Habitat 204.

27 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 53.

28 Westphalen, Kirche 540. 548 fig. 2.

29 The Berlin team that surveyed the settlement in the 1990's counted some 90 houses, equalling approximately 450-700 inhabitants, spread over a surface of 100m × 350m. The inhabitants of this settlement lived off the land, as is shown by the agricultural installations found. See Wulf, Akören. – Wulf-Rheidt, Akören 191-198.

30 Wulf, Akören 299f. 306.

31 Hellenkemper/Hild, Kilikien 96f. – Varinlioğlu, Landscape 56. – Varinlioğlu, Habitat 203f.

32 Gough, Anazarbos 110-113. – Posamentir, Säulenstrasse 1015f. fig. 2-5. – Posamentir, Anazarbos 209.

33 Akören II moreover seems to have been directly connected to Anazarbos by a road, Wulf, Akören 306.

34 Wulf, Akören 205. – For the church see Gough, Anazarbos 116-118 fig. 7-8. – Mietke, Apostelkirche 227-239.

35 Herzfeld/Guyer, Meriamlik 110.

36 As argued in Jacobs, Goals 107.

builders attested in Constantinople, Syria and Palestine in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the architecture of the Isaurian villages she studied<sup>37</sup>. Though this may explain some of the later developments, it does not account for the appearance of tetrapyla and paved streets already a century earlier. The connection between Karakabaklı and İşikkale and Korasion no doubt played a vital part in this story<sup>38</sup>, but we remain in the dark about the details.

In any case, these settlements nicely illustrate how some villages could now be keen to express monumentality to visitors and how they became interested in planning and display. They demonstrate how an architectural rhetoric of power that had been confined to urban contexts before the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, penetrated the countryside in late antique centuries. We see tetrapyla and monumental arches appearing in village communities, but also connected to imperial domains, like that at Bab el-Hawa in northern Syria. Here as well, an arch, this time of 6<sup>th</sup>-century date, was located on the road connecting Antioch to Beroia<sup>39</sup>. More frequently, this rhetoric of power was utilised in Christian pilgrimage sanctuaries from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards, for instance at Qal'at Sim'an in North Syria, where pilgrims passed under a free-standing triumphal arch as well as an arched gate<sup>40</sup>. In addition, although the exact lay-out and components of the cult centre of Saint Thecla at Meriamlik are not well-known, considering the apparently rich architectural tradition of the area around Seleukia, the presence of an arch at the border of the pilgrimage site and/or a tetrapylon would not be surprising<sup>41</sup>.

## Villages, towns or cities?

Arches and tetrapyla nevertheless remain rather remarkable monuments that have not been found in village contexts outside the provinces of southwest Turkey. It is worthwhile to give a cursory glance at other amenities that these villages were acquiring in late antique and early Byzantine times, amenities that we again are much more acquainted with in urban contexts. For instance, İşikkale, besides a tetrapylon,

paved streets and a monumental basilica, also possessed a more or less rectangular open space that could be used for gatherings and public events<sup>42</sup>. The village known only by the modern name of Manastır at the Cilician coast was given a bath building in Late Antiquity, an amenity well known from larger rural settlements in North Syria<sup>43</sup>. John Chrysostom mentions that landowners of the area around Antioch erected baths in villages, of course much to his disgust<sup>44</sup>. Korasion, the port that shipped the products of Rough Cilicia, was equipped with a bath and aqueduct, but was also given fortifications in the third quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The locality never became an official polis, and no bishop is known from the later centuries of Antiquity, but the amenities of the settlement, and especially its fortification wall, again are reminiscent of urban environments more so than of a village<sup>45</sup>. Indeed, most cities and towns of Asia Minor, large and small, were given fortifications in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and around the year 400<sup>46</sup>.

