

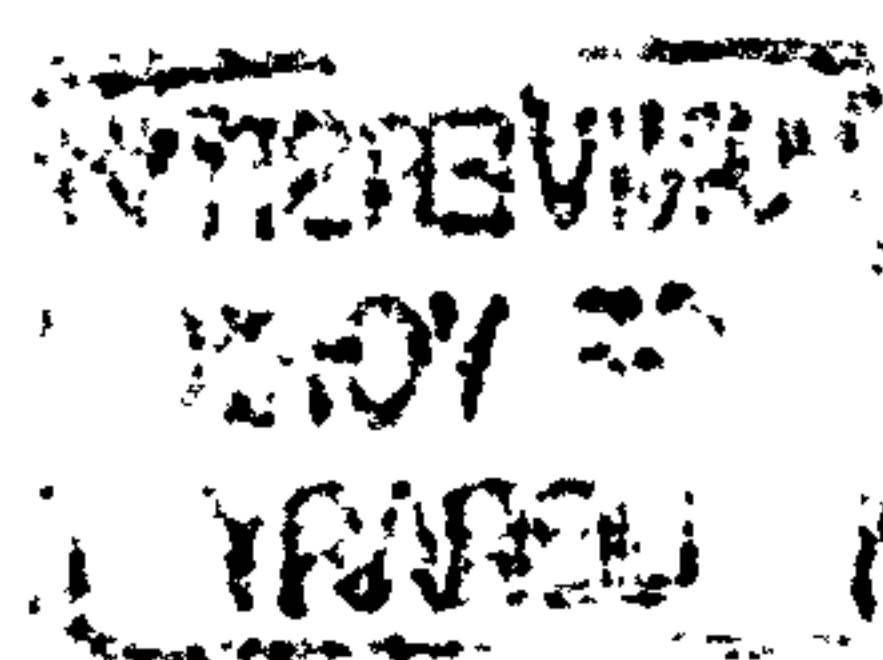
**The Archaeology of Monasticism  
Landscape, Politics and Social Organisation in Late Antique Syria**

Volume 1: Text

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## *Abstract*

This thesis reassesses the role played by monasticism in the social, economic and political changes of Late Antiquity in the eastern Mediterranean. In particular, it takes the Roman province of Syria as its primary arena, and argues that monasteries were more active in effecting social change in this region from the fourth to the seventh centuries than has been previously supposed. In arguing for such a role, a theoretical deconstruction of the nature of archaeological research in Syria is carried out, and the reasons why the material culture of that region has been consistently left out of wider intellectual debates are demonstrated.

Instead of monastic institutions being regarded as essentially separate from broader changes affecting the way rural society was organised, a more varied, dynamic model is proposed. Running contrary to many general commentaries on the late empire, which assert that the eastern Mediterranean maintained a consistent and successful taxation base, it is argued instead that more complex, localised methods of socio-economic control can be recognised archaeologically. Instead of there being a lack of social transformation until the seventh or eighth centuries in the eastern Mediterranean, it can be suggested that some areas in fact witnessed a shift from a predominantly tax-based economy to one where tribute was given to rural institutions as early as the fifth century.

By examining both the internal morphology of monastic sites as well as their broader relationship with topography and surrounding settlement patterns, a case can be made that monasteries were at the forefront of this shift. A landscape approach is adopted in order to scrutinise this model, using an archaeological data set from the limestone massif of north-west Syria. Three specific case studies are then used to contextualise these broad conclusions. This thesis brings together information from a number of previous surveys in the region throughout the twentieth century, with results obtained through my own fieldwork undertaken in 2003 and 2004.



# *Contents*

List of Tables	5
List of Figures	6
List of Appendices	10
Transliteration Scheme	11
Acknowledgements	12
Author's declaration	12
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Previous Work - Archaeology, Empire &amp; the Orient</b>	<b>20</b>
1.1 The monastery in Syria	20
1.2 Derrida and deconstruction	21
1.3 First contact: archaeology and the colonial agenda	25
1.4 The origins of American involvement: H.C.Butler	30
1.5 After the Great War: Western power and its archaeological implications	33
1.6 Consolidation: the work of Georges Tchalenko	38
1.7 Syria regained: Orientalism and the modern debate	45
1.8 Recent work: the Orient reconsidered	49
1.9 What next ? Defining the nature of the problem	55
1.10 Conclusion	57
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical Engagement - Approaching the Monastery</b>	<b>59</b>
2.1 The debate so far	59
2.2 Durkheim and the sociology of religion	61
2.3 Documents and the role of material culture	64
2.4 Processual theory and monasticism	69
2.5 Marxist interpretations of monasticism	73
2.6 Monasteries and post-processualism	82
2.7 Sacred landscapes and society	90
2.8 Contemporary definitions of landscape	97
2.9 Monasteries and the significance of location	100
2.10 Conclusion	102
<b>Chapter 3: Building a Model - The Late Roman Socio-Economic Context</b>	<b>104</b>
3.1 Previous studies of the Roman economy in Syria	104
3.2 Landscape, climate and foodstuffs	107
3.3 Studies of the Syrian countryside	116
3.4 More recent approaches	118
3.5 Power and control: a useful model?	124
3.6 Land ownership in rural communities	134
3.7 Taxation	136
3.8 The imperial economy	143
3.9 Monasteries and the economy	151
3.10 Conclusion	158

Continued overleaf

<b>Chapter 4: Historical Context &amp; Archaeological Evidence - Defining Monasticism</b>	<b>160</b>
4.1 The spread of Christian belief	160
4.2 The Council of Chalcedon and the creation of a Monophysite Church	164
4.3 Asceticism and the origins of monasticism	166
4.4 Ascetic practice in context	170
4.5 Transitions from holy man to monastery	173
4.6 Archaeological evidence for the earliest monastic activity	174
4.7 Documents and anxieties of definition: what <i>is</i> a Syrian monastery?	180
4.8 Material definitions of monasticism	187
4.9 Variation in monastic practice and material form	194
4.10 Dating monastic sites	206
4.11 Conclusion	214
<b>Chapter 5: Inter-site Perspectives – Distribution, Scale &amp; Variation</b>	<b>216</b>
5.1 Research questions and methodology	216
5.2 Selection of study area and the information resource	218
5.3 Organisation of the data	230
5.4 Mapping and locating the evidence	232
5.5 Settlement-monastery distribution	240
5.6 Siting, gradient and intervisibility	246
5.7 Access, communication and resources	255
5.8 Site surface area	259
5.9 Micro-distribution, density and sub-regions	268
5.10 Monastery morphology and site types	282
5.11 Discussion: the inter-site perspective	288
5.12 Conclusion	
<b>Chapter 6: Intra-site Perspectives - Monastery, Settlement and Landscape</b>	<b>290</b>
6.1 Case study selection	290
6.2 Case study 1: Qasr al-Brad	294
6.3 Case study 2: Kharab Shams	307
6.4 Case study 3: Burj Jalahah	322
6.5 Discussion: Monasticism and ideological expression in the landscape	333
6.6 Contrasting notions of monasticism	336
6.7 Conclusion	340
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusions – Monastic Authority in Late Antique Syria</b>	<b>342</b>
7.1 Summary	342
7.2 A model for hegemonic change in the Syrian countryside?	350
7.3 Monastery versus church? Monastic authority and ecclesiastical power in Syria	354
7.4 Syriac identity and the Monophysite church	356
7.5 Consumption and stagnation	359
7.6 Regional comparisons	362
7.7 Micro-Christendoms and political fragmentation	369
7.8 Arrested development? Monastic landscapes and early Islam	372
7.9 The monastery as ‘politician’: developing the model	375
7.10 Future work: the monastery and Syriac identity today	378
Glossary	383
Bibliography	385



## List of Tables

1	<i>Schematic representation of the model proposed in Chapter 3</i>	131
2	<i>Summary of the documentary record for the adoption of Christianity in the hinterland of Antioch</i>	163
3	<i>Monastic institutions in Theodoret of Cyrrhus' <i>Historia Religiosa</i> (after Price 1985, xvii)</i>	211
4	<i>A summary of the methodological questions tackled in Chapters 5 &amp; 6</i>	216
5	<i>The definitional categories used in this thesis</i>	224
6	<i>Monasteries and settlements in each of the sub-regions within the study area</i>	228
7	<i>Number of monasteries within each sub-region</i>	229
8	<i>Number of monasteries per sub-region, once definitional control is imposed</i>	230
9	<i>Ratio of number of settlements to each monastery</i>	230
10	<i>Database scheme used in this study</i>	231
11	<i>Ground control points used</i>	234
12	<i>Summary of location categories applied to the data</i>	236
13	<i>Summary of monastery-settlement distance data (distances in km)</i>	241
14	<i>Summary of monastery-settlement distance per 0.5km catchment</i>	241
15	<i>Summary of monastery-settlement distance data (for reliably located monasteries)</i>	242
16	<i>Summary of monastery-settlement distance per 0.5km catchment</i>	243
17	<i>List of monasteries within this 'isolated' category</i>	244
18	<i>Summary of settlement-'random' monastery site data</i>	245
19	<i>Summary of the altitude of monastic sites</i>	248
20	<i>Summary of the altitude of settlement sites</i>	248
21	<i>Summary of the distance between monastic sites and nearest communication route</i>	253
22	<i>Summary of the distance between 'random' monastic sites and nearest communication route</i>	254
23	<i>Summary of the surface area of monastic sites (where known)</i>	257
24	<i>Summary of the surface area of settlement sites (where known)</i>	257
25	<i>Sites within 'Group A'</i>	262
26	<i>Sites within 'Group B'</i>	263
27	<i>Group B sites which may relate to communal centres</i>	264
28	<i>Sites within 'Group C'</i>	265
29	<i>Summary of morphological features and their presence on monastic sites</i>	268
30	<i>Summary of the characteristics of each monastery type</i>	271
31	<i>Summary of the correlation between type and group</i>	286
32	<i>Remaining methodological tasks to be tackled in Chapter 6</i>	291
33	<i>The external surface area of masonry blocks used at Qasr al-Brad</i>	302
34	<i>Tower sites around Burj Jalahah and distance to nearest neighbour</i>	328
35	<i>Summary of the refined model presented as a result of the research in this thesis</i>	377

## List of Figures

1	<i>Map of western Asia showing the positions of modern Syria, Greater Syria or Bilad al-Sham and the limestone massif to the north-west</i>	27
2	<i>The areas delineated by the Sykes-Picot agreement, showing areas of widespread archaeological survey up to the Second World War</i>	34
3	<i>The limestone massif, showing areas subjected to archaeological survey up to the 1940s</i>	37
4	<i>Tchalenko's map of the areas of the limestone massif suitable for agriculture, according to information obtained during the 1940s and 50s</i>	42
5	<i>The village of Kharab Shams, with the monastery on the hill behind</i>	78
6	<i>The structure of society, according to a traditional Marxist position</i>	79
7	<i>The monastic site of Dayr al-Nasrani in the Hauran, demonstrating its dominant location</i>	91
8	<i>The monastic site of Dayr Mar Elian, used by Muslims and Christians alike</i>	94
9	<i>Map of the eastern Mediterranean showing the regions and places mentioned in the text</i>	108
10	<i>A modern olive grove in the north of the Jebel Sim'an region of the limestone massif, showing the nature of the cleared area and the limestone 'crust' surrounding the orchard</i>	115
11	<i>Map showing differential precipitation zones throughout Syria (Roach 1990, 22)</i>	116
12	<i>One of de Vogüé's reconstructions of a Roman 'villa' in the limestone massif (de Vogüé 1865)</i>	117
13	<i>Tchalenko and Tate's contrasting versions of the Debes plan (after Tate 1992, 7)</i>	119
14	<i>A press at Ksajba. This may have been used to process multiple crops</i>	121
15	<i>An olive grove at Bara, showing the ploughed ground ready for inter-planting of a cereal crop</i>	121
16	<i>The village of Dar 'Aman. The lack of an orthogonal layout is common to settlements in the limestone massif</i>	136
17	<i>Aerial photo showing cadastration on the south-eastern edge of Jebel Sim'an (from Tate 1992, 234)</i>	138
18	<i>The village of Dayr 'Aman, showing the kind of wide, open area which may have been used for the gathering of goods, for exchange and also the collection of taxation</i>	140
19	<i>A graph showing fluctuations in the supply of local coinage in various regions of the Roman empire from the first to the third centuries AD (after Hopkins 1980, 113)</i>	144
20	<i>Late Roman Amphora 1 (after Butcher 2004, 198)</i>	146
21	<i>Likely proportions of olive oil produced at Dayr Debes (according to the calculations in Biscop 1997)</i>	154
22	<i>An example of a press at the monastic site of Brayj in the limestone massif</i>	154
23	<i>Graph showing trends in construction throughout the limestone massif, based on inscriptional and stylistic data (after Tate 1992, 140)</i>	156
24	<i>Example of a stylite's column at Kafr Daryan</i>	176
25	<i>General view of the monastic site of Brayj from the north</i>	178
26	<i>Mattern's single phase plan of Brayj (after Mattern 1944)</i>	178
27	<i>An updated plan of Brayj, showing the two earlier structures</i>	179
28	<i>Detail of the east tower at Brayj, showing the stratigraphic relationship between the earlier tower and its subsequent extension</i>	179
29	<i>Incised decoration at the monastic site of Dayr Debes</i>	188



30	<i>The accommodation building at Qasr al-Brad</i>	190
31	<i>Domestic use of towers as evidenced by aumbries at Burj Jalahab</i>	191
32	<i>On the left is a Corona image of the village of Sirmada from the late 1960s. The expansion of this village is illustrated by the Landsat on the right taken in the 1990s</i>	192
33	<i>An example of a cistern at Dayr Turmanin</i>	193
34	<i>An example of an enclosure wall at Dayr Debes</i>	194
35	<i>Entrance to the ecclesiastical enclosure at Baqirha which was added to the site in AD 501</i>	200
36	<i>A plan of Baqirha, showing suggested phasing</i>	201
37	<i>The bema platform within the church at Baqirha (after Baccache &amp; Tchalenko 1980, 191)</i>	202
38	<i>North face of the north wall of the large, open plan structure at Dar Qita, showing its stratigraphic development. The wall on the right is the latest of the three phases</i>	203
39	<i>An overall plan of the Dar Qita ecclesiastical complex, showing a suggested phasing for the accommodation complex.</i>	204
40	<i>General view over the village of Dayr Sim'an from Qal'at Sim'an. The ecclesiastical site to the north-east of Dayr Sim'an can be seen in the mid-ground to the right of the picture</i>	205
41	<i>The 'auberge' or pandocheion at Dayr Sim'an</i>	206
42	<i>An example of Tate's 'single orthogonal' construction technique at Burj Jalahab</i>	208
43	<i>The 'communal habitation building' at Dayr Debes, elements of which may date to the late fourth century</i>	212
44	<i>The restored monastic site of Dayr Mar Musa. The earliest phase can be seen in the lower portion in the centre of the building</i>	214
45	<i>Map of the north-west of Syria showing the seven main mountainous areas of the limestone massif, as well as the major city sites mentioned in the text</i>	220
46	<i>The full distribution map of monastic sites within the current study area, according to Tchalenko</i>	223
47	<i>The site of Dayr Mi'az A</i>	226
48	<i>Bar chart showing monasteries by interpretation</i>	228
49	<i>Sample map of the north of Jebel Barisha, showing the location of Ksajba</i>	235
50	<i>Bar chart showing the number of monasteries per location category</i>	236
51	<i>Bar chart showing the number of secular settlements per location category</i>	236
52	<i>Pie chart summarising the reliability of monastery placement</i>	237
53	<i>Pie chart summarising the reliability of settlement placement</i>	237
54	<i>Distribution map showing monastery and settlement sites, water courses and ancient communication routes overlaid onto a Landsat image</i>	239
55	<i>Distribution map showing monastery and settlement sites, water courses and ancient communication routes without the Landsat image</i>	240
56	<i>Bar chart showing the distance between monasteries and their nearest settlement</i>	241
57	<i>Bar chart showing the distance between monasteries and their nearest settlement</i>	242
58	<i>Bar chart showing the distance between monasteries and their nearest settlement, with a more 'isolated' group marked in red</i>	243
59	<i>Distribution plot of settlements and 'random' monastic sites</i>	245

