

Rural Settlements in Byzantine Jordan

Studies based on historical and paleo-environmental data for Jordan are barely at the beginning. Of necessity this lecture can be only a first attempt for a general geographic synthesis of rural settlements in Byzantine Jordan based on historical archaeological and paleo-environmental data. Rather than giving solutions I believe that this attempt will raise questions to orient future research of archaeologists, who like myself with classical formation are interested in the Byzantine period of Jordan.

Results of archaeological research

It is clear to archaeologists working in the region that Jordan was intensively settled in the Byzantine period. Moreover I believe that it is useful to mention the nature of the scientific research evidence found to date. This will aid in determining the extent both of the archaeological exploration and of settlements in the different environmental regions of Jordan¹.

The most thoroughly explored region to date is the North, between the Zarqa river and the Yarmuk valley, surveyed by Schumacher at the end of the last century, and by Glueck and Bagatti (partly) during the 1940s². Of the 364 sites visited by Mittmann in the 1960s, nearly 240 showed traces of Byzantine occupation³. This evidence ranges from potsherds to architectural remains and ecclesiastical buildings. Excluding the urban centres such as Gadara, Abila, Capitolias and Gerasa, we find rural settlements in the Jebel Ajlun, in the Irbid plain and on the slopes of the Yarmuk and Jordan valleys. The evidence was so summarized in a recent survey report on the Yarmuk valley: 'The Byzantine period, like the Early Roman period, was well represented in every part of the

valley'. Of the 106 sites surveyed, 40 showed traces of Byzantine occupation⁴.

Relatively few churches of those rural settlements have been excavated such as at Um el-Manabi', on the Jebel Ajlun, at Khirbet Munyah north of Jerash, and several in the village of Rihab of Bene Hasan⁵. The region between the Zarqa river and Amman was surveyed by Glueck⁶. In August 1937 Fr De Vaux and Fr Benoit surveyed the area 25 square km. around the city of es-Salt. Of the 40 sites visited, 31 showed traces of Byzantine occupation⁷. Recently churches in the neighborhood of Amman, at Suwayfiyeh, Quweismeh and Jubeiha, were excavated, as well as an agricultural monastery at Zay el-Gaharbi north of es-Salt⁸.

The rest of the Balqa' region, south of Amman, as far as Wadi Zarqa Ma'in, was explored by members of the Survey in 1881⁹. This area has always been at the centre of attention of archaeologists interested in the Byzantine period, because of its richness in settlements of that period¹⁰.

The excavation of the Memorial of Moses at Siyagha, and of the four churches and a small monastery in the village of Nebo (Khirbet el-Mukhayyat), provided Franciscan archaeologists with the opportunity to explore in detail Mount Nebo and its surrounding region, intensively exploited for agricultural purposes in the Byzantine period.

The region north of Mount Nebo was recently surveyed by

⁴ AA. 'The East Jordan Valley Survey, 1975', *BASOR* 222 (1976) 41–66; J. Mellaart, *ADAJ* vi–vii (1962) 126–157; H. De Contenson, *ADAJ* xxii (1977–78) 108–135.

⁵ M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e Mosaici di Giordania*, I, Jerusalem 1981; 'Il complesso monastico di Khirbet Munya', *RAC* LIX (1983) 349–362.

⁶ N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, IV, 236–423.

⁷ R. De Vaux, 'Exploration de la région de Salt', *RB* 1938, 398–425.

⁸ Suwayfiyeh, *ADAJ* xv (1970) 25–27, Pl. 1; Quweismeh, S. Saller and B. Bagatti, *The Town of Nebo*, Jerusalem 1949, 251–268 and *LA* 1982, 509; Jubeiha, *ADAJ* xxii (1976) 8–10, Pls 13–22; Zay el Gharbi, M. Piccirillo, 'Il complesso monastico di Zay el-Gharbi e la diocesi di Gadara della Perea', *Studia Hierosolymitana*, III, Jerusalem 1982, 359–378.

⁹ C. R. Conder, *The Survey of Eastern Palestine*, London 1889.

¹⁰ S. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo*, I–III, Jerusalem 1941; S. Saller, B. Bagatti, *The Town of Nebo*, Jerusalem 1949.