The size of some of these settlements, which were not really cities or towns, but not ordinary villages either, could be very impressive. G. Dagron referred to them as »bourgade«, whereas A. Walmsley more recently used the term »super-village«<sup>47</sup>. For instance, Androna, or El-Andarin, in northwest Syria was characterised as an ordinary *kōmē* by a mosaic inscription of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the settlement covered a surface of 160ha, possessed two fortification walls, eleven churches, a kastron and a public bath<sup>48</sup>. In the Negev, the large villages of the Byzantine period overall are somewhat smaller, but still stretched over many hectares. Yet, they were called villages in local archival documents. The Nessana papyri for instance again refer to Nessana as a village (*kōmē*), belonging to the district of the city Elusa, even though it spread over 10ha<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, an inscription found in the street pavement near İşikkale mentions a *komopolis*. This term could apparently be used to indicate a settlement with characteristics of both a *kōmē* and a *polis*. Considering its find location and the amenities with which Korasion had been provided, it most likely referred to this site and not to one of the nearby smaller villages<sup>50</sup>.

37 Varinlioğlu, Environment 309.

38 Varinlioğlu, Habitat 204.

39 Varinlioğlu, Landscape 56. The suggestion that this arch was connected to the imperial domain was made by Tchalenko, Villages 114-117.

40 Jacobs, Goals, discusses several examples of ecclesiastical tetrapyla and arches in urban and rural contexts.

41 This was suggested by Varinlioğlu, Landscape 26f. as well. Meriamlik is located ca. 2km south of Seleukia. Its actual remains are badly known as the only excavations took place in 1907 (Guyer/Herzfeld, Meriamlik) and further research was limited to surveys of the extant ruins. See Hild/Hellenkemper, Kilikien 442f. – Hellenkemper, Wallfahrtsstätten 263f. – Hill, Churches 208-214. – Donev, St. Thecla 121-178 for an overview.

42 Varinlioğlu, Environment 300. – Varinlioğlu, Landscape 55.

43 If we move further south, some of the settlements in the northern Limestone massif in Syria were endowed with bath buildings. Of the six establishments known, only one in Brad is 3<sup>rd</sup> century in date, the others were erected in the Byzantine period. The larger establishments, encompassing stables and hostleries to accommodate visitors, are unsurprisingly located in places of some importance – administrative centres (Sergilla and Brad) or farming centres (Babisqa) or regional centres (Mujleyya and Northern Dana). They obviously functioned as meeting places

attracting people from afar. They were donated by generous philanthropists or by the rural community for the welfare of everybody. On the mosaic paving of the Sergilla baths, a Greek inscription announces the names of those who gave generously: Iulianus and his wife, Domiia, who offered the thermal baths to the village in the year 473 (Tchalenko, Églises 27. – Peña, Syria 191f.).

44 Iohannes Chrysostomos, In Acta Apostolorum Hom. 18.

45 For a description of the remains at Korasion, see Keil/Wilhelm, Denkmäler 102-117. – Hild/Hellenkemper, Kilikien 311f. fig. 241-244.

46 Jacobs, City 117-125.

47 Dagron, Bourgade 29 distinguished these settlements based on their number of inhabitants, between 1,000 and 5,000, a more specialized or diversified economy than that of a mere village, and a strong social cohesion. – Walmsley, Development 516 discusses examples from Jordan and Palestine. – Varinlioğlu, Landscape 40 for North Syrian examples.

48 Mundell Mango, Androna 307. – The results of the German expedition have recently been published in full, see Strube, Al Andarin.

49 Hirschfeld, Farms 38.

50 Dagron/Callot, Bâisseurs 61f. – Varinlioğlu, Environment 298. – Eichner, Wohnhäuser 285f. – Eichner, Wohnhäuser 285 discusses the use of the word *komopolis* in Strabo 12.2.6 and Malalas 13.39.13-14.

Also in regions where material remains are not as well preserved, very large village settlements characterise Late Antiquity. If we return to the Milesia, the area around Miletus, the settlement in which the church of »Ajos Pandelmonas« as well as one additional church was located, cannot easily be defined as either a village or a town. The spread of 6<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics would here suggest that this was a very sizeable settlement indeed<sup>51</sup>.