60	<i>Bar chart showing distance between 'random' monasteries and their nearest settlement site</i>	245
61	<i>The prominent siting of Dayr Tell 'Ada commanding extensive visibility of the Plain of Dana</i>	247
62	<i>Pie chart showing the number of monasteries per gradient siting</i>	248
63	<i>A viewshed plot showing settlements as visible from monastic sites</i>	250
64	<i>Pie chart showing the proportion of settlement sites visible from monastic sites</i>	250
65	<i>Viewsshed plot showing monasteries as visible from settlement sites</i>	251
66	<i>Pie chart showing the proportion of monastic sites visible from settlement sites</i>	251
67	<i>Viewsshed plot showing monasteries as visible from settlement sites in the Jebel Sim'an region</i>	252
68	<i>Distribution map showing position of monastic sites in relation to water courses</i>	254
69	<i>Line graph showing the relative scales of adjacent settlement and monastic sites</i>	258
70	<i>A reconstructed cross-section of a 'typical' spatial relationship, with a secular settlement and a monastery</i>	259
71	<i>Plot showing the density of monastic sites</i>	260
72	<i>Plot showing the position of three groups of particularly high monastery density</i>	262
73	<i>Distribution of possible central and dependant monastic units in Group B</i>	264
74	<i>Plot showing the density of settlement sites</i>	266
75	<i>Plot showing the density of settlement sites overlaid on to monastic sites</i>	267
76	<i>Cluster plot of monastic sites according to their morphological characteristics</i>	270
77	<i>Cluster plot of monastic sites according to their morphological characteristics, highlighting three types</i>	271
78	<i>The monastic site of Sarjibla (south), showing the press in the foreground, the church behind and an accommodation block to the right.</i>	272
79	<i>General view of Qal'at Sim'an, with the baptistery complex to the right</i>	274
80	<i>Detail from the Oceanus &amp; Thetis mosaic in the Antakya Museum: a cherub hauls in a fishing net while in the background stands a stone tower</i>	276
81	<i>A monastic tower at the site of Dayr Sim'an</i>	278
82	<i>The Type 3 site of Burj Nasr</i>	279
83	<i>Venn diagram showing the relationship between Type 3 and Group B sites</i>	280
84	<i>Distribution map showing some Type 3/Group B sites clustered around possible communal centres</i>	281
85	<i>Plan of the site of Burj Dayr 'Aman, showing modern damage to the north-east</i>	282
86	<i>Distribution map of monastic sites showing the lack of correlation between Type 1 sites and any particular density group, whether A, B or C</i>	285
87	<i>Distribution map of monastic sites showing the lack of correlation between Type 2 sites and any particular density group</i>	285
88	<i>Distribution map of monastic sites showing the partial correlation between Type 3 sites and Groups B &amp; C</i>	286
89	<i>Map showing the location of the three case studies used in this chapter</i>	293
90	<i>The late fourth/early fifth century church of Julianos at Brad, with a Muslim cemetery in the foreground</i>	295
91	<i>Plan of the monastic site of Qasr al-Brad</i>	296
92	<i>General view of Qasr al-Brad from the east</i>	297
93	<i>Qasr al-Brad church and cloister portico</i>	298
94	<i>The main accommodation building at Qasr al-Brad</i>	298



95	<i>A probable storage structure at Qasr al-Brad</i>	299
96	<i>The remains of a press, now backfilled, at Qasr al-Brad</i>	300
97	<i>The tower at Qasr al-Brad</i>	301
98	<i>The remains of the column at Qasr al-Brad, with the tower behind</i>	303
99	<i>Position of a sarcophagus within a small martyrion in the monastic church</i>	304
100	<i>Plan of the Brad region, showing the distance and nature of the topography between the main settlement and Qasr al-Brad to the south-west</i>	305
101	<i>Digital Elevation Model of the Brad region, showing the relative topographic positions of Qasr al-Brad and Brad. The monastery is slightly higher than the town</i>	306
102	<i>Plan of Kharab Shams, with the main village to the south and the monastery to the south</i>	307
103	<i>Kharab Shams: the village church on the right and the monastic church on top of the hill</i>	309
104	<i>Kharab Shams church showing added south aisle</i>	310
105	<i>East end of monastic church, with possible reuse of masonry shown in the aumbries to left and right</i>	311
106	<i>Kharab Shams monastic church from the north-east</i>	312
107	<i>Plan of the monastic site, showing a probable accommodation building to the north</i>	313
108	<i>One of the small 'domestic' presses located close to the monastic church</i>	315
109	<i>The flimsy enclosure wall which surrounds the monastic site</i>	315
110	<i>Kharab Shams press building from the south</i>	318
111	<i>Access to the second storey of the press building from the monastic site</i>	319
112	<i>View from the monastic church down into the village</i>	320
113	<i>View from the centre of the village towards the monastic site on the hill above</i>	320
114	<i>Rock-cut steps facilitating access between monastery and village</i>	321
115	<i>Digital Elevation Model of Kharab Shams showing the topographic position of the monastery above, and the village below</i>	322
116	<i>Plan of the site of Burj Jalahab</i>	323
117	<i>Burj Jalahab: the tower from the south-east</i>	324
118	<i>The large window on the ground floor of the tower of Burj Jalahab</i>	325
119	<i>Burj Jalahab: press with the tower behind. The fitting for the screw of the press is visible to the right of the picture</i>	326
120	<i>The interior of the cistern at Dayr Burj Jalahab, showing the plastered walls and finely carved pillars</i>	327
121	<i>Burj Jalahab, looking across the plain of Sirmada to the north</i>	329
122	<i>Distribution map of the Group B, Type 3 sites shown in Chapter 5</i>	330
123	<i>A Corona satellite image showing the position of Burj Jalahab and Qal'at Sirmada</i>	332
124	<i>An interpretation plot of the Corona satellite image, showing the position of field boundaries</i>	332
125	<i>Lintel motifs from the case study sites: Qasr al-Brad, Kharab Shams monastic church and Burj Jalahab</i>	339
126	<i>The monastic site of Dayr Mar Elian in the Qalamun</i>	363
127	<i>A map of the Hauran, showing the position of three surviving monastic sites on the Syrian side of the border</i>	364
128	<i>Butler's plan of Dayr al-Nasrani (Butler 1914, 335)</i>	365
129	<i>The large cistern at Dayr al-Nasrani</i>	366
130	<i>Field systems probably for stock management, photographed from the site of Dayr al-Nasrani</i>	367
131	<i>Dayr al-Nasrani from the west, showing its prominent position</i>	368

## *List of Appendices (Volume 2)*

- A Full colour image of the distribution of monastic sites, settlement sites, Roman roads and water courses, with a Landsat backdrop.
- B Full colour image of the distribution of monastic sites, settlement sites, Roman roads and water courses, without a backdrop.
- C Table summarising the climatic and environmental data used in the discussion in section 3.2.
- D Table of settlement sites within the study area.
- E Gazetteer of monastic sites in the thesis study area, displaying information relating to site location, morphology, bibliographical references and author's comments.
- F CD containing the full database created for this thesis, as well as the Geographical Information System.



## *Transliteration Scheme*

The Arabic place names in this thesis have been transliterated into the Roman script using the scheme set out below. In many cases, however, if a particular spelling or rendering of a name is in common English usage, then this version has been used instead (such as Damascus rather than Dimashq). What follows is essentially the same diacritical scheme as that used in the journal *Levant*, although for the purposes of simplicity many of the diacritical marks commonly used in such schemes have been omitted (except in the glossary, or where a term is used for the first time). I have tried to standardise most place names into the following scheme so that there is some consistency between the thesis text and the database. However, this means that the spellings used here are often different from those used by other authors.

### Consonants

ء	a	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th	ص	s	م	m
ج	j	ض	d	ن	n
ح	h	ط	t	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	dh	و	w
د	d	غ	'	ي	y
ذ	d	ف	gh		
ر	r		f		

### Vowels

ا	a	ـ	a
و	u	ـ	i
ي	y	ـ	u

## *Acknowledgements*

So many have generously offered time, advice and funding over the past three and a half years that it is difficult for this small page to do them justice. To begin with, I must thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council) who, along with the Council for British Research in the Levant, Palestine Exploration Fund and Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust, funded this programme of study. There are many within the Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums of Syria in Damascus who patiently accommodated my requests, for which I am grateful. In particular, Dr. Michel Maqdissi and Wouroud Ibrahim are thanked for offering time and kindness in their busy schedules. Dr. Amr al-Azm and Dr. Ma'amun Abdulkarim of the University of Damascus have provided ideas and logistical advice, as well as a friendly ear. Amr in particular has done much to make me feel welcome in Damascus. Mohammad Dbiyat at IFAPO helped me many times with maps and His Eminence Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Metropolitan of Aleppo kindly provided accommodation and advice.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of William Frend, for his love of all things heretical.

## *Author's Declaration*

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, and the responsibility for any errors is my own. A summary of some of the arguments made in this thesis have already appeared as a published conference paper (Hull 2003), but the majority of the data analysis, discussion and conclusions are presented here for the first time.



## Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to examine and explain the social, economic and ultimately political role played by Christian monasticism in Syria during Late Antiquity. It draws, in part, on fieldwork conducted in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2003 and 2004, but is in fact largely a theoretical work. The reason for this approach is that as I embarked on an examination of the social and political role of monasticism, I soon realised that a fairly lengthy programme of groundwork, in the form of deconstruction, was necessary before any fresh explanation could be introduced. The reasons for this deconstruction are essentially threefold.

Firstly, monasticism has rarely been allowed any kind of political role in archaeological accounts. The reasons why it has been so omitted are not necessarily to do with a genuine lack of monastic involvement in such affairs. The real reasons for this view are rather different. Firstly, monasticism has largely been regarded as a form of behaviour separate from society. It would appear to have been, by definition, an 'other', secluded and isolated for contemplative reasons, and therefore it could not be written into mainstream histories of humankind in the last two millennia. This is partly, of course, because monastic organisations have themselves sought to appear isolated. As a major producer of texts, they have informed readers of their noble distance from the world because their ideological constructs have relied heavily on this impression of separation. This view of monasticism has therefore in large part been self-perpetuated, as some of the most enthusiastic commentators on monastic life have themselves been monastics. Saints' lives, letters, rules and customaries have influenced one another in a cumulative fashion, each part of a chain of monastic discourse stretching back to the very gospels themselves. Consequently, 'any approach to the subject (of monasticism) is encumbered with a long baggage train, most of which must be left behind if there is to be any hope of understanding the role monastic life played' (Bagnal 1993, 294). Moreover, this 'baggage train', carried largely by western scholars since it is they who have produced most texts on the subject, is dominated by the western coenobitic tradition of the Benedictines and the Cistercians. It would be dangerous for us to unthinkingly carry such preconceptions into different contexts, and different timeframes.

But this impression of monastic separation has also been a function of academic convenience. Since monasteries often appear so isolated in physical and literary terms, it is often easier to conform to this impression by writing them into the margins, rather than the centre, of human history. Confronting the notion that monastic communities may ever have played an active, influential or causative role in human development would mean confronting the notion that by definition, they are never supposed to have done so. Pestell

comments on the fact that monasteries have often been approached with a sense of romanticism, whereby as nodes of secluded cultural activity they offer the viewer a sense of escape from the business of mainstream society (2004, 3-4). For the researcher too, they offer a subject of study which does not obviously involve a need to come to grips with the complexities of broader social, economic and political life. Consequently, most scholars have been happy enough to regard monasteries as remote from such affairs.

A second and nonetheless important factor which has contributed to the marginalisation of monasticism in discussions of Late Antiquity in the eastern Mediterranean, is the nature of Orientalist traditions in academic study of that region. It is argued later in the thesis that academic texts created over the past two centuries, have been inextricably entwined (whether consciously or otherwise) with political processes which have sought to juxtapose an 'East' and a 'West', and in so doing render the former as 'exotic' in contrast to the democratic dynamism of the latter (Said 1978). Within such a tradition, eastern subject matter has therefore been regarded as requiring 'special' methods of study in order to decode its mysteries. Consequently, Syria, 'the Orient' and indeed the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia in general, have often been viewed as presenting evidence of such quality and diversity that it is somehow unique, and deserving of 'special' techniques of analysis. The marginalisation of monastic studies has therefore been even more of a problem in the eastern Mediterranean, since accounts here have very often been needlessly isolated from discussions taking place elsewhere. Indeed, it has been pointed out that, until recently, studies of Byzantium in general have tended to occur in isolation, and often without any sense of theoretical self-reflection (Cameron 1980).

A third problem is period-specific. Late Antiquity is a period studied by scholars from two contrasting backgrounds which, until quite recently, have found it difficult to collaborate. Lavan describes these as the 'Continental' and the 'Atlantic' traditions (2003). The former, largely carried by scholars in Paris but which also 'has supporters in Oxford and in Classics and Religion departments around Europe', dominates with approaches that focus on extensive textual research, architecture for its own sake, with use of material remains heavily dependent on large quantities of data (2003, x-xi). Clearance is the norm in terms of excavation methodology and archaeological or anthropological theory rarely applied. Emphasis is on matters of cultural history and religion, and thus high status architecture forms the greater part of discussions.



The 'Atlantic' school by contrast uses techniques of stratigraphic recording and interpretation developed during the 'rescue' culture of the 1970s, and is very strong on artefactual and ecofactual analysis. It tends to focus therefore on questions of close chronology, with issues like technology and the economy to the fore. The archaeology of the lower classes, whether of the countryside or the town, is often focused on. This school uses textual sources more infrequently, and is prone to ignoring typologies developed by the 'Paris' school. It often seems like these two traditions exist 'without any substantial dialogue' (Lavan 2003, xiv). However, this thesis tries to form a theoretical framework within which elements of both approaches can be used profitably.

These three factors have combined to write monasticism out of major changes in the historical trajectories of Late Antiquity. Yet this thesis argues that monasticism *did* play a crucial role in the social changes that occurred from the late fourth century to the early seventh. During this period, the region of Greater Syria witnessed two significant developments. In contrast to recent syntheses (Ward-Perkins 2005a, Wickham 2005), it is arguable that it was a period when economic control of the countryside by the city decreased markedly in some areas. An urban-based tax was being collected less and less throughout the late fourth century, and locally-collected 'tribute' and then rent became the likely successors. Following this, architectural chronologies in the northern Syrian countryside suggest that there was an expansion of buildings of high quality construction throughout the fifth and early sixth centuries. This has usually been interpreted as a period of economic boom for a free peasantry.

Contemporary changes were also occurring in the way Christianity was organised and expressed, though such issues are rarely drawn into discussions of economic and social change. Throughout Late Antiquity, it would seem to have been the case that rural communities believed differently from the population of the towns. By the mid-fifth century, the villages of north-west Syria appear to have been largely Monophysite in belief, in marked opposition to the Orthodox view asserted by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The role of monasticism in these socio-economic, political and theological changes has not been explained. Yet at the same time as these changes were occurring, ascetic monasticism, made up of a network of holy men with hard line views on poverty, self-denial and the rejection of Roman society, began to emerge. Within a century, large, monastic institutions were built throughout the Syrian countryside in ways which are not suggestive of isolation or independence, but suggest instead, deep and complex interaction with the secular villages on

whose margins they were set. How did this emergence, and then transformation, of monastic behaviour intersect with broader societal changes? The two developments, of apparent economic boom on the one hand and the establishment of large monastic communities on the other, have rarely been discussed alongside the fact of monastic expansion, besides occasional paragraphs and footnotes in publications which discuss the settlement patterns and architecture of this period in general.

In order for this lacuna to be properly investigated, this thesis adopts two approaches. Because of the aforementioned factors which have combined to marginalise studies of monasticism in the eastern Mediterranean, this is by necessity a largely theoretical work. The process of deconstructing existing commentaries on monasticism is no simple one, but it is necessary if the often valid evidence contained within such commentaries is to be properly understood. Furthermore, in order to reconsider the role of monasticism and construct a new and stimulating model for future research, such a model must account carefully for broader social and economic processes also. This is no straightforward task given the often variable ways in which archaeological evidence has been collected and synthesised in the region.

As well as the process of theoretical deconstruction and then reconstruction, this research has also involved a fresh examination of the material record, and the insertion of new data through fieldwork. For this purpose, a total of five months were spent in the eastern Mediterranean, largely in the Syrian Arab Republic, throughout the period of the PhD. Archaeological research in this country is enormously rewarding. The quality of the archaeological preservation in north-west Syria in particular offers rich opportunities for investigating the status and role of emergent monasticism in great detail. Although both excavation and studies of surface artefact material have been rare due to the shallow stratification of the area, the standing architectural remains are, in most cases, so well evidenced as to be highly informative about the layout of individual structures, villages and even whole regions. It is certainly true that in landscapes such as the limestone massif, 'there is immeasurably more evidence for continuity of Roman-style settlement...than there is in the West' (Ward-Perkins 2005, 960). And indeed it is with evidence of such quality that we stand the best chance of examining what kinds of economic and social organisation *really* lay behind this apparent 'continuity'.

However, rewarding and abundant though such evidence undoubtedly is, fieldwork in Syria also presents significant challenges. The Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums in



Damascus faces a continuing problem of having an enormous heritage resource to manage and limited funds to carry out that task. They seek to control access to that heritage very carefully, but are at the same time faced with an abundance of requests to study those sites. Consequently, gaining permission and engaging the interest and collaboration of local colleagues takes time, and necessitates the careful planning of logistics and funding to ensure a reasonable return on the effort spent. The lengths of time involved in planning and carrying out fieldwork has therefore meant that a relatively small and well-defined data set has been employed in this thesis.