¹ For a general geographical analysis of the region, see D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible*, New York 1957, and F. Bender, *Geologie von Jordanien*, Berlin 1968.

² G. Schumacher, *Northern Ajlun*, London 1890; C. Steuernagel, 'Der Adschlun', *ZDPV*, 1924, 191–240 (1–48); 1925, 1–144 (49–192); 201–392 (193–384); 1926, 1–167 (385–551); 273–303; N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, IV, Part I–II, New Haven 1951 (*ASOR* xxv–xxviii); A. Augustinovich, B. Bagatti, 'Escursioni nei dintorni di Ajlun', *LA* 1952, 227–314.

³ S. Mittmann, *Beiträge zur Siedlung und Territorialgeschichte des Nördlichen Ostjordanlandes*, Wiesbaden 1970.

members of the Hesban expedition¹¹. 'Results of the 1973–74 survey'—as stated in the published report—'have re-confirmed the observations of many scholars that Transjordan was heavily settled in the Byzantine period. Of the 125 sites identified around Hesban, 108 or 86%, yielded pottery of this period. In fact, at 21 of those sites, Byzantine was the dominant ware'. For the paleo-environmental and ethno-graphic research initiated systematically by the Hesban Expedition, the area has become a reference point for future research in the field.

In the Madaba region we recall the excavation of churches at Ma'in, at Massuh, Abu Sarbut, and at Dhiban between the Wadi Wala and the Mujib rivers, along with the survey conducted in the region west of Ma'in¹².

Extending south, between wadi Mujib and wadi el-Hasa, Reginetta Canova collected evidence of Byzantine epoch: churches, lintels with crosses, and over 400 funerary inscriptions in 29 villages¹³. In the southern region, between wadi el-Hasa and Aqaba, research has progressed little since Glueck's survey¹⁴. For the wadi el-Hasa itself, a recent survey has produced the following result: 'The Byzantine period was apparently the one of greatest population and the greatest number of settlements in the area surveyed. Moreover, many Byzantine sherds were found at major and minor sites through the area'¹⁵. Of particular interest is the discovery of a hermitage in the wadi Afra¹⁶.

The same general evidence was collected in the Jordan valley and in the region south of the Lisan peninsula¹⁷. As for the region north of the Dead Sea, we recall the recent excavation of a church in the village of Shuneh el-Janubyeh¹⁸. The settlements gradually diminish as we move towards the desert. However, along the Via Nova Traiana and inside the Limes Arabicus we find important settlements in the southern Hauran intensively inhabited¹⁹.

Finally, in the 'Brief Survey of ancient Christian monuments in Transjordan' published by Fr Saller in 1949, we find listed 141 sites in Jordan both urban and rural, 85 of which

show architectural remains of Byzantine epoch with a total of 170 churches²⁰.

We can conclude this brief survey, stressing that while the central-northern regions and the Ghor have been thoroughly explored and partly excavated, the same cannot be said of the region south of the wadi Mujib and east of the inhabited land. Despite those limits, which we must keep in mind for an overall evaluation of the research, the survey has proven that the Ghor as well as the Jebel Ajlun, the inner region along the desert, and the area along the edge of the rift, were intensively inhabited during the Byzantine period.

The relative abundance of precipitation during the winter months and the presence of perennial streams or springs and fertile soil favour the Jebel Ajlun and the region which borders the Jordan Valley, partly the Ghor, where we found settlements along the wadi beds and near the perennial springs. Not surprisingly, the greatest number of rural settlements are to be found there. However, despite the environmental harshness due to lack of rainfall and springs, whether in the south or to the interior towards the desert, we find important settlements even on a large scale.

Two main types of rural settlements

From a typological examination of the ruins we can divide the rural settlements of Jordan into two main types:

- 1) Byzantine villages fortified by enclosures or built near military installations, which we find mainly in the steppe. These apparently were developed around pre-existent way stations of the Roman–Nabatean epoch, along the caravan routes of the region, such as Um er-Rasas, Um el-Walid, Um el-Jimal, Khirbet es-Samra etc.
- 2) Agricultural villages developed progressively on Jebel Ajlun in relation to terraced fields or on the margin of cultivated lands in the Balqa' region, such as Maqatī', Khirbet el-Wahadneh on Jebel Ajlun, Massuh and Abu Sarbut in the plain of Madaba.