## Epigraphy and mosaics in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century Near East

In the last section of this paper, I would like to review the use of epigraphy and mosaics in the villages of Jordan<sup>52</sup>. Epigraphy, similar to tetrapyla and arches, generally is considered a typically urban phenomenon<sup>53</sup>. If we linger in the region of Isauria for another moment, inscriptions rarely turn up outside the cities, with just a few of them found in the port of Korasion and none in the villages<sup>54</sup>. The spread of inscriptions in rural contexts again can be linked to the spread of churches and monasteries into the countryside. To my knowledge, the spread of mosaics in urban and rural communities has not explicitly been discussed, but before churches were constructed in the countryside, the amount of mosaic decoration outside of urban centres seemingly was a lot smaller as well, confined to rural villas and »palaces«.

One of the mosaics that often features in regional overviews of the provinces of Palestine and Arabia is a panel found in a church near Khirbet Kissufim, a settlement located in the Negev to the south of Gaza<sup>55</sup>. It depicts two women, both of them elegantly attired and richly embellished with jewellery, including earrings, bracelets, a diadem and a necklace. The younger woman is strewing coins, in an exceptionally prominent gesture reminiscent of the *liberalitas* shown on consular diptychs. The second woman, of a more advanced age, is holding a platter in both hands with an unidentified creature on it, probably a bird of some kind. A Greek inscription, ΚΑΛΗ ΩΡΑ Η ΚΥΡΑ ΣΙΑΘΟΥΣ, is added to the light background above the two figures. There

has been quite some discussion about the exact meaning of the inscription. Some scholars interpret ΚΑΛΗ ΩΡΑ as a nominative form and a name, others assume it is a dative form that must be translated as meaning a greeting, that is, »in good time«<sup>56</sup>. So the inscription would be »In good time (or on this happy occasion), the Lady Silthous«. The second woman might be a servant or a family member – her identity remains unclear.

The site where the mosaic to which this panel belonged was found, was not a city but a village, like there were many in the provinces of Palestine and Arabia. The countryside, which had been expanding already from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onward<sup>57</sup>, experienced a true boom in activity, village construction and extension from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Construction of churches in the countryside reached its zenith in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century but continued into the Umayyad period<sup>58</sup>. A shift from urban to rural sites already in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century but certainly by the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century is visible from north to south in the provinces of Arabia and the three Palestines<sup>59</sup>. In urban contexts, building activity seemingly had reached its peak already in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, with a few exceptions. Urban inscriptions datable to the 7<sup>th</sup> century are very limited<sup>60</sup>. In the Negev, some of the urban settlements – Avdat and Mamphis – had disappeared in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Beer Sheba in the northern Negev seems to show decline as well, whereas the fate of Elusa is ill-understood. Conversely, villages like Nessana, Shivta and Rehovot evidently flourished in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century, all of them covering surfaces of about 10 ha<sup>61</sup>. Shivta's churches were extended and renovated. A chapel was added to the south of the North Basilica in the year 607<sup>62</sup>; the south church has preserved an inscription commemorating a new paving of the church under Bishop George and the Archdeacon and *economus* Peter in the year 640<sup>63</sup>. Further to the north, in the Hauran, a similar evolution was taking place. To name but one example, Khirbet al-Samra, a village belonging to the rural territory of Bosra, was given eight churches in total, most of them built around the 630s<sup>64</sup>. The increase in epigraphy and churches in villages of both the Hauran and Negev seems to attest to a parallel growth of

51 Lohmann, Survey 1994, 304f. 300 fig. 18.

52 A more extended version of the epigraphic habit in villages of Palestine and Arabia can be found in Jacobs, Churches.

53 For late antique and Byzantine epigraphy as an urban phenomenon, see Destephen, »Byzantinization«.

54 Keil/Wilhelm, Denkmäler 108-117 for Korasion.

55 Cohen, Kissufim 254-256 for a report of the original discovery. – Cohen, Church.

56 E.g. Cohen, Church 279. – Israeli/Mevorah, Cradle 86f. – Habas, Donations 83 consider Kaliora to be a name – though note that Habas confuses her with Silthous. – Ovadia/Mucznik, Kissufim 275f. argue for the second option.