At the same time, the fieldwork carried out here was never intended to produce the kinds of lengthy field gazetteers so often produced by archaeologists studying the late antique remains of Syria. Such previous studies have proved useful in their day, and are indeed used in abundance by this thesis. Instead, the fieldwork carried out here instead sought to check, validate and scrutinise previous research in a targeted manner, so that it could be used more profitably within the research programme pursued here. My fieldwork also sought to physically locate the information provided by previous gazetteers more accurately, so that it could be used in conjunction with modern satellite images and mapping to produce meaningful spatial analyses.

In order to confront directly the intellectual and physical isolation usually assumed of monasticism, I decided to examine the physical relationship between monastic complexes and the world around them. How did monasteries relate to areas of secular settlement, resources and topography in their vicinity? In order to answer such questions, material evidence was examined in particular, though some use was made of literary sources. The approach adopted consists essentially of a landscape analysis. However, this is not intended as a purely descriptive enterprise, viewing landscape as something of a 'backdrop' to lives more properly evidenced by pottery and hagiographies. Instead, I have sought to understand the spaces which monastic sites occupied, influenced and overlooked as an active and integral part of the broader social interaction between their own communities and the rural population as a whole. Thus, through an examination of the material evidence, my aim has been to examine not just how monastic landscapes were constructed physically, but also mentally by those who inhabited them.

This research has therefore tried to apply both methodological techniques and theoretical perspectives which have been experimented with at greater length in studies of late Roman to early Medieval transition elsewhere in the world, and bring them (though not without

careful consideration of the specifics of local context) to the landscapes of north-west Syria. These approaches ask a number of questions. For example, did monasteries play a role in social transformation in Late Antiquity? If so, what precisely was that role? To what extent did monasteries play an active part in economic transformation? How did the economic basis for monastic life link with the ideological statements made through their buildings, their position in the landscape, and their connections with areas of secular settlement? It will be argued that archaeology is well-equipped to answer these questions, though not without careful consideration of how material evidence can be used alongside the sometimes contradictory perspectives provided by documents. The ways in which previous scholars have combined their theoretical outlook and the 'data' on the ground has arguably impeded the conclusions that could be drawn of late antique monasticism. The political and social context of their work on the one hand, but the fact that such a context is rarely made explicit on the other, could be seen as having held the subject back somewhat. However, it is hoped that the work which this thesis represents goes some way towards developing a new 'model' for understanding changes in rural settlement in Late Antiquity not just in Syria, but wherever early Christian monasticism emerged and established itself.

The temporal scope of this thesis, though generally described throughout as 'Late Antiquity', can be described more specifically as follows. In order to understand how monasteries developed and assumed a role within society as a whole, its earliest tangible origins in the fourth century will be discussed. Since archaeological evidence is of primary consideration, the fifth and sixth centuries in fact make up the majority of the discussion here since it is these centuries which appear to present the majority of the evidence in the north-west of Syria. Furthermore, it is during this period that monasticism undergoes a series of important changes. It would be all too easy to then draw the thesis to a close at the moment Islam arrives, as so many previous scholars have done, on the grounds that the Arab invasions somehow had a decisive and widespread impact (a view which originates with Pirenne 1937, but is prevalent in Tchalenko 1953 also). Later in the thesis, it is argued that this view is not sustainable. However, the main focus of the present study does indeed end in the seventh century, for it is by this time that settlement abatement and at least some degree of economic stagnation had been reached, and the role of monasticism begins to change again.

Chapter 1 begins this study by examining the political and intellectual circumstances of archaeological work in Syria and indeed the 'Orient' as a whole. Chapter 2 then develops the argument from deconstruction to a consideration of how archaeological theory has dealt with monastic settlement in the past. Having outlined the theoretical approach to be



adopted by this thesis, Chapter 3 then begins to develop a working 'model' based on the socio-economic context of late antique Syria. This model having been proposed, specific data is then approached in order to investigate this model further. Before a data set can be defined with any certainty, Chapter 4 carries out the necessary but often overlooked issue how we may actually define a monastery. How as both historians and archaeologists can we understand when we have or have not found one? It is concluded that monastic sites are in fact more varied, and of greater longevity, than previously supposed.

Data sets from across the limestone massif of north-west Syria are then defined and examined, and issues of chronological and spatial breadth produced by the model are addressed in Chapter 5. The ways in which monastic sites across the region were positioned and laid out is analysed, and distinct groups and types identified which may betray different kinds of interaction with secular settlement patterns. Chapter 6 then intensifies the research, by looking at three case studies in order to examine the specific chronological and morphological evidence from different forms of monastic complex. It is concluded that as well as there being three broadly different forms monasticism in operation, these may be seen as different stages in a chronological development during which monastic communities gradually took control of the production, storage and redistribution of agricultural surplus. Having looked at the issue of what role monastic sites played in fourth to seventh century socio-economic change, Chapter 7 concludes by expanding the discussion. The social and economic questions asked by this thesis are extrapolated to link with discussion of the political changes brought about by an increasing urban-rural divide, by the Monophysite controversy and ultimately the creation of a separate Church, and by the rise of Syriac as a literary and liturgical language. Broader comparisons are then drawn with areas outside Syria, and a refined model is presented which, it is hoped, will stimulate further debate.

This conclusion is intended to 'stretch' the evidence currently available to its limit, but it is hoped that with carefully targeted work in the future it can provide a productive framework for debate. Without such debate, monasticism will remain a static emblem, both for academic study seeking to understand the widespread changes of Late Antiquity, and for the modern Christian communities of Syria who look to monasticism as the origins of their faith. This research seeks to highlight instead that monasteries were neither static nor isolated, but pragmatic, powerful and ultimately profoundly influential in their dealings with society at large. Because of the strength of that role, monasticism *must* be explained if the wider question, of what happened to society in Late Antiquity in the eastern empire, can ever be understood.

# Chapter 1

## Previous Work: Archaeology, Empire & the Orient



*This chapter seeks to define the ways in which the archaeology of monasticism in Syria has been approached by previous scholars of the subject. It begins with the very first surveys of the region by French explorers during the nineteenth century, before describing the work of the American Princeton Expedition from 1899, the Syrian Antiquities Service of the Mandate period, and in particular the survey of Georges Tchalenko. It is argued here that a full deconstruction of the political agenda of such surveys is necessary if the nuanced conclusions of such work are to be understood. After reviewing the majority of the study of this field for the twentieth century, the views of Edward Said are defined and used as a tool by which to appreciate the full implications of the archaeology of Christianity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More recent work is then examined and deriving from this, the theoretical outlook to be adopted in this thesis is introduced.*

### 1.1 The monastery in Syria

'...the past as play, the Orient as theme park.'

(Hodder 1998, 138)

Syriac monasticism today plays an important role in the definition of Syrian Orthodox identity, both within the bounds of Greater Syria, but ever more so within its now scattered diaspora through the continents of the world (published references on this topic remain scant, but some indication is given by, for example, Syrian Orthodox Resources 2000, Sato 2003, Schemm 2005). The role of the early monasteries, and especially their enigmatic founders, the ascetics of Late Antiquity, are portrayed as crucial to an understanding of the church as a whole. The symbolism which centres on their origins and early religious activities increasingly features, for instance, in a discourse of modern travel and political journalism decrying the rapid diminution of Christian communities in the region (Dalrymple 1998; Kimball 1992; Sennott 2002). Though the importance of these early institutions and figures in establishing a Syrian Orthodox church and as symbols for its conduct today is undeniable, there is arguably a need for an updated analysis of how monasticism was actually constructed in the late Roman and Byzantine worlds in which it emerged. Similarly, the tendency by scholars of the subject to use predominantly textual sources, often liturgical and hagiographical in nature, has led to a focus on the religious aspects of early monasticism. While such aspects are important, the social and political role of monasteries is likely to have been varied and significant too. There therefore exists potential for a broad, multidisciplinary synthesis of the subject, which would bring modern archaeological analysis, more familiarly applied to subject matter outside the Middle East, to the monasteries of the



Syrian countryside. In this way, it is hoped that their origins and early development can be given a more convincing social and economic context and as a result, the political implications of their foundation understood.

As was argued in the introduction, this thesis is therefore an attempt to draw together, assess and broaden the interpretation of the evidence produced by around a century and a half of scholarship on monasticism in Syria. This scholarship has produced some degree of interpretation of monasticism, but has largely been carried out on the basis of documentary evidence alone, with only occasional and rather intuitive reference made to the large bodies of material evidence produced by archaeological survey in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The surveyors who have produced such evidence have, by contrast, tended to pursue rather simplistic, uni-causal explanations as to why monasteries were so numerous and prominent within the landscape by the fifth and sixth centuries, and what the implications of this may have been for rural society as a whole. In order to introduce how this study hopes to make more thorough and interesting use of this material evidence, this chapter will first assess the nature of these early surveys through a deconstruction of their research agenda and political context. Some consideration of the archaeology of Christianity throughout western Asia as a whole will be made. More specific regional, historiographical information will be presented regarding documentary evidence in Chapters 2 and 4, the economy in Chapter 3, and in relation to specific case studies in Chapter 6.

## 1.2 Derrida & Deconstruction

In order to understand the conclusions produced by scholarship on the subject of early Christian monasticism in Syria produced over the last century and a half, we must seek to define the social, political and historical context in which that work was carried out. The origin, composition and methodology of each archaeological project carried out in western Asia from the early nineteenth century onwards arguably had a profound impact on the published outcome of those projects which are left for us to read today. 'It is all too easy, and at least to some extent incorrect, to say that archaeologists have excavated in the Near East in order to elucidate the prehistory and history of that region' (Hodder 1998, 125). Indeed it has been increasingly recognised in the last twenty years or so 'that politics can never be entirely excluded from archaeological practice or theory' (Carman 1993, 39). This is because, as Johnson describes it:

'...our statements about the past are never cool objective judgements detached from the real world. They are always made here, in the present, with all its heady



and complicated, jumbled mixture of political and moral judgements.' (Johnson 1999, 107)

In fact, as long ago as 1939 Collingwood pointed out that our theoretical position 'ultimately arises out of 'real' life...we study history in order to see more clearly into the situation in which we are called upon to act' (1939, 114). The sixty years which separate these two superficially similar statements have produced an important distinction, however. There has been a growing realisation that archaeological conclusion 'must be understood as *constituted*, not just shaped or influenced or interfered with, by its social, political context' (Wylie 1989, 94). This means that not only can we recognise the presence of explicit *bias*, but we must go beyond this to investigate how *all* archaeology, not just the obvious, extreme examples of its 'misuse', has been conceived, pursued and concluded.

In archaeology, such a view forms a part of the 'post-processual' framework of thought, which derives from a broader recognition that *knowledge in general* can no longer be viewed as an entity separate from those that created it, and indeed the very milieu of that creation. *Any* knowledge is therefore a construct, so that the methods of that construction must be taken apart and scrutinised. According to Jacques Derrida, this scrutiny, or 'deconstruction', is essential because knowledge does not exist as an independent text, 'there are just other texts' (Johnson 1999, 163; Derrida 1988; Quine 1960; for archaeology, this notion was developed by Hodder 1986; for a critique, see Olsen 1989). Derrida was not entirely new in recognising this, as he takes something of Plato's quest for definitions, then continues the anti-metaphysical line of thought running from Nietzsche and through Heidegger (Nietzsche 1967). However, Derrida is more radical than his forebears and his emphasis goes further than a mere clarification of the hidden texts surrounding any written, published account. In reacting against structuralist thinking, indeed the broader Western metaphysical tradition in general, Derrida attempts to escape altogether from traditional binary oppositions like true-false, original-derivative, unified-diverse, objective-subjective, and so on. With relevance to this thesis, he views, for example, the contrast between the style and situation of a scholarly text on the one hand and its factual content on the other, with scepticism (Howells 1999, 73). In fact, for Derrida, there is no such distinction.

For this reason, the course of the historiography below follows the theoretical imperative set by Derrida, that we must deconstruct every aspect of an archaeological publication from the point of origin in order to assess the nature of the conclusion it seeks to make. It is important to state, however, that it is *not* necessarily the case that if a text is deconstructed it



is automatically therefore regarded as a flawed piece of work. As Alison Wylie has pointed out, if we are to treat the topic of deconstruction seriously, we must accept that 'not just bad science must be deconstructed, but all' (1989, 94). If we can therefore make the distinction that dissolution is not disillusionment, then, as Llewelyn has summarised of Derrida, 'to deconstruct is not to destroy' (1986, xiii). Otherwise, if any exposition of the origins of an argument is equated with irredeemable criticism, then the sands of scholarly conclusion would be forever shifting according to the standards of the present. It is instead, that deconstruction allows 'a detailed reconnaissance of the frontier', so that the frontier may be thoroughly reassessed (Derrida 1981, in Llewelyn 1986, x).

Deconstruction, by its very definition, must consider every aspect of the context of a text. As Hodder points out, there are many such texts 'caught in a maelstrom of perspectives and special interests' (1998, 138). However, it is argued here, that the most important aspect to consider in the context of a historiography of archaeology for Syria is the role of the nation state in constructing archaeological agenda. Archaeological parties from a wide variety of nations have carried out, and indeed continue to work in Syria. These parties have predominantly, especially until the Second World War, been from France, the United States, Germany and Britain, with significant contributions also from Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Syria itself. The broader political agenda of each of these nations had an undeniable impact on the way in which survey and excavation work was carried out, and indeed the conclusions which this work produced.

Hodder has remarked that '(a)ny historical review of the development of archaeology in Europe cannot avoid the links to nationalism and ethnicity' (1991, 4). Indeed it has been argued that the appearance of nationalism itself stimulated the very creation of archaeology as a science (Rowlands 1998, 35). But beyond this, Hodder's comment should be extended also to the development of European archaeology *outside* Europe, especially within the context of the colonial agenda pursued by Western European nations and the United States from the mid-nineteenth century. Hinsley asserts that 'archaeology is best understood as a narrative, a particular form of origin myth that began in nineteenth century Euro-American societies to take on increasing importance as a vehicle of validation for social groups engaged (and enmeshed) in industrial growth, capital accumulation, and colonial expansion' (1989, 79-80). That is not to say that such narratives hold *no* interest, and are not in part convincing, for us today. However, it is important to recognise that archaeological teams working outside their country of origin always bring with them, explicitly and implicitly, a



range of external perspectives, thereby producing conclusions which are a relationship between those pre-conceived perspectives and the archaeological material they encounter.

Trigger has confronted this subject by summarising the range of different ways in which the political agenda of the state impacts upon the construction of archaeological agenda. He defines colonial and imperial archaeology as distinct theoretical types, describing the former as 'the archaeology of countries where European powers have subjected native populations to various forms of institutionalised domination' and the latter as 'associated with a small number of states...which have exerted political domination over large areas of the world' (Jones 1997, 9, citing Trigger 1984). It is argued here, as indeed Trigger himself expressed, that defining a precise distinction between the two is problematic, as the various European and American political agenda of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and indeed continuing into the twenty-first) have often fluctuated between the two (1984, 368). Nevertheless, recognising that both colonial *and* imperial archaeology are distinct from archaeology as practised 'at home' is important, and perhaps nowhere more so than the Middle East.

Until recently, discussion of the link between a contemporary political milieu and its archaeological study has been slight for the Middle East. A lone voice for many years has been Neil Silberman, who has discussed the role of archaeology in state formation in Israel (1982, 1988, 1990, 1999). The 1998 volume, *Archaeology Under Fire: Nationalism, Politics and Heritage in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East*, has gone some way towards redressing this balance, with a variety of case studies drawn from the region as a whole (Meskell 1998). Bahrani, for example, (in quoting Stolper) has recognised of archaeology in Iraq that '(t)he European and intellectual history that shaped the study of the ancient Near East is not to be separated from political history' (Stolper 1992, 20; cited in Bahrani 1998, 167). There could be no clearer example of this than the 2003 war in that country, the effects of which profoundly diminished the quality of the archaeological record within Iraq. *Archaeology Under Fire* also presents case studies from Turkey, Cyprus, the Gulf states and elsewhere. There is a notable lacuna, however, with regard to Syria. Recent conference papers have attempted to address issues within that country (Hull 2004a, 2004b, 2005). Although it is not the primary purpose of this thesis to discuss the socio-politics of archaeology in Syria, a summary is included here in order to set its own conclusions in context. This summary cannot be complete for reasons of space, but nor is it intended simply as a detached precursor to the main body of the research, 'as something apart, something special, something that can be adequately dealt with on its own so that the real business of doing archaeology can be



proceeded unhindered' (Carman 1993, 39). One of the major objectives of this thesis therefore will be to define the political role of early Christian monasticism in Syria. But first, in order to bring together the conclusions made previously of monasticism, the conditions, pressures and agenda of the practitioners who produced such conclusions are now presented.