To those two main types of villages we add the agricultural monasteries where the monks, like the peasants of the nearby villages, lived by the exploitation of the land. We mention the excavated monasteries at Zay el-Gharby, Munyah, and on Mount Nebo the Memorial of Moses, and the smaller monastery of el-Keniseh at Khirbet el-Mukhayyat.

Demographic considerations

Moving on to demographic considerations, we recall that no village has been systematically excavated thus far, but only isolated churches. Therefore no overall plan of settlement has been provided, so as to permit identification of public edifices, roads, courtyards and dwellings. The state of preservation of the ruins has permitted the drawing of the plan of Um el-Jimal

¹¹ D. Waterhouse, R. Ibach, 'The Topographical Survey', *AUSS* 13 (1975) 217–233; R. Ibach, 'Archaeological Survey of the Hesban Region', *AUSS* 14 (1976) 119–126; xv–xvi (1977–78) 201–213.

¹² Ma'in, *RB* 1938, 227–258; *Studia Hierosolymitana*, I, 127–154; Massuh, *ADAJ* xviii (1973) 83; Dhiban, A. D. Tushingham, *The Excavations at Dhiban (Dhiban) in Moab*, *AASOR* xli, Cambridge 1972, pp. 59–76; A. Strobel, 'Topographische Untersuchungen bei der 'Ain el-Minya', *ZDPV* 1982, 192–203, Taf. 7–18.

¹³ R. Canova, *Iscrizioni e Monumenti Protocristiani del Paese di Moab*, Città del Vaticano 1954.

¹⁴ A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea*, I–II, Wien 1907; N. Glueck, *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, I (AASOR xiv), 1–113; III (AASOR xviii–xix) 1–32. J. M. Miller, 'Archaeological Survey South of Wadi Mujib: Glueck's Sites Revised', *ADAJ* xxiii (1979), 79–92.

¹⁵ B. MacDonald, 'The Wadi el-Hasa Survey 1979: A Preliminary Report', *ADAJ* xxiv (1980) 169–183.

¹⁶ B. MacDonald, 'The Hermitage of John the Abbott at Hammam 'Afra, Southern Jordan', *LA* 1980, 351–364, Pls 59–70.

¹⁷ A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea*, II, 277 fs.; F. M. Abel, 'De Tell Nimrin au Zerqa', *RB* 1910, 543–545.

¹⁸ M. Piccirillo, 'A Church at Shunat Nimrin', *ADAJ*, 1982, 335–342, Pls ciii–cx.

¹⁹ *AAES* II, A, 2; III, A, 2 summarized in M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e Mosaici di Giordania*, I.

²⁰ *Town of Nebo*, *op. cit.* 221–234.

and partially of Um er-Rasas, and the acquisition of a general idea of several other villages, in their urbanistic aspect.

The lack of such information has thus far limited current demographic research. Nevertheless on the basis of the survey research conducted so far in the region, and helped by parallel studies, we can characterize the nature of the economy of the two types of rural settlements outlined above.

The second type has the advantage of having been studied more thoroughly. The survey of Mount Nebo, in addition to results achieved by the paleo-botanical examinations done by the Hesban expedition, may be used as a test to show that the economy of those villages was based primarily on agriculture and only secondarily on grazing of sheep and goats, or raising of domestic animals. Given the identical environmental situation of Mount Nebo and Hesban and their proximity to each other on the edge of the Jordanian highland, the two sites are complementary for our research.

On Mount Nebo are still visible the retaining walls of terraces which the peasants or the monks of the monastery used in the Byzantine period; later, the region was abandoned. Such terraces were planted with vineyards and olive groves, as the discovery of 14 vine or oil presses indicates (2 in the village of Nebo, one in the monastery, 11 scattered on the mountain)²¹. Therefore the mountain looked no different than the outskirts of the present-day nearby village of Kufeir el-Wkhyan, whose terraces were built and planted recently by the sedentarized bedouins of the region west of Madaba.