57 Hirschfeld, Expansion.

58 Cohen Kissufim 256 for the region immediately around Kissufim. For churches built in the broader region see Michel, Églises.

59 Di Segni, Documentation 165. – Hirschfeld, Farms. – Hamarneh, Topografia 55-62. – Walmsley, Village 517. – Walmsley, Development 337-339. – Hamarneh, Continuity with examples. – Leah Di Segni has studied how many buildings were constructed per year in these provinces and has thus shown that the

highest rate of construction was reached during the reign of Phocas (Di Segni, Documentation 158-178). – The construction rates between the reign of Anastasius and the Abbasids is presented in graph form in Walmsley, Village 517 fig. 5. – Walmsley, Development 338 fig. 14.

60 Di Segni, Documentation List I (Dedicatory inscriptions of sacred and public buildings in Israel (Southern Phoenicia, Palaestina I, II and III West of the Jordan) and List II (Dedicatory inscriptions of sacred and public buildings in Jordan and Southern Syria (Provincia Arabia, Eastern Palaestina).

61 Hirschfeld, Farms 39.

62 Rosenthal-Heginbottom, Kirchen 97f. The church had a very rich epigraphic record. Besides the building inscription, the church further contained 14 epitaphs, commemorating 18 deceased between 505 and 679, nine of which post-dated the Arab conquest, two building inscriptions and some further fragments (Rosenthal-Heginbottom, Kirchen 93-96).

63 Rosenthal-Heginbottom, Kirchen 103.

64 Walmsley, Village 517.

the entire settlement, as the buildings are evenly spread on the settlement plan<sup>65</sup>.

Not only was the number of village churches increasing rapidly, but also monasteries expanded around the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and continued to profit from patronage during the 7<sup>th</sup> century and later. They were built in the environs of major centres, or, more often, in the proximity of large and medium sized rural settlements and in some cases perfectly integrated into their fringes<sup>66</sup>. In addition, Basema Hamarneh has drawn attention to the fact that, together with the growing size of villages and the amount of village churches, the ecclesiastical positions in the countryside also gained some importance<sup>67</sup>. Many of the inscriptions in the region under discussion – in urban churches, village churches and monasteries – refer to the bishop of the urban diocese that the church was located in. This suggests that building policy was at least sanctioned by the bishop. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, there is little evidence for initiatives unconnected to the urban centre or initiatives of sole monastic communities. However, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, more reference is being made to the *officium* of chore bishop and *periodeutes*. There are already several references to both functionaries in the Petra papyri, and they start appearing in dated inscriptions from around the year 600 onwards<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, the fact that some of the larger villages were given baptisteries in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (or in Cilicia already in the 6<sup>th</sup> century), and especially after 635, suggests that they were becoming more and more religiously autonomous from urban centres<sup>69</sup>.

Up until now, I have not commented on who was responsible for this architectural and epigraphic blurring of boundaries. This remains a difficult matter, closely connected to the social composition of these villages<sup>70</sup>. The content of the associated inscriptions gives us some indications, but also the material remains themselves suggest that various inhabitants of the countryside were adopting practices previously confined to urban contexts<sup>71</sup>.

It is often assumed that the churches just discussed were the result of the patronage of wealthy landowners. The influence of such landowners on the villages of the eastern Mediterranean is based on literary evidence such as the passage of John Chrysostom mentioned above, in which he refers to the involvement of landowners in villages around Antioch, and, for the more southern regions, the papyri from Petra.