The review which follows is divided chronologically according to the significant changes in the socio-political milieu of Syria from the late nineteenth century until the present day. The next three sections will review the origins of archaeological investigation of early Christian monasticism, until the work of its most significant contributor, Georges Tchalenko. Section 1.6 will review Tchalenko's work in some detail, before 1.7 and 1.8 assess the legacy of this work in more recent decades. Finally, section 1.9 brings the discussion up to the present day, and hopes to summarise the current state of understanding of this subject. In so doing, the problematic aspects of this understanding will be presented, by way of an introduction to the *modus operandi* described in Chapters 2 and 3.

### **1.3 First contact: archaeology and the colonial agenda**

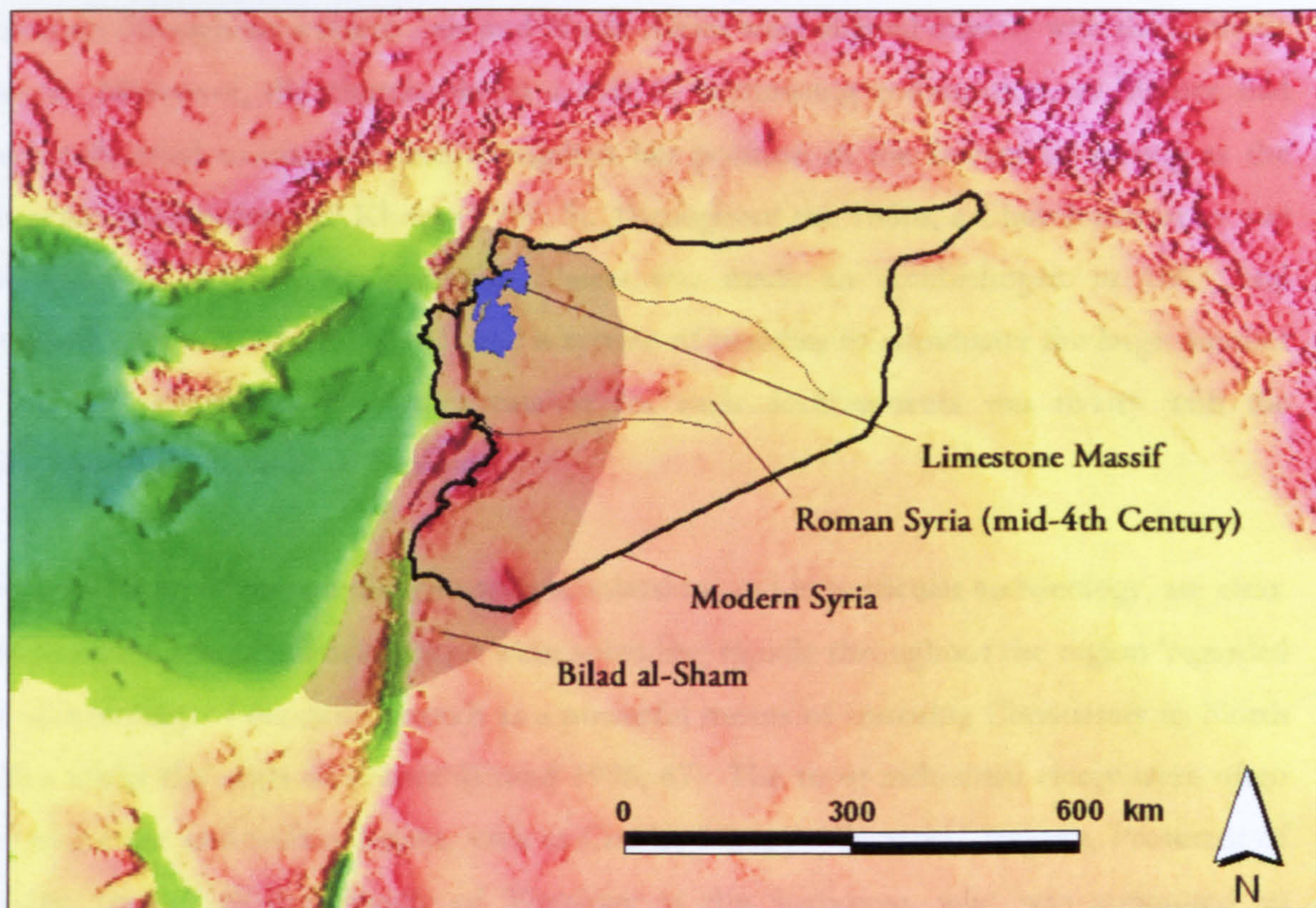
In contrast to studies of early periods in western Asia, late antique and medieval evidence has been produced rather less by major, long-running excavations of single sites than by wide-ranging surveys of surface material. This is in part due to the nature of the material of this period: it is rarely to be found in the same form as the *tell*-based archaeology so common to Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Age studies. Furthermore, in a rural context at least, the preservation in certain areas has been excellent, permitting the coverage of large areas in a comparatively short period. A further reason may be, as will be seen, that previous surveys have tended to feed the agenda and enthusiasm of those that follow, a factor represented as much in the methodology adopted as the conclusions produced.

The majority of this early data collection in the Middle East was conducted in common with more general attempts to administer the population and landscape during the late Ottoman and Mandate periods. The circumstances and presentation of this data often reflects more general political and cultural agenda. For example, early archaeological survey and excavation of ecclesiastical structures in Palestine was carried out by the British scholar J.W.Crowfoot in the 1930s, during which time he also happened to be in the Egyptian civil service (1941). For what is now south-east Turkey, the British traveller Gertrude Bell carried out a survey of the Christian monasteries and churches in the region of Bin Bir Kilisse, and later became an aide in the British High Commission in Baghdad (Bell 1982). Similarly,

whilst in Iraq and northern Arabia, the writings and photographs of Gertrude Bell contain rich archaeological observation, at times inextricable from her observation of contemporary populations and behaviour (Bell 1987, Anon 2001). This link, between 'political power interests' and the nature of archaeological survey is important to deconstruct because of its influence over both the practical agenda of where to look and how, as well as the conclusions which those surveys have handed down to us.

It should be pointed out that there is some ambiguity as to what has been meant by 'Syria', since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen some significant shifts in the boundaries of the region. To further complicate this situation, the term 'Syria' has, since at least the early Islamic period, referred to 'both a country and a concept' (Hopwood 1988, 1). A more thorough discussion of this issue will take place in section 3.2. For now, it is sufficient to clarify that the 185,000 square kilometres of the modern Syrian Arab Republic has borders which are largely a creation of the Sykes-Picot agreement between the British and French governments in 1916, and that historically the term 'Syria' has referred to a much larger area (Grey & Cambon 1916). Since the beginning of Roman administration over the region in 64 BC, a coherent province of Syria has been generally defined as extending in the north from the Taurus mountains of modern Turkey, as far as the Euphrates river in the East. The southernmost extent runs from Dura Europos, before turning to the south-west across the stretch of desert which covers the northern fan of the Wadi Sirhan. Around the town of Bostra (modern Bosra), the border then runs south, along a line approximately parallel with the River Jordan and around 60 kilometres to its east. The southernmost extent of the province at its creation was around the southern littoral of the Dead Sea. Much of the discussion of 'Syria' in this thesis will refer to this area, which in Arabic is termed *Bilad al-Sham*, rather than simply the modern boundaries. Later, when more specific evidence is examined, the province of Syria as devised under Constantius II in the mid-fourth century and equating to the north-westernmost area around Antioch and Apamea, will be considered more closely. This province is dominated by the geographical region often referred to as the 'limestone massif' in English, 'massif calcaire' in French, or 'Belus Massif' in antiquity.





*Figure 1: Map of western Asia showing the positions of modern Syria, Greater Syria or Bilad al-Sham (shaded in grey), and the limestone massif (in blue) to the north-west*

It is important to examine the nature of French administrative control in the region in order to understand the context in which early archaeological survey work was conducted. French colonial interest in western Asia has been a lengthy one, with the first tangible evidence deriving from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. Although on this occasion, the French did not reach Syria as their expansion was checked in Palestine, in the 'confused aftermath' which followed, a new dynasty took power (Hopwood 1988 16). Muhammed Ali, and his son Ibrahim, gained control of much of the Levant, and occupied Syria from 1831-40. A strong element within the reformist agenda of Ibrahim Pasha was his establishment of economic and cultural links with European nations. European missionaries and consuls began to establish projects throughout Syria. Particularly prominent among these were French Catholic missions like those established in 1855 by Lavigerie and De Vogüé under the aegis of the *Écoles d'Orient* (discussed further, below). The influence of this body in western Asia was furthered by the 1856 Peace of Paris which followed the Crimean War. Under this agreement, the Ottoman government was obliged to grant 'religious toleration' to all of its subjects, a move which gave the *Écoles d'Orient* greater diplomatic leverage throughout the region (Frend 1996, 67). As an example of the socio-political impact of such leverage, the Christian populations of southern Syria were granted 3,000,000 francs by the French government in 1860 for the purpose of fighting the Druze majority among whom they lived. This situation must be seen as part of a broader picture, whereby French colonial



ambitions throughout western Asia and North Africa were aligned directly with the Catholic Church. Moreover, the church played a role in legitimising colonisation, as 'France had historically tried to establish and strengthen her position in the Levant by posing as the protector of Christians' (P.Khoury 1987, 5). Throughout the 1860s, a Church hierarchy was established in Algeria, for example. Algiers was made an archbishopric in 1867, and equipped with a considerable staff and a system of parishes to administer the large number of French settlements. A further catalyst for such developments was rivalry with the ambitions of the Church of England.

The association of these ambitions with scholarship, and in particular archaeology, are clear. The French Catholic hierarchy who were spreading rapidly throughout the region 'regarded the archaeology of the early Church as a powerful means of restoring Christianity to North Africa under the aegis of France' (Frend 1996, 67). The most influential clergy were often also historians and archaeologists, such as Charles-Martial Allemand Lavigerie, Professor of Church History in the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne, who was appointed an ambassador to Syria for the *École d'Orient* in 1860, then Archbishop of Algiers in 1867. Lavigerie played a direct role in archaeological fieldwork in Algeria by instructing the diocesan clergy throughout Algeria to investigate evidence for the early church. Furthermore, funding for such projects was organised and distributed directly from French central government ministries, such as the *Ministère de la Culture*. This provided French archaeologists with three advantages: they were well funded, centrally organised and driven by a religious imperative. When similar fieldwork was being carried out by British scholars in, for example, Egypt, Palestine and Asia Minor, this was usually funded by individual university departments (such as the Universities of Aberdeen and Oxford, for example) or by wealthy individuals.

It is within the context of this more general establishment of the French Catholic Church that the first concerted survey work in Syria was carried out by Melchior de Vogüé in 1861/2. De Vogüé was not only, in common with Lavigerie, a member of the *École d'Orient*, he also held various diplomatic positions in the French civil service. His early survey work took him in 1852 first on a general tour, visiting sites of early Christian interest all over the region. In 1854 he returned, this time to conduct more intensive work primarily in two discrete areas within the region of north-west Syria, often referred to as the 'limestone massif' (de Vogüé 1865), but also in the Hauran region of the south. Fieldwork within these zones was as much exploration as it was archaeology, focussing generally on the population, landscape and languages present. An important factor in this exploration



was the early use of photography, first used *in extenso* in the Middle East at this time. In fact, such journeys would continue to be conducted in north-west Syria, but also throughout western Asia and Anatolia, until after the Second World War. The *Reisen* of the German and Austro-Hungarian teams, the *voyages* of the French, and the *expeditions* of the English and later the Americans, combined observation of the physical remains with ethnography, philology and a broader religious and political assessment of the populations there. Implicit within most of these studies is the notion that on the one hand the living communities that these explorers encountered had not changed their way of life in centuries, but also that they *could not be* the same communities who had created the architectural wonders of the late Roman and Byzantine periods. During Butler's survey of the Ledja' area of southern Syria, for example, he stated the following of the village of Harran:

'Unfortunately it was chosen as a place for settlement by the early Moslems and was almost completely rebuilt by them. It is occupied today by a small group of Druse families, who in the construction of their own crude dwellings have accomplished the complete destruction of the ancient buildings...Altogether, Harran is now a disappointing ruin.' (Butler 1907, 423-4)

This notion of a 'disappointing', almost violent, discontinuity underlies much of the survey work which will be described below, and will be discussed in greater detail in section 1.6.

De Vogüé's archaeological interest was specifically architectural, and in particular the 'civile et religieuse' buildings of the Roman and Byzantine periods up to the arrival of Islam. In common with most subsequent surveys, his concern was with visible, surface architectural elements, and the identification and translation of inscriptions. What makes de Vogüé's work particularly significant is that he was the first to draw to scholarly attention the remarkable preservation of archaeological evidence in north-west Syria, its extent, and the fact that it offered an insight into a hitherto little studied period in the history of the region: the late Roman and Byzantine periods. However, the study lacks the systematic presentation of later works, and was somewhat opportunistic in its data gathering strategy. As a result, there is little overall sense of how early Christianity impacted upon the economic and social terrain of the late Roman world. Instead, it was sufficient for de Vogüé to comment only on the early Christian evidence itself. For him, magnificent structures such as the great apsed church of Qalb Lozeh, or the cathedral at Bostra, was evidence not only of 'Syrian Christianity at the height of its prosperity in the fifth and sixth centuries' but more significantly 'of the faith of the inhabitants' (Frend 1996, 74-5).



The early concern which French scholars had shown for epigraphic evidence, particularly where it showed the extent and spread of late Roman Christianity, is reflected in the establishment of the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres as early as 1663. In Syria during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this work was consolidated by a number of subsequent scholars such as von Oppenheim and Hartmann (von Oppenheim & Lucas 1905; Hartmann 1913). A more extensive survey was presented by Jalabert and Mouterde, whose extensive translations in the volumes, *Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de la Syrie* helped form the chronological framework upon which later scholars have relied (there are various, but the volume used most frequently here is Jalabert and Mouterde 1939). Indeed, such a focus was widespread at this time almost wherever the archaeology of historical periods took place in western Asia or North Africa. It was certainly true of Ramsay's work in Asia Minor, for example, whose discoveries established the study of material remains within the history of Christianity, hitherto dominated by textual research (Frend 1996, 95; Ramsay 1893, 1896). The same can be said of Audollent's work in Algeria (Audollent & Letaille 1890). The richness of the epigraphic resource in Syria means that it continues to constitute a research focus today.

#### **1.4 The origins of American involvement: H.C. Butler**

A marked shift in methodology came with the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria, which were the first to introduce the concept of an inventory to surveys of late Roman and Byzantine material. These were headed by H.C. Butler, who took a large team of epigraphers, architectural surveyors, draftsmen and photographers on three journeys through Syria in 1899-1900, 1904-5 and 1909 (Butler 1907, 1909 & 1913). The geographical objective of these surveys was discrete and coherent, focussing on two distinct areas of the north-west and the south of Syria, and the intellectual agenda more explicitly argued than in previous cases. Butler's primary emphasis, accompanied as he was by a team of epigraphers, architectural draftsmen and photographers, was the production of accurate plans and building elevations. Once again, the development of photographic technology (in this case executed by George Cavalcanti) contributed an important factor to Butler's work.

It is a more complex task to place in context the involvement of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria, since there was no link with missionary activity. However, it *is* important to contextualise the American work, since it represents a major contribution to our knowledge of two regions in particular, the limestone massif of the north-west, and the Hauran of the south. Such expeditions were certainly well in advance of the expansive foreign policy and overseas investment which formed the backdrop to



American archaeology abroad from 1918 onwards, during which long-term American projects were established at Dura Europos and Antioch, for example (Patterson 1986, 11; Frend 1996, 180). There is none of the same degree of explicit colonial interest which governed French, and to a lesser extent British, archaeological work. Yet however remarkable programmes such as the Princeton Expedition were in pioneering terms, they can and should be seen as part of a long-standing American academic interest in the 'Orient', based in area-specific university departments established through private endowment. The Princeton Expedition began in 1899, at exactly the time when many such departments and expeditions were beginning to form. The Harvard Semitic Museum, for example, was founded in 1889, and embarked on a major excavation at Samaria in 1907 (Anon[a] 2003). Similarly the University of Chicago established the Haskell Oriental Museum in 1896, and through the Oriental Exploration Fund began a major field programme at Bismaya in 1904. Two years later, an epigraphic and photographic survey resembling Butler's in Syria, was begun in Upper Egypt (Breasted 1908).

This trend was a concerted one therefore, but was clearly different from the government sponsored, religiously-driven missions of the French. Instead, Patterson comments that such programmes derived from what he terms the 'Eastern Establishment' in the United States, which developed following the American Civil War and especially in the 1890s. This consisted of the input of funds from major investment banks into a variety of 'philanthropic' causes. Consequently:

'...the leaders of large corporations and eastern investment banks came to exert a preponderant influence on the decision-making processes of the government. They promoted domestic and overseas expansion to ensure the prosperity of their firms; they oversaw the formation of specialists and technical agencies in the government; they shaped educational policy, creating a national science policy 'responsive to the needs of society' through the activities of philanthropies like the Carnegie Institute of Washington' (Patterson 1986, 8).