The laboratory examination, by means of the flotation method of essay samples taken in different trenches of the Hesban excavations²², has proved that the area surrounding Hesban was cultivated mainly with wheat, barley, vineyards and olive groves with other types of cereals and fruit trees. The identification of zooarchaeological remains from the same excavations has likewise demonstrated that the main types of animals raised were sheep and goats, followed by cattle and other domestic animals²³. Gazelle and partridge remains proved that there was hunting as well. Agricultural, hunting and pastoral scenes represented in the floor mosaics of the churches of the region, on the basis of the above evidence, are not merely 'genre' scenes, but real life situations artistically depicted²⁴.

For the *first type of settlements* of Jordan, developed along the edge of the cultivated land in the steppe, we still do not possess adequate documentation, but only the survey data. We must therefore make use of comparative conclusions from places of similar environmental conditions such as the towns and villages of the Negev better excavated and studied²⁵.

Those sites have developed into villages as the result of massive sedentarization of nomadic tribes who lived in that region. The nature of the steppe and the lack of rainfall, despite adequate systems of water catchment, restricted agriculture to the cultivation of barley primarily and wheat and vineyards secondarily. Located as they were on important caravan routes which crossed the region, such settlements depended primarily on local commerce with the still nomadic tribes and on inter-regional commerce with Syria and Palestine. Sheep and goat breeding likewise played an important role.

The necessary water for human consumption as well as for flocks and domestic animals in both types of settlements far from large water springs or perennial streams, was assured by private cisterns and large public water reservoirs ordinarily protected by the authority. About 30 cisterns have thus far been located among the ruins of the village of Nebo. A large reservoir and six cisterns of notable dimension and capacity have been discovered in the monastery of Nebo²⁶. Some were also found in two places which were not far from the perennial springs of Ayoun Mousa to the north, and Ain Judeideh and Ain Keneiseh to the south. As for public water reservoirs, which were filled by catchment of run-off water, we mention as examples those of Dhiban, Um er-Rasas, Um el-Jimal and Rihab²⁷. As today, agriculture did not depend upon this stock of catchment water but on rainfall, which was more or less abundant and wisely channeled to the field for this purpose.

The lack of excavation of units of habitation in such villages on which to base an appropriate calculation, prevents us estimating numerically the population of Jordan both urban and rural. But the presence of churches and houses beyond the enclosure walls of several settlements, such as at Um er-Rasas and Um el-Jimal, is an indication that the settled population was continuously increasing in the region. Based on the onomastic of the numerous inscriptions so far collected in the region, we can say that the great majority of the population was of Arab origin, though not necessarily nomads or semi-nomads²⁸.

Precisely because of environmental differences among the regions of Jordan, an agricultural population had always existed in the area next to the nomadic tribes of the desert. The phenomenon of transition from one culture to another to such a great extent, in a period of political and economical security, has to be explained on the basis of the attraction exerted on the nomadic population by alternative sources for remunerative gain and by more comfortable forms of life. Certainly an auxiliary factor must have been the alliances made between the Byzantine authority and the tribes, in-

²¹ *Town of Nebo*, *op. cit.* 13–15.

²² 'The Flotation Remains of Tell Hesban', *AUSS*, 1976, 185–187.

²³ 'Preliminary Analysis of the Animal Bones from Tell Hesban', *AUSS*, 1978, 259–287; 1973, 133–144; 1978, 229–257.

²⁴ As in the mosaic floors of the churches on Mount Nebo (*Town of Nebo*, *op. cit.* Pls 8–29 and *LA* 1976, Tavv. 60–76).

²⁵ Evenari, *The Negev: the challenge of a desert*, Cambridge 1971. J. D. Elliott, *The Elusa Oikumene*, Cobb Institute of Archaeology, 1981; K. C. Gutwein, *Third Palestine: A Regional Study in Byzantine Urbanization*, NY 1982.

²⁶ *Town of Nebo*, *op. cit.* 10–13; *Memorial of Moses*, 1, 186–207.

²⁷ *ADAJ* 1982, 102, for a plan of Umm el-Jimal; *Explorations in Eastern Palestine*, III, 227, for an aerial photo of Um er-Rasas, a plan in *Town of Nebo*, *op. cit.* 246; *LA* 1980, Tav. 31, for a general plan of Rihab.

²⁸ R. Canova, *Iscrizioni . . . protocristiane . . . di Moab*, p. LXXXI–XC; M. Noth, *ZDPV* 84(1968) 143–158.

corporated in some way into the state apparatus through the submission of their sheikhs and the enlistment of the able-bodied men into the Byzantine army.