They show how the land assets of a family living in Petra and Gaza were dispersed over numerous villages and were normally leased out on a contractual basis<sup>72</sup>. If we assume that the cities were contracting by the later 6<sup>th</sup> century, it would not be inconceivable that members of a rich land-owning elite had taken up permanent residence in the countryside<sup>73</sup>. However, recognising where these owners physically stayed has so far proven largely impossible. There is very little evidence for the presence of an aristocracy in the aforementioned villages. Most of the houses were used for lodging an extended family and as the centre of agricultural exploitation. At Shivta, the architecture of the 170 or so houses identified generally suggest equality, with only one house standing out: »House 2«<sup>74</sup>. It was double the size of the others, possessed 14 rooms surrounding a spacious courtyard and it was physically connected to »Building 1«, which seemed to have served some communal function and may have been connected to a nearby wine-press<sup>75</sup>. Varinlioğlu was able to distinguish a few »wealthier« buildings at Karakabaklı as well, based on their size, their advantageous settings and additional architectural decoration<sup>76</sup>. Are we then to assume that the people who paid for church mosaics and furniture lived in such residences? Or is it more likely that multiple members of society contributed?

Let us take another look at the Kissufim pavement. The »Lady Silthous« at the right of the panel has been called an aristocratic lady<sup>77</sup>. This characterisation assumingly is based on the combination of the title *kyr*, the action of distributing coins and her wealthy attire. Based on her action of strewing coins, it has even been suggested that she donated the finances for the entire mosaic pavement of the church<sup>78</sup>. The female donors appearing in the mosaics of the Roman Near East typically look their best<sup>79</sup>, but equating jewellery with elite status may not be very sound. It is worth repeating Dossey's observation that, on the mosaics of North-Africa, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards, peasants and servants are wearing tailored, colourful clothes and are depicted with jewellery<sup>80</sup>. Indeed, church donations of the later 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries were not necessarily made by people living in exceptional houses or with a status far above that of a well-off farmer or trader.

Admittedly, there is only one very explicit reference to a merchant in an inscription from the region, dating as late as 776. In a room to the south of the basilica in the monastic

65 Walmsley, Village 517 for Khirbat el-Samra.

66 Hamarneh, Monasteries 291-293.

67 Hamarneh, Evergetismo 60-62. – Hamarneh, Monasteries 277.

68 Hamarneh, Continuity 65. – Kaplan, Villageois 80f. on chore bishops in 4<sup>th</sup>-century Asia Minor.

69 Hamarneh, Continuity 65 lists baptisteries at Umm ar-Rasas, Hayyan al-Mushayrif, Rihab, Khirbat al-Maqatl', Dhiban, Ma'm, ad-Dayr and Khirbat Hujayjah.

70 For an overview of literary sources on this matter, see Dagron, Bourgade. – Kaplan, Hommes Chapter 4. – Kaplan, Villageois.

71 I have explored this topic at greater length in Jacobs, Churches.

72 Gatier, Villages 113. – For Petra see Fiema, Petra 226. – Papyrological evidence from Egypt likewise suggests increased interaction between city and village, for instance with villagers leasing land from urban residents who owned land in the village and with villagers supplying the cities with agricultural products through

local markets and obtaining short-term financing, Bagnall, Village 556. – Hamarneh, Continuity 62 with further pertinent literary passages and references.

73 Hamarneh, Continuity 62.

74 Hirschfeld, Shivta 403-407. – Similarly, the stone-built 6<sup>th</sup>-century houses in the villages in North Syria all were of more or less the same dimensions and quality, Tate, Prospérité 95f. – Gatier, Villages 111.

75 Hirschfeld, Shivta 407.

76 Varinlioğlu, Habitat 299.

77 For instance, Di Segni, Gaza 47f.n. 30 calls her »a gentlewoman« and refers to her as belonging to an »aristocratic family«.

78 Ovadiah/Muczniak, Kissufim 275.

79 Further examples in Hunt, Mosaics 120. – Habas, Donations. – Hachlili, Pavements 238f.

80 Dossey, Peasant Chapter 3.

complex of Mar Liyas in the diocese of Pella, the text mentioned Esion, priest and abbot, as well as the benefaction of John the pulse merchant and his family<sup>81</sup>. A further indication of the contribution of non-aristocratic members of society though is provided by the subject of the panel located to the east of the Lady Silthous in the church at Kissufim. It depicts a man leading a camel laden with Gaza amphorae and baskets, accompanied by the word »Orbikon«. The exact meaning of this label again is contested, but based on other parallel depictions it is very likely a personal name<sup>82</sup>. Orbikon can be taken as a representative of a very lucrative profession in the 6<sup>th</sup> and also 7<sup>th</sup> century, that of the owner of a camel caravan, or, more specifically, wine trader. The presence of wealthy wine merchants in Kissufim would not be surprising, considering that the village was located in a wine producing region, 15 km from the export port of Gaza<sup>83</sup>.