This form of funding resulted in fieldwork the agenda of which was often focused on the collection of 'ancient near eastern' artefacts and photographs. Indeed, Willey described the whole of the period from 1840 to the First World War as the 'Classificatory-Descriptive Period' in American archaeology, during which the foundation of museums like the Smithsonian (1846), the Peabody (1866), the Bureau of Ethnology (1879) and the National Museum (1879) all demanded stocks of material in order to provide an empirical basis for



the teaching of, and a growing public interest in, archaeology (Willey & Sabloff 1974, 48-9). Furthermore, research fuelled undergraduate programmes at the major private universities, whose general funding and social basis were again part of the Eastern Establishment.

Butler's was clearly not fieldwork with an emphasis on the landscape and its people, driven by governmental support as part of a broader colonial process, as was de Vogüé's and later French surveys. However, it was arguably geared towards forms of cultural colonialism, whose agenda was the collection of material for the 'needs of society' at home. Although the ways in which this process was funded, and the results dissipated, could be seen as specific to the Eastern Establishment, this situation was in many ways part of a broader picture. The industrial power which enabled European and American colonialism was also beginning to result, from the later nineteenth century, in a rise in living standards and economic prosperity 'at home'. This rise 'in turn created an increased interest in the arts including scientific and archaeological discoveries', an interest which in part resulted in, but in turn also fuelled, the creation of public museums, civic universities and amateur interest groups (Frend 1996, 108). The demands of this situation, not only in America but also in Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and elsewhere, were insatiable. The archaeological consequence of this was that large areas of Syria were covered rapidly through the targeting of discrete sub-regions as representative of that region as a whole. For example, in his first expedition in the north-west of Syria, Butler visited two areas which covered much the same ground as de Vogüé in the limestone massif (see section 1.3, above). He then examined an elongated stretch of territory in the Jabal al-Hass region south-west of Aleppo from Hazana to Siyala, and a further area south of Mu'alaq. For the south of Syria, he covered large parts of the Basalt landscape of the Hauran. The second Princeton Expedition investigated the area immediately north-east of Hama, from Sabba', 60 kilometres north-east to Andarin, then a further 60 kilometres west-north-west to Karratin. By Butler's own admission, these surveys involved an element of 'somewhat arbitrary geographical division' (1920, iii-v). Nevertheless, they were enough to secure for him a broad impression of the range of building types, approximate date, and 'the observation of the influences of the East upon the Hellenistic styles of construction and decoration'. Within this, his agenda remained the rapid recording across as great an area as possible of the minutiae of building form and decoration. These buildings could not be taken home to furnish a museum collection, but they could be recorded almost as thoroughly. Once again, however, little attempt was made to account for the social and economic context for such buildings. *Why* were they built, and what the effects of their creation?



## 1.5 After the Great War: Western power and its archaeological implications

Although some areas of western Asia and North Africa remained relatively unaffected by the fighting of the First World War, other areas, Syria included, were heavily involved. All archaeological fieldwork there ceased for its duration. Conversely, the aftermath of that conflict profoundly affected both the methods and circumstances of archaeology. These effects manifested themselves in a longer-term French strategy of survey work in north-west Syria beginning in the 1920s, which coincided with a more formal assumption of political control of the region by the French and British governments following the collapse of Ottoman rule. It is important to recognise this link, since much of the archaeological work in the subsequent two decades was carried out in conjunction with military objectives. Moreover, it was apparent both at the time, as well as in retrospect, that French military and political control resulted in a monopoly of the archaeological fieldwork. Sir Hercules Read, for example, in his address to the Society of Antiquaries in 1923 commented that the French 'exercise a jealous control over what France considers her legitimate spheres of influence' (Read 1923, 205, cited in Frensdorff 1996, 214). This arguably had a significant impact on both the logistical process of that archaeological work, and also the conclusions produced. Subsequent paragraphs will attempt to explain this link in greater detail.

The events which led to formal French control of most of Syria began with the Arab Revolt of 1916, the subsequent Sykes-Picot agreement, and the San Remo conference which followed in 1920 (Grey & Cambon 1916). Through this, an area approximately corresponding to modern Syria, Lebanon and parts of western Iraq and southern Turkey was ceded to a French 'mandate', and the states of Jordan and most of Iraq to a British mandate. The area corresponding to modern Israel, the West Bank and Gaza was to be 'internationalized'. A close examination of an extract of the exact wording of the Sykes-Picot agreement is revealing:

'That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall have priority of right of enterprise and local loans. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall alone supply advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

That in the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.' (Grey & Cambon 1916)



As can be seen, under this agreement, each nation, Britain and France, had two different forms of control over their respective mandates. There were areas where 'direct control' was exerted, and areas where 'influence' was to be exerted. The latter areas would be gradually prepared for Arab control, while the former would be retained under the control of France or Britain for a longer period. If the relative location of these areas is examined more closely, an interesting pattern emerges.

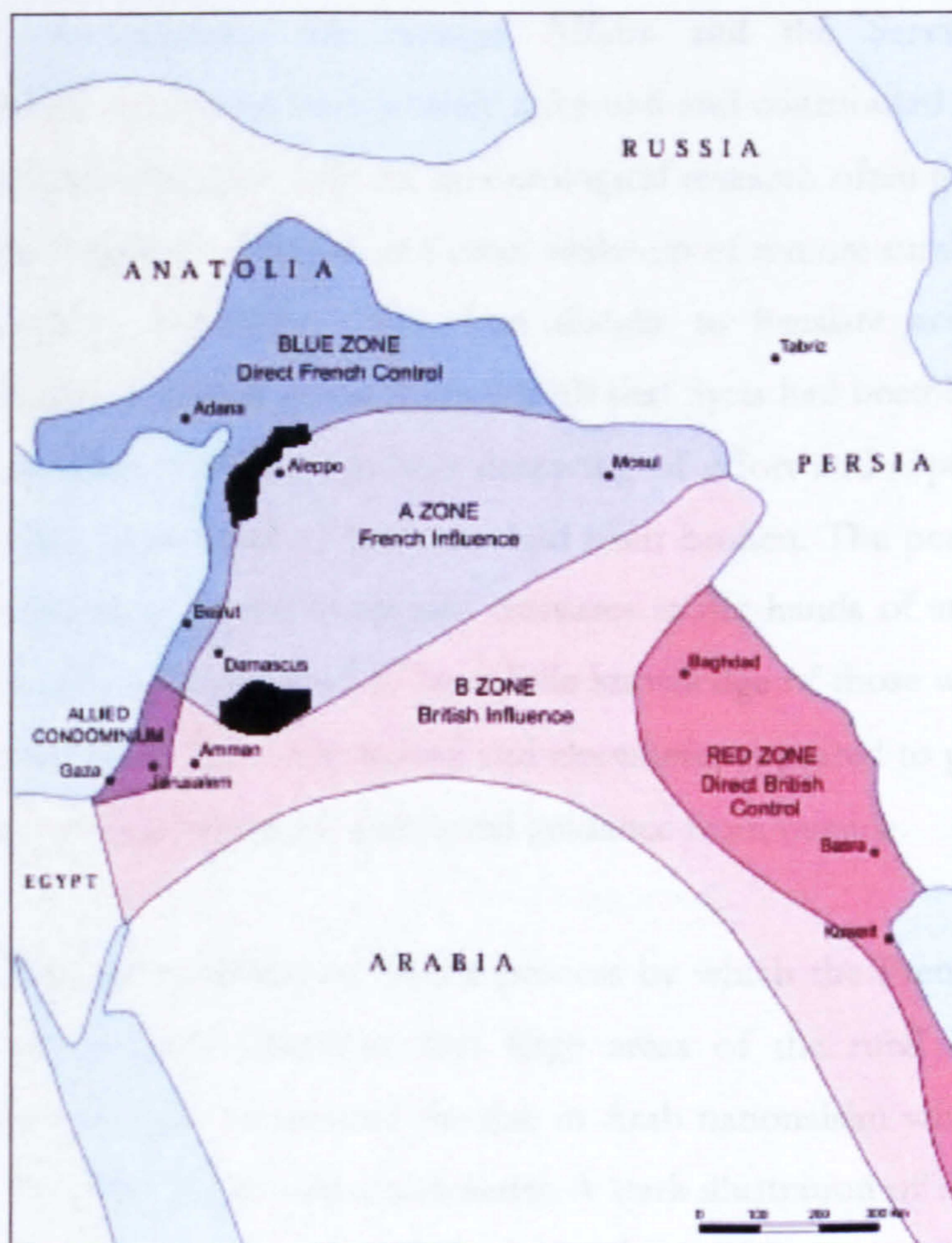


Figure 2: The areas delineated by the Sykes-Picot agreement. The blocks in black denote areas of widespread archaeological survey up to the Second World War

It is interesting to reflect on the fact that most of the early surveys of surface archaeological material occurred precisely on the borders of each of the zones agreed in the Sykes-Picot agreement. If the areas of early survey work are overlaid onto the Sykes-Picot map of 1916, this trend is apparent (see figure 1). This situation meant, along with the fact that French archaeological work tended to be entirely state-sponsored, that the surveys conducted in this region were in direct collaboration with the French army, who provided thorough geographical data, aerial photographs and logistical support (Tchalenko 1953 I, xii). This army was particularly well funded and equipped, as illustrated by the fact that military



expenditure was approximately ten times that spent on civilian projects in Syria (Hopwood 1988, 24).

It is also instructive to bear in mind that the new Syrian Antiquities Service, which replaced the Ottoman General Directorate for Imperial Museums in 1920 under the direction of Joseph Chamonard, was undoubtedly a creation of the French government (Gelin 2002). It contained, to begin with, no Syrian scholars or practitioners. And interestingly, it was commissioned, run and funded directly from Paris, by a combination of the Ministry for Public Instruction, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Service of Works. Archaeological work can be seen to have actively informed and contributed to the ideology of the Mandate administration. Not only did archaeological research often go hand-in-hand with research into the linguistic, religious and tribal make-up of remote rural regions within France's new possession, informing those who sought to legislate accordingly from Damascus. Archaeological research demonstrated both that Syria had been host to glorious civilisations within the past and therefore was deserving of effort and expenditure by the French public, and that the success of that past had been broken. The perceived collapse and subsequent maltreatment of archaeological treasures at the hands of an unpredictable and nomadic people, who were assumed to have little knowledge of those who had created the awe-inspiring ruins of the limestone massif and elsewhere, appeared to prove that Syria was now in desperate need of legislative and moral guidance from outside.

On the ground in Syria, an examination of the process by which the French government consolidated its position there illustrates that large areas of the rural landscape were surveyed and patrolled in order to combat the rise in Arab nationalism which increasingly manifested itself in the form of guerrilla movements. A stark illustration of this is the Druze uprising in the Hauran region of southern Syria from 1925 to 1927. This drew the French military into a protracted military operation there, during which its large, well-equipped army suffered heavy losses at the hands of the local fighters, whose superior knowledge of the terrain counted for a great deal. The detail apparent in the resulting aerial photographs taken by the French military aviation squadron of the 39th Regiment and the 1:50,000 maps made by the Bureau Topographique du Levant under Lieutenant Colonel Perrier (Mugnier 2001, 1000) is testament to their recognition that in order to suppress such movements, knowledge of the landscape was essential. The inclusion of archaeological sites on these photographs and maps, as well as the ways in which these resources helped place archaeology within a broader landscape context, were an important development, and one which many archaeologists in western Asia and North Africa were quick to make use of



(see, for example, Woolley 1923; also, as described below, Lassus 1935, Tchalenko 1953). For the first time, sites of importance to the archaeology of Christianity were considered as part of their landscape. Instead of individual sites being regarded almost as singular 'artefacts', such factors as distribution patterns, geographical situation and communication routes were being taken into account, albeit in an as yet limited fashion. This issue of the landscape context of monastic sites, and especially the ways in which the French army enabled such a context to be examined, will be returned to with the work of Georges Tchalenko in section 1.6. First, however, the work of the archaeologist who paved the way for Tchalenko will be described.

Jean Lassus, an archaeologist formally of the *École Française de Rome* and then based at the Louvre, established a project in the 1930s which was to be the first systematic survey by the French since de Vogüé. He had trained originally as an excavator on a site which was a great symbol of French Christian archaeology in North Africa, Tipasa. His emphasis was now central and north-west Syria, and the carefully conceived inventory which followed resulted in his *Inventaire Archéologique de la Région au Nord-Est de Hama* (1935). As with the earlier survey of de Vogüé, there was an element of exploring the unknown about Lassus' work, with an emphasis on the virgin nature of the ground he was breaking. Access to sites is described in detail, with the landscape, communication routes and picturesque or otherwise aesthetic viewpoints described at length. For Lassus, however, the important difference was that aerial photography and adequate mapping had been made available by military activity in the area. This enabled him to present a series of innovative, transparent settlement plans overlying photographs, which illustrated the relative position of sites in the landscape. For the first time also, there was an attempt to relate rural sites to an urban sphere of influence, depending on the architectural styles, motifs and epigraphy present. However, such attempts remained limited, and the priority was still, as it had been with the de Vogüé and Butler surveys, the minutiae of spandrels, lintels and capitals. For Lassus, it was the museum-worthy object, or the motif which could be drawn and photographed, which continued to catch his eye, rather than the juxtaposition of buildings, the space they created or their position in the landscape.

An attempt at greater synthesis was presented in his 1947 work *Sanctuaires Chrétiens de Syrie*, which drew not only on his own evidence, but that of de Vogüé and Butler, as well as numerous travel accounts (largely by French travellers, but also Swiss, German and British), from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was really the first time that such a broad sweep had been tackled in one volume, and formed the origins of the typology of the



church ground plan for the region, a technique of analysis, dating and comparison which has formed a major element of the archaeology of Christianity in western Asia.

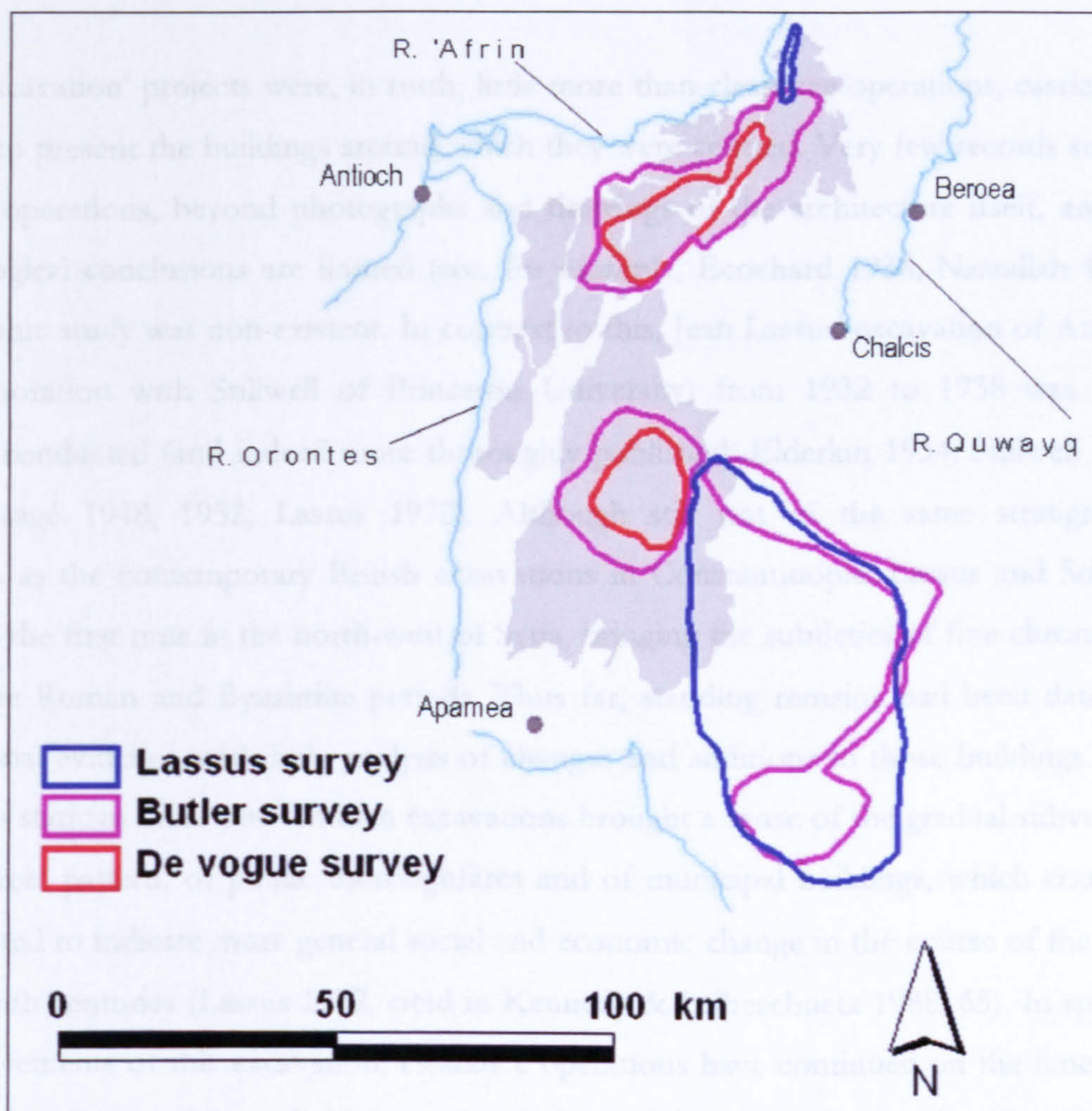


Figure 3: The limestone massif, showing areas subjected to archaeological survey up to the 1940s (original in colour)

As well as his survey work, Lassus was simultaneously involved in a major excavation programme within the city of Antioch (modern Antakiya). This project began in 1932, at precisely the time when other French excavations in Syria were beginning. Subsurface archaeology had hitherto been rare for archaeologists of the late Roman and Byzantine periods, and their work tended to be totally disconnected from the intensive, *tell*-based excavation archaeology conducted by figures such as Mallowan at Tell Brak and Chagar Bazaar, or Schaeffer at Ugarit. The establishment of excavation projects is therefore significant, as it can be read as a sign of political confidence. For the first time, resources, logistical arrangements and security could be commanded firmly enough for excavation to take place. All of the archaeology thus far had taken the form of brief, transitory surveys, which intervened little in the material record, apart from the selective removal of inscriptions and architectural features which could be removed and transported easily. The French view of their broader purpose in North Africa and western Asia, that they were the



protectors of Christianity, now began to have lasting implications for heritage management. The first to receive the attentions of the conservators was Qal'at Sim'an during the 1930s, followed quickly by similar work at Brad and at the church of Qalb Loza.