The activation of caravan commerce along the road which crossed the region, willed by Justinian²⁹, and the political security assured by the network of military forts and camps of the Limes Arabicus³⁰, along with the condition of peace favoured by the *pax aeterna* with the Persian Empire, are at the same time the concomitant external causes that explain the phenomenon of intensive sedentarization in the desert as well as in the agricultural settlements.

Among the concomitant factors that could contribute to the acceleration of the process of sedentarization, is to be included the conversion of peasants and tribes to the Christian faith. We do not know to what extent the State Authority participated in this conversion. We know for sure that a 'bishop of tents' was in charge of the Christian nomads of the area since the 4th century AD³¹, and some Choriepiscopi were sacred in villages. In any event, it seems certain from a thorough examination of a plan like that of Um el-Jimal, that the churches were not added, but were built simultaneously with the houses in the growing settlement. In this context the presence of numerous churches and chapels which we found in such close proximity to each other not only in urban centres but also in villages, like Rihab, Um el-Jimal, Khirbet es-Samra, poses a problem not yet historically solved³².

Administrative division

From the few literary sources related to our period we know that the region at the peak of economic growth and settled population was subdivided into four regional areas, depending upon four provinces of the Byzantine imperial administration which encompassed the actual territory of present Jordan³³. Positively this situation favoured cultural and commercial exchanges with the external world towards the Mediterranean coast to the west and with the Syrian interior to the north, as with southern regions. In the interior we have urban centres depending upon the metropolis city of the province (the only metropolis of the four provinces in Jordanian territory was Petra of the Palestina III Salutaris, perhaps only as a title of honour), together with rural settlements.

We have found such a division in the mosaic inscriptions. Next to the cities (POLEIS)³⁴, at Nebo and Maqati' the two settlements are called in the local inscriptions KOME,

village³⁵. The same division was used in the *Onomasticon*. For some villages or settlements of special importance we have the qualification of *great* (MEGISTE) such as for Ma'in Baal Ma'on, and *pergrandis* (PAMMEGISTE) for Dhiban-Dibon³⁶, without specification of what such qualification could signify in the administration of the province³⁷.

The mosaic inscriptions with the mention of the bishop of the nearby town, help us to include those villages in the territorial ecclesiastical division of the region into bishoprics, which are assumed normally to correspond to political administrative units³⁸. So we have four provinces and about 18 bishoprics in Jordan, although for some of them it is not assumed that they had the status of a city.

From the same inscriptions we know that along with the clergy who were in charge of the numerous churches of the villages, there were also monks in the monasteries inside and outside the settlements, and mosaicists, either local or called in by rich families to decorate the sacred edifices³⁹. From those inscriptions we are able to date the peak of sedentarization reached in Jordan, that is the 6th and 7th centuries AD, beginning in the second half of the 5th century.

In what way those settlements were contributing economically to the maintenance of the provinces, how they were taxed, if they were in a border region like Jordan, how the properties were allotted, are all questions to which we can give no adequate answer. We can only afford an hypothetical answer based on the general administration of the provinces of the empire, as evidenced in the Nezzana papyri for the Palestina III Salutaris⁴⁰. A possible answer for the division of properties could be obtained by examining the field divisions which we see in and around old villages, once it is ascertained that such enclosures are from the Byzantine epoch.

At least in one case we have been informed of a commercial transaction between our region and Palestine. Cyril of Scythopolis in his life of St Saba, relates an incident which occurred to an Arab who was transporting wheat with a camel from the village of Mekawer to the monastery of wadi en-Nar⁴¹. Furthermore among the papyrus documents found at Nezzana in the Negev we have an autograph letter of Moses, bishop of Aila, on the Red Sea, sending a money gift to two sanctuaries of the Negev through an Arab, 'a Saracen' bedouin camel rider⁴².

Conclusion

If with a methodical survey extended to the southern and

²⁹ F. M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine*, II, 355–388. A. Grabar, *L'Age d'or de Justinien*, Paris 1966.

³⁰ T. Parker, *ADAJ* 1981, 171–178 and D. L. Kennedy, *ADAJ* 1981, 21–24; D. L. Kennedy, *Archaeological Explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan*, BAR International Series 134, 1982.