Finally, it may also be useful to stop to think about how much a donor would have spent on a mosaic pavement, even though this is extremely difficult. Suffice it to say that, if the Lady Silthous (with or without her companion) had donated only the amount needed to create her own panel, she would not have spent an enormous amount of money. According to the information gathered by Baumann, a smaller surface of mosaic would have cost between 0.25 and three solidi<sup>84</sup>. It would therefore seem that such mosaic panels were within the reach of broader layers of society, not just the elite.

This is confirmed by a different category of church donations on which one could be commemorated for all eternity: that of church silver. The items belonging to the treasure of Kaper Koraon were donated to the village on the plain of Chalcis, to its Church of St. Sergios, between 540 and 640 or somewhat later<sup>85</sup>. As calculated by Marlia Mango, most items in the reconstructed Kaper Koraon treasure, though impressive to look at, had a rather low monetary value as the silver was worked very thin<sup>86</sup>. The most expensive object, the Antioch cross revetment, weighed eighteen pounds, good for 27 solidi (no. 35), but a silver spoon (no. 19) would have cost about half a solidus, a chalice (no. 57-59) four solidi<sup>87</sup>, more or less comparable to that of a mosaic panel. Since most of the items of the Kaper Koraon treasure were inscribed, about 50 individuals making at least one donation of silver are known, only four of which had a title added to their name<sup>88</sup>. As opposed to the slightly earlier Sion treasure, more than a third of which was donated to an important and upcoming pilgrimage centre by a bishop Eutythianos, bishops play a minor role in donations in the village of Kaper Koraon<sup>89</sup>.

Only one donor was an archbishop. The *cursus honorum* of a certain Megas can be followed on several of the objects of the treasure (with titles as »most glorious ex-consul« and »patrician«). A third donor with titles was a tribune and *argyropates*. The fourth was probably a *magistrianos*, working under the Master of Office as an *agens in rebus*. All other donors did not carry titles. As they did have their family relationships mentioned in the texts on the objects, it has been possible to reconstruct that most of them came from four or five families, each of which for some three generations donated to the church. They may very well have been middle class merchants or artisans<sup>90</sup>.

## Conclusion

In summary, in imperial times, large communal buildings, architectural decoration as well as inscriptions were urban features that hardly appeared outside of the city-context. Cities and villages were thus easy to distinguish based on their architecture. This changed in late antique and Byzantine times, changes which can often, though not always, be connected to the growing rural presence of the Church. In the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, stonemasons working in Asia Minor must have mainly earned a living by working for projects in the countryside. Already in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century and continuing in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, villages along the south coast of Asia Minor, in Syria, the provinces of Arabia and the three Palestines, started to take on more characteristics that we would normally call »urban«. Among these was the appearance of monuments such as bath houses and fortifications, and, at least in south-east Turkey, honorific arches and tetrapyla. Eventually, an extensive epigraphic record was no longer the prerogative of urban settlements. This evolution was stopped prematurely in the provinces more to the north, whereas in the south it continued without being interrupted by the Islamic conquest. Here, villages of the 7<sup>th</sup> and also 8<sup>th</sup> centuries apparently had inhabitants that continued the epigraphic tradition even though town-dwellers no longer did.

The people responsible for the flourishing of these settlements as well as for the continued investments in church decoration and epigraphy cannot simply be equated with an upper class. By contrast, part of the donations can seemingly be connected to affluent »middle class« donors and donor families making use of the same means of expressions known – to them and us – from urban contexts.