These 'excavation' projects were, in truth, little more than clearance operations, carried out in order to present the buildings around which they were centred. Very few records survive of these operations, beyond photographs and drawings of the architecture itself, and the archaeological conclusions are limited (see, for example, Écochard 1936; Nasrallah 1970). Stratigraphic study was non-existent. In contrast to this, Jean Lassus' excavation of Antioch (in collaboration with Stillwell of Princeton University) from 1932 to 1938 was more carefully conducted (and indeed more thoroughly published: Elderkin 1934; Stillwell 1938, 1941; Waagé 1948, 1952; Lassus 1972). Although still not of the same stratigraphic standards as the contemporary British excavations in Constantinople, Lassus and Stillwell were, for the first time in the north-west of Syria, bringing the subtleties of fine chronology to the late Roman and Byzantine periods. Thus far, standing remains had been dated by inscriptional evidence, with little analysis of changes and additions to those buildings. Sites were thus static in time. The Antioch excavations brought a sense of the gradual subversion of the street pattern, of public thoroughfares and of municipal buildings, which could be extrapolated to indicate more general social and economic change in the course of the sixth and seventh centuries (Lassus 1972, cited in Kennedy & Leibeschuetz 1988, 65). In spite of the achievements of this excavation, clearance operations have continued on the limestone massif, primarily in order to clarify the ground plans of churches and as part of 'restoration' projects (see, for example, some of the results of this in Baccache & Tchalenko 1980; although recent French-Syrian work at Qal'at Sim'an has been of a much higher standard of recording).

### **1.6 Consolidation: the work of Georges Tchalenko**

Perhaps the best known, most thorough and certainly the most often cited survey was that conducted by Georges Tchalenko of the entire limestone massif (Tchalenko 1953). Tchalenko, initially alongside the aforementioned Jean Lassus, commenced what was to be the first comprehensive study of that region in 1939, with a grant from the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Although the survey emerged from well-established restoration projects at the major monastic sites of Qal'at Sim'an and Qalbloza, its most admirable aspect was a recognition from the outset that 'les grands monuments ne peuvent s'expliquer sans une étude préalable des formes antérieures de l'architecture locale' (1953 I, xii). Moreover, he recognised the need to examine not only the church architecture,



which had hitherto received most of the attention of early surveys (in part due to their rich inscriptional evidence), but also the secular architecture, the broader rural settlement patterns, and the broader countryside within which settlement took place. Tchalenko's work has, with very few exceptions, been well received by the academic community since its publication during the 1950s. Maxime Rodinson, himself a pioneering sociologist and historian, remarked that,

'De temps à autre surgit dans la littérature scientifique un ouvrage d'une classe supérieure, un de ces ouvrages dont on dit qu'ils font époque...je crois que, sans hyperbole, on peut qualifier ainsi l'ouvrage de Georges Tchalenko sur le massif calcaire de la Syrie du Nord à l'époque romaine et byzantine.' (Rodinson 1961, 171)

An important difference between the work of previous scholars and that of Tchalenko was that although he was primarily an architect, having worked on the major restoration projects in Aleppo and at Palmyra for the Syrian Archaeological Service for over twenty years, he also saw the need for the first time for a 'comprehensive synthesis' of the region in Late Antiquity (Foss 1996, 151). He reached for 'l'histoire totale', by asking questions not only of the architectural forms represented in the structures of the region, but also their social context, as well as their change through time (Rodinson 1961, 175).

Tchalenko had been working on the reconstruction of the complexes at Qalb Loze and at Qal'at Sim'an. His subsequent survey work began around the town of Brad, but was quickly postponed due to the outbreak of war. He returned, this time directing the project alone, in 1946. This was an interesting time for French archaeology in the region. The political legitimacy of the French Mandate in Syria had been shattered by fighting between the Free French and the Vichy government in 1940 and 1941, and though they maintained an administrative and military presence until the formal assumption of Syrian independence in 1946, their influence in the country had been significantly weakened. In 1945, in a final attempt by Charles de Gaulle to save the French position, extra troops were brought into Syria. Anti-French disturbances resulted, and the French reacted by bombarding Damascus. The British army intervened, and forced the French to withdraw, finally, in April 1946, following a United Nations resolution, and under pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union who had both recognised Syrian independence in 1944 (Hopwood 1988, 30).



Furthermore, the political terrain of the immediate post-independence era in Syria, though ostensibly one of nationalist rule by old upper class elites who had maintained influence from the late Ottoman period, was in fact increasingly of a pan-Arab, middle class mood. The establishment of the pan-Arab Ba'ath Party in 1947, an increasing divide between military and civilian power structures, and the decline of the old Sunni, urban elites meant that French presence and influence within the country was out-of-place, and indeed in some quarters openly resented (P.Khoury 1987, 626-630).

As a part of this independence process, the old Syrian Antiquities Service was now divided between the Antiquities Service of Lebanon, and the Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums of Syria (or the DGAM; Gelin 2002). It was run first by an American archaeologist from Yale, Frank Brown, and then by Syrians, beginning with Jafar al-Hassam, thereafter. Nevertheless, in spite of this change in the political climate, it is significant that practically the only archaeological work to have been carried out in Syria over the previous century (within certain notable exceptions, such as Butler), had been of French conception and management. The Syrian DGAM, and indeed the main mapping agencies, were still essentially of a French model, and indeed it could be argued that still at this stage, formal archaeology was essentially a European (and North American) pursuit. Moreover, a number of sizable projects, implemented by the Institut Français Archéologique du Proche Orient prior to the Second World War, were still in operation. A certain momentum to this historic link between French academic agenda and Syrian subject matter was in place therefore, but within the context of a changing infrastructure and mood.

Tchalenko's wide-ranging and in-depth publication of his survey results, presented in his 1953 three-volume *Villages Antiques de la Syrie du Nord*, in many ways reflects this continued yet changing context. It was a direct continuation of the same project established in 1939, and indeed of the long-held French predilection for survey on the limestone massif, yet broke a long-held mould in archaeological survey in western Asia, in that his concern was for knowledge of social and economic trajectory, rather than primarily the study of high-status architecture for its own sake. In this sense, Tchalenko was part of a broader trend within survey archaeology represented also by figures like Willey in Peru (Willey 1953).

With relevance to this thesis, although Tchalenko attempted to describe all of the remains there, whether secular or religious, dispersed or congregated, pre or post-Christian, his primary emphasis is undoubtedly the impact of monastic institutionalisation from, as he saw it, the early sixth century. Through use of inscriptional evidence as a dating tool, he



concluded that although the area was initially settled by Roman army veterans during the second century AD, it was in the early sixth century that the large-scale reorganisation of the agricultural basis of the region took place. Significantly, Tchalenko saw this reorganisation as concurrent with the construction of major monastic institutions, and that the economic success which these changes produced were responsible for a flowering of architectural achievement, apparent in both form and motif (about which more will be said, below; 1953 I, 177). Of further significance is the fact that although the sixth century saw massive upheavals resulting from a series of earthquakes, plague and the Persian invasions of 527-532 and 540-562, which in turn resulted in a general economic downturn and a cessation of new building projects in limestone massif, monastic buildings and churches continued to be constructed into the seventh century.

Tchalenko's methodology involved a 'total' approach to survey as far as he saw it, with mapping and photography of every visible structure, the drawing of two-dimensional ground plans, and a summary of agricultural organisation through the survey of field boundaries using aerial photographs. This approach was in part prompted by the extraordinary preservation of archaeological evidence in the limestone massif. The local, hard limestone has meant that architectural degradation and colluvial coverage of sites has been slight. Furthermore, later settlement in the region was seemingly rare from the ninth until the nineteenth centuries.

A particularly interesting aspect to Tchalenko's research design is that the relative lack of disturbance of the region during this lengthy period until the nineteenth century led him to assume that the resources of the region had changed little, and that an assessment of them in the 1930s would reveal important information about the availability of such factors as water, soil and stone in Late Antiquity. Yet it is apparent that such a survey of the modern situation may also have derived from a more general colonial agenda in existence at the time, whereby administration of the French mandate of Syria relied on thorough resource assessment. For example, there are detailed maps of topography, geology and the 'orogenic' system (1953 II, 3, 24, 25-28). These could be viewed as essential to any analysis of the landscape context of the archaeology. However, Tchalenko also plots soil distribution, rainfall and areas of cultivable land (1953 II, 29-30). These are then used to assess which areas of north-west Syria would be suitable for agriculture, and in particular through the use of which crops (31-32). Areas of late antique settlement are plotted, but also areas of modern settlement (33-35). Likewise, ancient communication routes are usefully displayed, but also routes of modern 'accès et pénétration' (37-38). These are extrapolated to



link with routes within Syria as a whole. Of course, these observations may simply reflect an attempt to account for areas of ancient settlement, within the belief that little has significantly changed in the region for 1,300 years. In this regard he was surely inspired by René Dussaud's *Topographie Historique de la Syrie Antique et Médiévale* (1927). Indeed, Dussaud was at the time secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres which was the primary financier of Tchalenko's work, and may even have had a direct influence over his agenda.

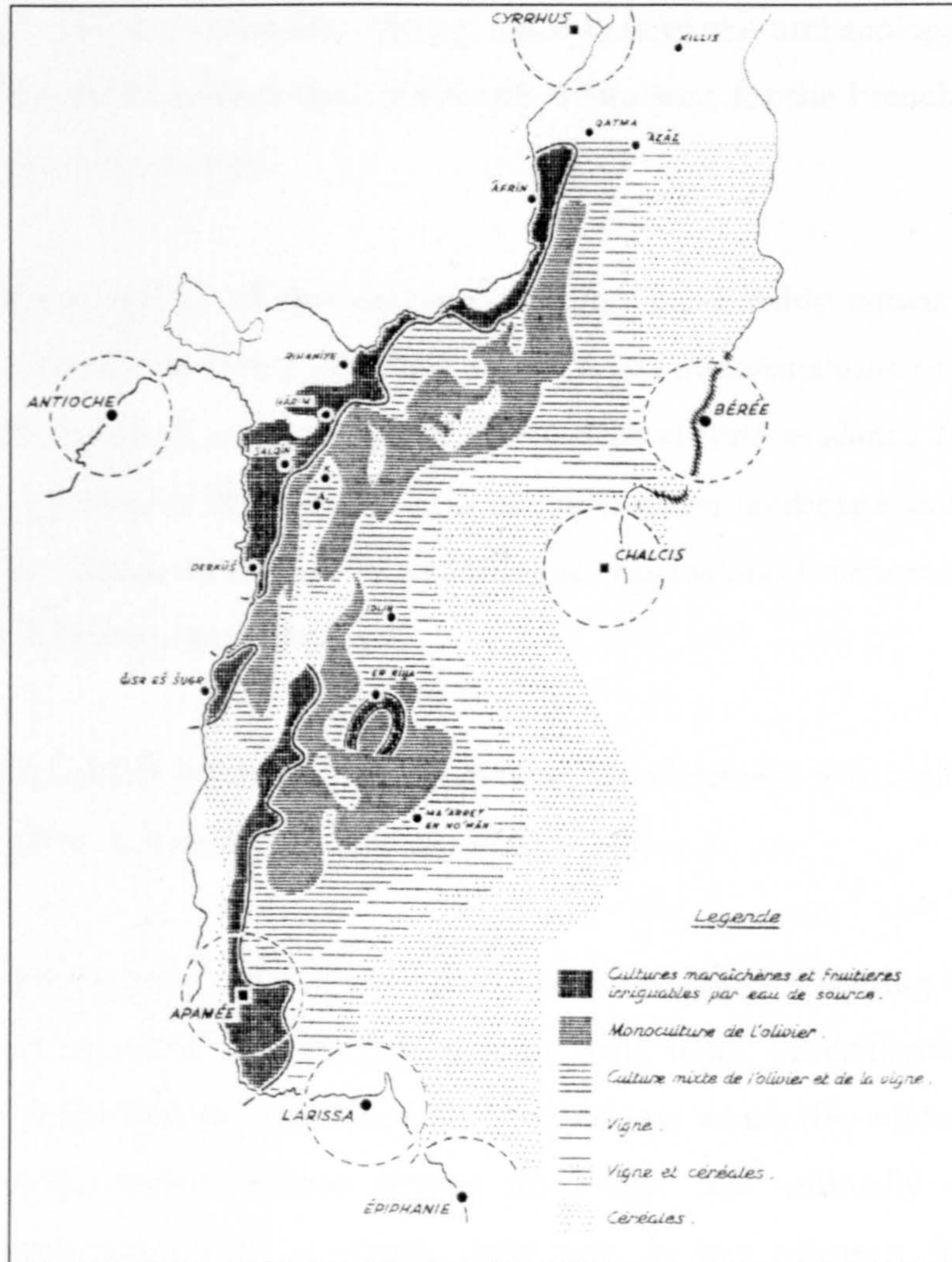


Figure 4: Tchalenko's map of the areas of the limestone massif suitable for agriculture, according to information obtained during the 1940s and 50s

It seems clear, anyhow, that (as discussed in section 1.3) Tchalenko's survey, and to an extent the other French surveys of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were part of a more general milieu which was associated with a combination of Catholic missionary activity and colonial administration, and that that milieu had a recognisable affect on the agenda of the field surveys. There were projects whose agenda was, though certainly deriving from a broader colonial outlook, less overtly Christian in character, such as Gsell's work at Khamissa, Mdaourouch and Announa in Algeria (Gsell 1914-1922). Indeed since the work of Voltaire in the mid-eighteenth century, there had existed a complex relationship



in French scholarship between agnostic and even atheist humanists and the French Catholic establishment. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, this complexity had led to a scepticism which arguably lessened the power of the Church in state affairs. However, as Chadwick has recently pointed out (ed, 2000), for most of the twentieth century, Catholicism continued to play a role in French nation building. Even today, she argues, it still functions as a complex component of French identity. So in spite of the changing nature of their foreign policy following the Second World War, and the reduced role of the Catholic church within this, the fact remains that the dominant, driving force behind the archaeology of Roman and Byzantine period sites in western Asia and North Africa was, for the French, an integral part of a broader missionary project.