³¹ F. M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine*, II, Chap. IV, 'Arabes et Moines au Ve Siècle', 344–354.

³² M. Avi-Yonah, 'The Economics of Byzantine Palestine', *IEJ* 1962, 39–51.

³³ *Die Provincia Arabia*, III, 249–360; A. Spijkerman, *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia*, Jerusalem 1978; G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, Harvard 1983.

³⁴ As in the inscriptions of Madaba (*LA* 1982, 379).

³⁵ In the dedicatory inscription of the Church of St Georges (*Town of Nebo*, 140) and in the inscription of the Chapel at Maqati' (M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e Mosaici di Giordania*, 24).

³⁶ *Onomasticon* 44, 26 and 76, 18.

³⁷ L. Brehier, *Les Institutions de l'Empire byzantin*, 1970.

³⁸ M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e Mosaici di Giordania*, 11–13.

³⁹ M. Piccirillo, *1 Mosaici di Giordania dal I all'VIII sec. d.C.*, Roma 1982.

⁴⁰ C. J. Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, III, *Non-Literary Papyri*, Princeton 1958.

⁴¹ E. Schwartz, *Kyrrillos, Vita St Sabae*, 186, 15, LXXXI.

⁴² Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, III, 51.

eastern regions of Jordan, one can provide a more detailed view of the rural settlements during the Byzantine epoch, only a cross-disciplinary study of such settlements can provide the necessary information to put forth less hypothetical conclusions based on more accurate archaeological historical and paleo-environmental data.

From this synthesis it is obvious that much work has to be done in the different fields of research. Recognizing this necessity and priority, I do not however think that one can subscribe to the suggestion I read in a recent geographical analysis of an ancient desert ecosystem: 'Systematic examinations of towns and villages are needed . . . Controlled surface collecting may be used, followed by excavations. The purpose of excavations should be to identify economic specializations, social classes and their locations, and the locations of other functional areas within and surrounding the site. Many activities areas may have to be inferred from architectural remains alone. Excavations should not continue to concentrate on remains of churches, temples, and cemeteries. These types of remains have been over-emphasized in past excavations . . . and a balanced perspective on the sites . . . has not been achieved. Excavation of these remains perhaps should consist merely of identification without complete excavation'⁴³.

In the enthusiasm for new methods of scientific investigation, we should not forget that much information regarding the Roman-Byzantine period of Jordan until now has been provided by archaeologists of classical background in excavations of public and ecclesiastical buildings, which ordinarily are the only ones to provide inscriptions. Thanks to such buildings and their inscriptions, we have the possibility, as we have seen, to determine the territorial extension of the urban

centres, and to put forth in some cases a first outline of the urbanistic development of a settlement, which could be completed with the excavation of habitational units.

Moreover we should not forget that with an archaeological excavation of a church in a village, we can arrive at a first historical evidence of the developing economic welfare of the rural population in the area. After the excavation of several churches conducted by myself in the villages of Nebo, Rihab and Massuh, I can say that the building activity, begun at the end of the 5th century and the first years of the 6th century for practical liturgical purposes, becomes changed in the second half of the 6th century into a luxurious building project of new churches and the beautification of the old ones with mosaic floors and painted or mosaic walls. In this connection we find clergy and rich families involved, whose names emerge at this stage in the village. Two different epochs are closely connected and differentiated by different economic factors.

The landscape of Jordan, whose economy was primarily based on agriculture and sheep grazing, reflected to a great extent such differentiation because of the climatic and environmental differences of its regions. The villages of the Balqa' region and on Jebel Ajlun with their numerous open villages built with nari stone around their churches on top of natural elevations, looked different from the black settlements of the desert, which gave the impression of fortified settlements in a hostile and desert land. Economic and security differences along with the natural environment are at the root of the great diversity of the widespread settlements.

The contemporary sedentary and agricultural development of Jordan, assisted by the central government, surprises the traveler who drives inland off the main roads. It can give an appropriate idea of how the region looked in the Byzantine epoch, a period of equilibrium among the different political, cultural, and environmental components.

⁴³ J. D. Elliott, *The Elusa Oikoumene*, 160.