81 Hamarneh, Monasteries 280.

82 Ovadiah/Mucznik, Kissufim 276. – This is contested by Di Segni, Gaza 48 n. 30.

83 McCormick, Movements 71 f. fig. 3.6.

84 Baumann, Stifter 303-307.

85 The treasure is presented and discussed in Mundell Mango, Silver.

86 Mundell Mango, Silver 11. – Mundell Mango, Value, on the monetary value of silver objects and furnishing from the entire Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire.

87 Mundell Mango, Silver 11-13.

88 Mundell Mango, Silver 8-11.

89 Bishop Eutythianos donated about one third of the treasure. Among the other donors, there were two and possibly three more bishops, one priest, two deacons and one reader as well as secular members of the society, one of which bore the title of *lamprotata*. A second lay donor may have been a *clarissimus*. See Boyd, Treasure 8-14 and Appendix 1. – Ševčenko, Treasure 46-49, Appendix for the donors of the Sion treasure.

90 Mundell Mango, Silver 10. – Similarly, Fourlas, Silver discusses a silver hoard currently at Karlsruhe, possibly discovered in the Biqā valley in Lebanon, that included a censer and a spoon donated to an unknown sanctuary by Frankish soldiers in the Roman East.

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## Zusammenfassung / Summary / Résumé

**»Urbanisierte« Dörfer im frühen Byzanz. Ein Überblick**  
Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der physischen Entwicklung ländlicher Siedlungen im östlichen Mittelmeerraum zwischen dem 4. und dem 7./8. Jahrhundert. Er konzentriert sich insbesondere auf die Einführung einer Reihe von Merkmalen, die in der Kaiserzeit nur sehr selten außerhalb des städtischen Kontextes auftraten. Die Diskussion berührt (1) marmorne Bauausstattung, (2) Gemeinschaftseinrichtungen wie Badehäuser und Befestigungen, Ehrenbögen und Tetrapyla sowie (3) Inschriften, die oft auf Fußbodenmosaiken angebracht sind. Die weite Verbreitung dieser Merkmale lässt vermuten, dass die Dörfer sowohl wohlhabend als auch gut vernetzt waren. Zusammen mit den gleichzeitig stattfindenden Veränderungen in städtischen Kontexten, die oft als »Verländlichung« zusammengefasst werden, wird deutlich, dass die traditionelle Unterscheidung zwischen Stadt und Dorf in den späteren Jahrhunderten der Antike zunehmend irrelevant wird.

### Villages «urbanisés» dans l'Empire byzantin précoce.

#### Un aperçu

Cet article traite de l'évolution physique des habitats ruraux dans le bassin méditerranéen oriental entre les 4<sup>e</sup> et 7/8<sup>e</sup> siècles et se concentre surtout sur l'introduction de toute une série de caractères très rares en dehors du milieu urbain à l'époque impériale. La discussion concerne: 1) les équipements en marbre dans les constructions; 2) les infrastructures communes telles que les thermes et fortifications, arcs honorifiques et tétrapyles, ainsi que 3) les inscriptions, souvent placées sur les mosaïques de sol. La large distribution de ces caractères suggère une certaine aisance et une bonne interconnexion des villages concernés. Avec les changements qui s'opèrent au même moment dans les milieux urbains, souvent repris sous le terme de «ruralisation», il devient évident que la distinction traditionnelle entre ville et village n'a guère plus de justification dans les derniers siècles de l'Antiquité.

Traduction: Y. Gautier

**»Urbanised« Villages in Early Byzantium. An Overview**  
This article deals with the physical development of rural settlements in the Eastern Mediterranean between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century. More in particular, it focuses on the introduction of a number of features that in imperial times only very rarely appeared outside of urban contexts. The discussion touches upon (1) marble building decoration; (2) communal monuments such as bath houses and fortifications, honorific arches and tetrapyla; and (3) inscriptions, often associated with floor mosaics. The proliferation of these features suggests that villages were both well-off and well-connected. When seen together with changes occurring simultaneously in urban contexts, often summarised as »ruralisation«, it becomes clear that the traditional distinction between city and village becomes increasingly irrelevant in the later centuries of Antiquity.