Since archaeological survey of this era was so often inextricably entwined with a more general colonial interest, we must ask what the *intellectual* manifestations of this were. If the abundant results of survey work described above demonstrate evidence for incisive study not only of the remains of the past but also of the modern landscape and populations, to what extent is this dual agenda reflected in academic conclusion? An answer to this question begins with the following quotation:

‘Cette organisation matérielle semble évoluer parallèlement à la réglementation de la discipline spirituelle.’ (Tchalenko 1953 I, 149)

In short, the French scholars of archaeology of this era sought a flowering of early Christian civilisation which in some way related to their own sense of civilisation in the west. Administration of the ‘Orient’, and the military superiority which this administration sought to enforce, was necessary because it was no longer the spiritually enlightened and economically successful society it clearly once was. It was precisely from this era of scholarship that the notion of complete, decisive change with the arrival of Islam derived: that flowering was cut short by a very different social force arriving from the south in AD 636. We may ponder, for example, on Tchalenko’s admiration for the clear and orderly architectural style of the limestone massif, which he regards as unique to this region, and to this period:

‘La perfection frappe d’abord: perfection des proportions, du dessin, de la facture. Ce n’est pas l’art romain de Syrie, avec son exuberance de composition et de modelé; ce n’est pas l’art byzantin, avec son opposition schématique des blancs et des noirs; ce n’est pas non plus l’art de la région basaltique voisine, où



la matière impose aux motifs un caractère purement graphique. La composition est marquée par une volonté d'ordre et de logique; le dessin est clair, sobre, immédiatement saisissable.' (1953 I, 49)

The implication may be that this architectural quality, which placed it 'parmi les plus harmonieux de l'architecture syrienne', as well as the 'discipline spirituelle' mentioned above, left the region in the seventh and eighth centuries, never to return (Tchalenko 1953, 155). As long ago as 1907, Butler had commented of this architecture that it 'had its roots in the Hellenistic architecture of Greece and Rome' and that it 'knew no rival until 500 years after its death, when the Gothic architecture of Northern Europe came into being' (Butler 1907, vi). It is as if the thoroughness of Tchalenko's survey, and to a lesser extent previous studies of the region, sought to unlock the prosperity and success of the early Christian period, for use in the present.

Lewis has pointed out that French colonial interests, more so than the British, continued to comprise not only concern with 'the military potentialities and dangers of the area', but also 'a more general cultural and religious mission' (1995, 353). Such a mission would have found more easily a connection with an apparently highly successful flowering of architectural achievement and agricultural prosperity paralleled by a Christian religious imperative than for later periods. Indeed Hodder, in paraphrasing Said, has commented more broadly that a 'democratic dynamism of Europe' contrasted with constructions of a 'stagnant and despotic' Orient (1998, 125; Said 1978). Such despotism is perhaps especially emphasised by scholars of this era for the period following the arrival of Islam. The use of historical and archaeological study in driving such polar constructions will be described more fully in the following section. For the purposes of this section, it is important to recognise that although during the time of Tchalenko's work in the 1930s (then subsequently from 1946) a Syrian government was in the process of becoming established under Jamil Mardam and Faris al-Khuri of the so-called 'National Bloc', there were continued attempts at Christian missionary work there. As well as missionary work deriving directly from French central government, there was also a continuation of a more general Catholic thrust towards expansion through the medium of archaeology. The Pontifical Institute for Christian Archaeology, for example, established in 1926, continued to encourage projects which elucidated the early church. This connection then, between Catholic Christianity and archaeology, guided in part by French colonial policy but also by other parties, which began in Syria in the 1860s, continued into the next major catalyst for change in the region, the Second World War.



## 1.7 Syria regained: Orientalism and the modern debate

The Second World War marked a significant break in the political history of western Asia, since it was, for most regions, the first moment of independence since the sixteenth century. For Syria, the area marked out by the borders of the French Mandate was granted independence in April 1946. The French government's hold over Syria, significantly weakened by the internal struggle there between the Vichy and the Free French, was finally - officially at least - over. Although French scholarship continued (and indeed continues to this day) to have a profound influence over the course of Syrian subject matter and people, their near-monopoly of the archaeological terrain was over. This had a far-reaching impact not only over the personnel operating within the country, but also over the agenda pursued and thus the conclusions reached. This is therefore an appropriate point in the chapter to pause and reflect upon the nature of the work described so far.

So far in this chapter, there has been an attempt to convey three aspects of the study of early Christian archaeology in Syria. The first is the *political context* of those studies, in order to convey the intentions of the parties involved. The second is the nature of the work itself, so that the *methodology* of each project could be compared. The third is the *outcome*, in primarily intellectual terms, in order to elucidate the theoretical framework of the day. Summarising such a quantity of both work and data in just a few sentences is challenging. However, if a major theme can be picked out of this work, it is that contrasting agenda were sought and achieved by the French and the American work. In essence, the American work derived not so much from the immediate political context of Syria, nor indeed of colonial administration, though the broader political intentions of the United States were, by this point, paternalistic at least. Instead, it derived from (and in turn contributed to) the pressures of university endowment, and more specifically what Patterson terms the 'Eastern Establishment' (Patterson 1986, 8). The French agenda, though of course differing in detail between the 1860s and the 1940s, had a common theme running through the political context, the methodology and the outcome, which was the pursuit of the 'discipline spirituelle' of early Christianity, as well as 'les plus harmonieux de l'architecture syrienne' which resulted (Tchalenko 1953 I, 149, 155). In spite of the fact that the French government recognised the presence of native Christian communities within the territories of their Mandate, especially in Lebanon, the Hauran and the Qalamoun, there was a profound sense of discontinuity presented between the archaeological remains and the modern population. Through the funding and support of organisations such as the Écoles d'Orient, the École Française de Rome, the École Biblique, and the overarching Ministère de la Culture, a body of literature, a reconstructed architectural legacy and more significantly a broader cultural



view was held by certain academics and disseminated to the French public through school and university courses, that there existed a glorious early Christian past in Syria, which had been jeopardised and then finally (almost) eradicated by the arrival of Islam. Moreover, since it appears to have been the view that that past was the responsibility of France (Hopwood 1988, 23), Catholic missions from the 1840s and continuing until well after the Second World War, sought to restore it. This view was further emphasised by the aforementioned sense of discontinuity between past and modern populations. The considerable trouble the colonial powers had had during the 1920s to enforce their respective Mandates in the region could not sit comfortably with any notion of a native 'discipline spirituelle'. At the risk of describing this situation too bluntly, the political implications were that the Orient never 'grew up', and that therefore European colonial powers must 'help' them do that.

In this sense, the scholarship described so far can be seen as part of what Edward Said has termed Orientalism, whereby representations of an 'East' are juxtaposed as separate from a 'West', and where 'the Orient came to be seen as stagnant and despotic in order to define the democratic dynamism of Europe' (Hodder 1998, 125; Said 1978). Said asserts that this juxtaposition is actually a process. This process has been in motion since the Orient was first studied in a concerted manner by European intellectuals at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The motivations behind this study, the methods through which it has been conducted, and the ways and the location in which it has been presented, are 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience' (Said 1978, 1). The product of this process has been, for its creators, not only an Orient which is 'a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences', but also 'the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant...its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (1978, 1-2). In short, Said argues that an Orient has been created which is an exotic 'other', set in opposition to a more dynamic, functionally superior Occident. But crucially, such representations are not the sole factor of interest in discussing Orientalist literature. Scholarly enquiry and the cultural media which derived from such work were products of a colonial process and, furthermore, were bound up within its machinery. Archaeological survey of the kind that created the works of de Vogüé, Butler, Lassus, Tchalenko and others were not simply products of the domination of certain western nations over the Middle East then. Such surveys were actively involved in the business of domination.

For Said, who proclaims himself 'an Oriental' (1978, 26), the studies which have resulted from this polarised approach are 'shot through with doctrines of European superiority,



various kinds of racism, imperialism, and the like' (1978, 8). These views have been the subject of considerable debate since their initial publication, and indeed some reform by his own hand (for example, Said 1988 & 2003, Thomas 1991, Halliday 1993, Milner & Gerstle 1994, Ansell-Pearson et al 1997, Bayoumi & Rubin 2001). Not least among these criticisms are that Said tends to overstate his case, that his views derive from a personal grudge against western academia and that he is dangerously subjective. Furthermore, he has been accused of perpetrating the very juxtaposition of representation which he himself complains of. He does not engage with archaeology directly, and only touches on anthropology briefly. Furthermore, it has been commented that he never offered clear solutions to the problem of Orientalist representation. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework which he provided is regarded here as useful in accounting for the nature of Orientalist studies in the past, and arguably to some extent still today.

Archaeological study of 'Eastern' subject matter has been regarded as 'special', unique to the 'East'. We may reflect, for example, on Butler's description of the surface remains of the Hauran that 'it represents a distinct racial, if not national life, and which is Oriental in sentiment and in expression' (Butler 1907, vi). This opinion has produced an attitude that such remains require a special outlook in order to deal with them. In common with the emergence of Islamic archaeology at this time, the study of early Christianity tended to be associated with 'academic pigeonholing with...'exotic' archaeological studies placed away from the received mainstream and thus made to appear remote, inaccessible and different' (Insoll 1999a, 3). This is reflected in the fact that studies of the Orient often derive from University departments whose primary emphasis is on the Orient as a region. This has certainly led to a rich cross-fertilisation of ideas from different disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistics, literature and history. However, it may be argued that this method of study has partially isolated the Orient from broader, inter-regional intellectual processes pursued in departments whose emphasis is subject, rather than area, related. Although western Asia, like any other region, has particular socio-political specifics of its own, it 'is not unique, except possibly in the content of the myths that are propagated about it, from within and without' (Halliday 1993, 162). For archaeology, although this situation has led to some inter-disciplinary research, especially relating to documentary and archaeological evidence, it has also had the consequence of limiting the application of broad theoretical frameworks and field methodologies more familiar to practices elsewhere.

Until recently, and certainly for the period up to the Second World War, there have been very few attempts to relate early Christian subject matter to material from Europe, nor



indeed to apply techniques more familiar to European topics. The situation described above, whereby early Christianity was seen as a successful flowering of Syrian culture which was later subsumed by Islam, has not been helped by the fact that scholars of the subject have arguably been reluctant to relate their work to the broader dynamics of late Roman and Byzantine socio-politics. Of course, there has been the work of Pirenne (1937) and subsequent scholars (for example, Hodges and Whitehouse 1983, Christie & Loseby 1996, Ward-Perkins 2005a, Wickham 2005) who have made comparisons which span east and west, and have sought also an origin to the early medieval west. But the comparison of specific settlement forms which may have been similar in the northern and the eastern Mediterranean, their role within society in transforming systems of power and control in the fourth to seventh centuries, and ultimately the legacy of this in creating a Medieval world, has not been a strong theme of archaeological study in the twentieth century. Early monastic settlement has, by extension, tended to be regarded as a 'cultural phenomenon' therefore, rather than as a vehicle for, or expression of, greater processes at work. This current understanding has not come about because monasteries of that region *were* essentially cultural phenomena, but because we have made them so. That they are culturally embedded, and have a culture of their own may be true, both of today and through time, but this approach lacks the kinds of analysis more familiar to monastic studies elsewhere, which have related the monastery more convincingly to its social and political context. More broadly, it has often not related the monasteries of Syria, and the movements which created and surrounded them, to Christian monasteries elsewhere in the world.

It must be said that this intellectual distance has certainly closed over the years. There have also emerged some important syntheses which view the archaeology of early Christianity, as well as of specific topics (like monasticism) within this subject, as a whole, thus spanning geographical divides where necessary (for monasticism, Dunn 2000, Lawrence 2001, McNally 2001). Significant among works of broader synthesis has been the work of Peter Brown (2002) and William Frend (1984, 1988, 1996). It may be the case, in fact, that the ramifications of Orientalist studies are no longer explicitly an extension of the colonialist agenda from which they originated. However, so much of the archaeological study described so far *has* been, and modern studies often remain very much a part of the same process. The entrenched descriptions of early Christian monasticism in western Asia as a topic where studies have to be specially tailored to cope with its unique, exotic complexity have created barriers to the transfer of techniques of analysis from elsewhere.



‘In brief, because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action.’ (Said 1979, 3)

Within the study of monasticism in the Middle East (which I will here call western Asia), and one might argue especially within Syria, Orientalist sentiments have produced a body of work which has been content to focus on theological origins, great ascetic figures and major monastic institutions (among many others, Jargy 1952, Vööbus 1960, Leroy 1963, Brock 1987a, Drijvers 1994, Fowden 1999, Hatlie 1999). Where material evidence has been consulted, ‘whole categories of archaeological evidence have been neglected owing to dated research designs and methods tied to the dictates of art history’ (Insoll 1999a, 5). This has left considerations of the socio-political impact of monasticism largely unaddressed.

### 1.8 Recent work: the Orient reconsidered

This situation has prompted some reassessment over the last twenty years or so. With relevance to the field of monasticism, one of the aspects of this theoretical reconsideration has been an acknowledgement of the complexity of the socio-economy of north-west Syria in the fourth to seventh centuries. In part, this has been influenced by the more general theoretical terrain of the late 1960s and 1970s, which saw the gradual inception of processualist ideas into a wide range of research agenda emanating from American and European university archaeology departments (the key texts in this movement are usually cited as Binford & Binford 1968 & Clarke 1972). In terms of archaeological fieldwork within Syria, this change has occurred largely within a continuation of the framework established during the French Mandate of the 1920s and 30s. In spite of tumultuous changes within the domestic politics of Syria during the 1950s and 60s until the establishment of Hafez al-Assad in 1971, and fluctuating relations with neighbouring Arab countries as well as the US and the UK since that time, French foreign policy has continued to support archaeological endeavours as a means of diplomatic entrée throughout. The Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums continues to be run along lines established by the French during the 1930s, and many of its staff receive (in the absence of any dedicated university archaeology courses within Syria until 2000) their academic training in France or Belgium. A large proportion of the 128 archaeological projects conducted in Syria in 2002 were of French conception, and France continues to play a strong role in the direction of archaeological research in the country (Ghiyath al-Zahri *pers comm* July 2002; IFAPO 2005). Important contributors to this policy in the last three decades have been Jean-Pierre Sodini and Georges Tate.



Sodini and Tate's excavation of the village of Dehes during the 1970s represented both a prominent re-establishment of French research in the limestone massif, but also a break with the past in methodological terms (Sodini et al 1980). It has at last provided some intensive detail within the more extensive survey work of the last century and a half. It had always been Tchalenko's argument (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) that the limestone massif had depended largely on the olive harvest, and that the profits resulting from this trade were invested in the buildings. The scale of the churches of the region can be accounted for by the success of the olive oil trade, and by the fact that extra labour was drafted in during the olive harvest. However, the aforementioned excavation contradicted a number of these assumptions. From 1976 to 1978, a total of six buildings in Dehes were excavated using, for the first time in the limestone massif region, a stratigraphic methodology.

The results of this work appeared to directly contradict some of the results of surface survey. They suggested, for example, that a more mixed economy was evidenced by animal bones, troughs and grain storage areas. Each house was not a 'villa' in the sense of a high status estate centre, but acted as a dedicated animal byre, with human accommodation above. This highly mixed nature of the economy is perhaps not surprising, but it certainly differs from Tchalenko's assumption that the olive represented something of a monoculture for the region.

Another important modification to Tchalenko's thesis, and indeed to all of the previous conclusions made of the limestone massif and its 'Dead Cities', is the point at which the settlements there were abandoned. For de Vogüé, abandonment was clear, rapid and decisive, occurring in 636, at the moment of the invasion of the Muslim armies from the south. For Butler, climatic change and especially soil impoverishment after deforestation were decisive in this (Butler 1920). Mattern modified this idea by claiming that nomadic elements of both the Sasanian and then the Arab invasions tore up the olive trees, and that this destruction was irreversible. He added, rather acerbically, that '(c)es nomads ont toujours été les ennemis des arbres et leurs descendants sont restés les dignes héritiers de cette haine' (Mattern 1944, 139).

For Tchalenko, the chronology of this decline was essentially correct, though he presented a more qualified perspective, suggesting that the effects of the earthquakes, Sasanian invasions and drought of the sixth century disrupted the socio-economy. The Muslim invasion continued this process, by further isolating the olive producers from their Mediterranean



markets, thus sealing the fate of an already impoverished region. This is evidenced by the fact that building inscriptions cease for domestic architecture around 550, and for ecclesiastical structures by 610. Although Arabic inscriptions do occur throughout the medieval period, these are sporadic and rare, and mark a different kind of settlement which was reintroduced after a period of total abandonment. However, Sodini and Tate present a very different chronology, based on pottery and coin evidence from their excavation at Dehes. For them, although the upheavals of the sixth century did indeed cause some depopulation, widespread settlement in the region continued until as late as the ninth century.

Some of the conclusions drawn by the Dehes project have been given greater weight by Georges Tate's subsequent work, *Les Campagnes de la Syrie du Nord* (1992). The emphasis of this publication is the domestic architecture of the limestone massif. Analysis continues the swing towards processualism taken by the Dehes excavation. Tate produces a picture of an internally coherent system, consisting of 700 villages, with 100 rooms per village and 300,000 people in all. Rather than the control of the economic prosperity of the region being held by absentee landlords, as argued by Tchalenko, for Tate this system 'which some historians have considered parasites living off the surplus of villages like these, were really part of a broad economic system whose parts reinforced each other' (Foss 1996, 53). Clive Foss summarises Tate's view of the collapse of this system resulting from a 'Malthusian crisis' after 636, whereby the population became too great to sustain, then gradually declined as its methods of operation ceased to function effectively (1996, 52-3).

In order to deconstruct Tate's views, it is necessary to highlight not only their more general theoretical context, but also their specific political circumstances within French academia. Tchalenko and Tate had, for many years throughout the mid-twentieth century, been locked in an acrimonious legal dispute over intellectual rights to the information produced by the studies of the Institut Français Archéologique du Proche Orient of the limestone massif. Both men had a great deal of status and information at stake, as Tchalenko was for many years the director of IFAPO's mission in northern Syria, a position subsequently taken by Tate. Indeed, the Tchalenko archive held at the University of Oxford contains some documentation deriving from this long-term struggle for dominance (Lukas Schachner *pers comm* July 2003). Of course, it cannot be implied that Tate's contradiction of Tchalenko's conclusions solely derive from this dispute. However, this situation does illustrate the potential impact of personal and broader academic circumstances on French archaeology in Syria.



In spite of this dominance of the archaeology of the limestone massif by IFAPO, and indeed largely by two men alone, the Dehes excavation can now be seen as part of a growing body of socio-economic evidence from the region. Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, more specific investigations of monastic architecture took place. The so-called 'Apamean' monasteries of the southern limestone massif were investigated by Fourdrin, and the 'Antiochene' by Biscop (Biscop 1997; Fourdrin 1991). Biscop's excavation of Dayr Dehes in particular did much to clarify the gradual development of a monastic site through analysis of the standing stratigraphy (Biscop 1997). The site appeared to display evidence for an earlier period of monastic development in the region in the fourth century, previously thought to have been eradicated by subsequent rebuilding. This work also demonstrated the fundamental importance of agricultural production to the Dayr Dehes complex, with a careful delineation of the complex's environs, as well as a quantification of the capacity of the site's two presses. However, besides a brief consideration of the use of local labour for the olive harvest, little consideration was given, to the ways in which the monastery interacted in the life of the surrounding villages, the landscape setting of the monastery, or how it connected with settlements in the surrounding area.

Although the Dehes and Dayr Dehes excavations have yet to be followed by other published major excavations within the mountains of the limestone massif (though the excavation and structural survey at Qal'at Sim'an are expected shortly), other intensive work nearby has yielded potentially useful data, such as at the nearby Mediterranean port of Seleucia (Dagron 1985), and in the villages within what is now Turkish territory close to Antioch (Mécérian 1969; Djobadze 1964, 1965; Lafontaine-Dosogne 1967). Similarly, recent work by Paul Reynolds on constructing amphora typologies for the north-east Mediterranean has begun to draw away from the long-held assumption that the 'Late Roman Amphora' (LRA) 1 type was made in north-west Syria (Reynolds 2000, 2003 and *forthcoming*). This issue is discussed further in Chapter 3.

A recently completed programme of PhD research by Lukas Schachner at the University of Oxford, examining the evidence for production within monastic complexes throughout western Asia as a whole, is awaited with interest. This ambitious project takes in various subregions, including the two regions within the bounds of modern Syria which have been subjected to the most analysis in terms of ecclesiastical architecture in the past: the limestone massif and the Hauran.



Although current fieldwork projects in Syria are numerous, with 128 individual projects taking place in 2002, very few include investigations of monastic complexes, or indeed of late Roman and Byzantine material in general. French-initiated fieldwork still accounts for the only interventionist work carried out in the limestone massif (although a joint German-British-Syrian project at al-Anderin has been conducted since 1997), and indeed it seems to be the case that only French projects are permitted by the Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic within this particular region. Georges Tate continues to work at the village of Serjilla, on the eastern slope of Jebel Riha, towards the south of the limestone massif. This project is based largely on survey work, but has included some excavation at Serjilla. Deriving from this project is Charpentier's study of 'Les bains des Sergilla' (1994). Other publications have yet to appear.

Indeed, the primarily high status, architectural emphasis of the Serjilla project continues to represent the norm rather than the exception in terms of the archaeological agenda for Late Antiquity in Syria. Although the Dehes excavation, and the subsequent studies by Tate, Schachner and others, take in a range of social and economic perspectives, it often seems that the agenda and methodology now established by such a long tradition of survey continues to feed those that follow. The publication by Baccache of *Églises de Village de la Syrie du Nord*, for example, followed on very much from the Tchalenko survey forty years earlier (1980). The detailed review by Biscop and Sodini of the relationship between the columns and the apses present at Qal'at Sim'an returns to subject matter originally covered by Écochard in the 1930s (Biscop & Sodini 1984; Écochard 1936).

A break in tradition was initiated, to a certain extent, by the three Spanish scholars Ignace Peña, Pascal Fernandez and Romauld Fernandez through a series of publications from 1975 onwards, which have focused especially on evidence for early monasteries (Peña et al 1975, 1980, 1983). The uniqueness of these studies is that they have sought evidence for the very earliest phases of monasticism, which has led them to investigate, much more thoroughly than any of their forebears in the limestone massif, the extensive standing remains there. But rather than concerning themselves primarily with the most obvious, best preserved and high status evidence, they have recorded and discussed a large amount of material of an ephemeral and often inconclusive nature. Their extensive travels around, in particular, the southern and western mountains of the limestone massif have drawn in hitherto unrecorded incised graffiti, local traditions about the use or place-name origin of sites and roughly-built structures of rubble construction whose date and purpose are ambiguous (especially in Peña et al 1987, 1990 and 1999). The ambiguity of much of this evidence has left questions



regarding the reliability of their conclusions. Since their particular focus of study was monastic sites, they perhaps have had a tendency to speculate that any evidence for a relatively isolated complex should be regarded as a monastery. Not least in the reasons for this speculation is their own background, as Catholic monks of a Franciscan order based in Syria. Indeed, their deep and clearly emotive regard for monasticism in the past is evident in their view that 'the monastery was an institution so integrated into the rural world that a settlement of *any* kind without its nearby monastery was *unimaginable*' (Peña et al 1997, 113; *my italics*).

A further problem exists in that their explanations of which sites are, or are not, 'monastic' is inconsistent. At the site of Wadi 'Ubayd (or 'Obeid), for example, an isolated, stand-alone cistern exists 100m south of the village itself, and is concluded as having belonged 'without doubt to a hermitage, which has now completely disappeared' (Peña et al 1987, 201). The site of Heir Saleh on the other hand possesses a group of rectangular structures, 3 cisterns and a press, but is concluded simply as being 'quelques villas' (112). Some isolated sites may have been purely agricultural, some pertaining to the burial of a local saint and which never hosted monastic practice, others simply domestic and secular in use. Others may have been genuinely monastic in character. The problem here is that *which* spreads of surface archaeological material represent monasteries and which do not, and the reasoning behind such a conclusion, is not defined. And in some ways, this assumption, both that monasteries *must* have been present, that they were powerful and successful and thus that their role in society is self-evident, is part of the long-held methods of research into the Christianity of the Orient begun by such bodies as the École Biblique and the École d'Orient. And in this sense, Peña, Castellana and Fernandez are part of a tradition begun by scholars of the Catholic Church like Lavignerie in Algeria and Syria in the 1860s. Moreover, in common with Tchalenko's notion of a 'discipline spirituelle' driving monasteries to success, Peña et al conclude that monasteries within Syria were a particular creation of the 'Syrian soul' and of the 'creative spirit of their race' (1975, 26-27). We are reminded here of Said's observation that within the Orientalist tradition of Western academia, the 'Orient' has been depicted as having a special 'mind' of its own, unique to the 'East' and similar throughout the 'East', and which is in part responsible for its predicament (whatever that is depicted as being; Said 1978, 3).

Other recent studies of ecclesiastical architecture have been more cautious in their attempts at defining their subject matter. An examination of the layout of the churches of the region by Loosley continues very much along the lines set by Tchalenko, in that it investigates the



purpose and chronology of the *bema* platform (the semi-circular apse aligned west-east within the nave of certain churches in Syria and Mesopotamia), and especially its relationship with the liturgy. She argues from a micro-architectural perspective, then extrapolates the results throughout the limestone massif as a whole (Loosley 1999, 2001). Loosley differs significantly from Tchalenko, however, in that as a non-French scholar, her research breaks with the IFAPO tradition of archaeological suzerainty over the region. It may be this, combined with the in-depth use of Syriac liturgical texts, which introduces a social dimension into her discussion of the *bema*. She concludes that this platform in the nave originally housed the clergy, enabling them to sit among the broader congregation and thus create a sense of inclusiveness in the liturgy. This changed in the seventh century, when the control exercised by monastic institutions led to a growing divide between clergy and congregation, and thus an abandonment of the use of the *bema* as a vehicle for integration. This study is the most recent to include material from north-west Syria, and indeed to draw monasteries into a discussion of late antique Syria as a whole.

### 1.9 What next? Defining the nature of the problem

Although the results of this industry have been abundant, with a range of both in-depth and broad syntheses of the earliest Christian monasteries produced, it is arguably the case that the approaches taken so far have failed to address the full *social* implications of the creation and development of monasticism. It remains unclear, for example, to what extent the physical remains of the earliest monasteries can be used to help our understanding of how they were regarded and used by the populations both within and around them, why they were built where they were, and what role such institutions played, if any, in the complex, changing relations between state and society. How can we use what remains of their buildings, the space which those buildings create, the position they occupy within the landscape, to go beyond regarding the monastery largely as a cultural phenomenon? In short, how can we discuss their link with society, and do so without falling into the trap of Orientalism which Said has defined?

These issues will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, and a 'model' proposed in Chapter 3. So, having defined some of the specific, archaeological questions which remain unanswered for now, let us now return to the broader discussion of deconstruction with which this chapter began. How far is it possible to define the intellectual context of an investigation carried out on early Syrian monasticism today? Western Asia has been the subject of an unprecedented and increasing degree of both academic and popular scrutiny due to political events, and especially since the inception of the latest *intifada* in Palestine in



2000, the events of September 11th 2001, and the US-led military action in Afghanistan in 2001, and in Iraq in 2003. Syria has been far from immune from such scrutiny, as there has been an enormous amount of political pressure placed on that country recently by the United States of America's 'Syria Accountability Act', by difficulties over the EU-Syrian 'Association Agreement', and most recently by UN resolution 1559 which called for Syrian troops to withdraw completely from Lebanon (Noueihed 2004, 9-10). This scrutiny has been partnered by an increasing ethos of political orthodoxy, deriving from the contrasting sources of American neo-conservatism, a complex milieu comprising Sunni and Shi'a Islamist parties and the secular dictatorships of the Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria. Against this may be set an inherent belief in heterogeneous politics, the right of communities to self-determination within the constraints of a global environment. There have already been some discussions of the relationship between archaeological study and such forms of self-determination within religious groups in various locations in western Asia. This is clear, for example, in the role played by museum displays in the re-assertion of Islam in the now highly multi-cultural countries of the Arabian Gulf (Hull 2000). Loosley mentions that the Syrian Orthodox church 'is looking to the past for clarity in liturgical matters' within a climate of change (1999, 24). Conversely, the destruction of Syrian Orthodox and Armenian ecclesiastical sites in south-east Anatolia by the Turkish government throughout the 1980s and 1990s played a role in Turkish nation building (Dalrymple 1998), as does the Israel Antiquities Authority treatment of non-Jewish religious sites (Dalrymple 1999).

In terms of a more general world view, Brown and Carver have applied their admiration for diversity by seeing it in the late antique and early medieval worlds (Brown 2002, Carver 2003). A recent discussion by Greenwood raised the spectre of ethnic and linguistic diversity within the Armenian Orthodox Church of the fifth to tenth centuries (Greenwood 2003). Terms such as 'micro-Christendoms' (Brown 2002, 216) and 'intellectual patchworks' are appropriate in that they describe 'a period of political experiment' in which 'communities negotiated their future' (Carver 2003a, 3-4, 12). Nor have such notions been restricted to studies of Christianity. As long ago as the 1970s, el-Zein defined an anthropology of *islams*, to account for 'the diversity in the actual content of religious experience as lived in the everyday world' (el-Zein 1977, 227, 231). This has been recognised archaeologically by Insoll, who examines 'the degree to which regional traditions, schools, sects and different nationalities within Islam and the Muslim world destroy, or at least encroach upon, the idea of the cohesive whole...diversity which might be reflected in the archaeological record' (Insoll 1999a, 9-10).



As Frend has summarised of recent studies of Christianity, the dominant theme could now be of the 'vivid kaleidoscopic character of the lives and beliefs of its different adherents' (Frend 1996, 385). This mood has 'enabled the non-orthodox traditions to speak for themselves' so that a 'whole new world of divergent beliefs and teaching has been opened up'. This thesis therefore applies ideas of economic control and communal identity to examine the evolution of political agenda in the late fourth to seventh centuries in terms of reactions to Byzantine Orthodoxy. This will be carried out through an examination of monasteries, largely Monophysite in their doctrinal allegiance, whose theological outlook broke from Chalcedonian orthodoxy in 451. The extent to which such monasteries acted as centres of power which re-directed surplus within the countryside and combined this movement with a sense of Syriac identity will be examined by observing how these monasteries stood in relation to both the rural settlements around them, as well as the communication routes, production facilities, field systems and natural topography. Having identified the nature of these relationships, the ways in which spatial juxtaposition translates into social control will be explained using ideas partially derived from a combination of the views of Wickham (1984) and Brown (1971), and partially from work which has viewed the creation of landscapes as an essential but complex component of social identity (Schimmel 1991, Bender ed. 1993, Tilley 1994). Thus, both the economic and the symbolic role of monasteries within the broader community is the subject of this thesis. These contrasting yet complementary roles will be examined at two different scales, the long-term and wide-ranging versus the immediate, singular and 'day-to-day'. These two perspectives will be examined with the aid of Braudel, whose *longue durée* and *histoire événementielle* is used to structure the evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6. However, it will be borne in mind that once this investigation is complete, there may well be no single, convincing model of the role of monasteries in Late Antiquity evident in their position, layout and facilities, but more considerable variations both in period and region, in the degree to which such self-determination was exercised or intended in the Syrian countryside.

### 1.10 Conclusion

And so it is within the context of such heterogeneity that the following chapter seeks to introduce the theoretical basis for this current study. Chapter 2 will argue that in order to embrace the diversity of religious expression which is essential to political stability within the growing number of post-war vacuums in *modern* western Asia, greater consideration of the range of socio-political roles played by monasteries through time must be taken into account. A range of theoretical viewpoints current in archaeology throughout the last thirty years are then explored in order to see how this might be carried out. The approach to be



adopted here examines the evidence for a general change within rural communities from social relations which initially involved taxation paid to urban collectors, but then changed to a system of tribute and perhaps rent paid to local authorities. These authorities may have been monastic, but it will be argued that a landscape approach must be used in order to properly consider this possibility. The material evidence used to examine the usefulness of such a theory is, in the next chapter, drawn from monasticism wherever it has occurred (whether in the west of Ireland, Upper Egypt or in Italy). From Chapter 3 onwards, more specific analysis is carried out using material drawn from Syria, and from the north-west of Syria in particular, since it is this region which presents the best-preserved and most readily available information. However, the final section will consider the appropriateness of data from the north-west by considering two further regions by way of comparison: the Qalamun of central Syria, where very little archaeological work on this period has been carried out, and the Hauran of the south, where surveys have been conducted but with limited synthesis or conclusion.

It is hoped then that theoretical views and techniques more familiar to studies of rural settlement elsewhere can be brought together to study the monastic sites of north-west Syria. In this way, the previous pitfalls of Orientalist scholars, with their tendency to over-emphasise the uniqueness of early Christianity in the 'East', can be avoided.



## Chapter 2

### Theoretical Engagement: Approaching the Monastery

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*The previous chapter outlined the ways in which the late Roman and Byzantine periods in Syria have been approached. It was concluded that monasticism, and to an extent the archaeology of Christianity in general, has been regarded in ways that have divorced it from the breadth of archaeological approaches developed in recent decades. This chapter will carry this theme forward by examining the range of archaeological approaches previously applied to the study of monasticism elsewhere in the Old World. As a result of this examination, the theoretical approach to be applied in this thesis to the landscape setting of monasteries within Syria is outlined. Several issues are dealt with here; to begin with, the ways in which both documentary and material evidence can be integrated in fruitful ways is discussed, followed by consideration of archaeological approaches to the study of religion, and especially of Christianity. Then, different ways in which archaeologists have sought to account for the role of monasteries in late antique society are explored. Were monasteries, first and foremost, spiritual centres, not 'bloodying their hands' with the day-to-day politics of state-polity interaction? Were they economic 'power houses' or mere subsistence survivors? To what degree did the establishment of a network of monastic institutions play a role in the transformation of town/country relations in Late Antiquity? In what ways can archaeological study contribute to the answering of these questions? Inevitably, answers to these questions are dependent on the specifics of time and place, but could the ways in which archaeologists elsewhere have sought to approach these issues provide thought provoking models for the situation in fourth to seventh century Syria? It is argued here that monasteries could have played a significant role in a broad change from an 'ancient' mode of production to a feudal one, which was brought about by social conflict in the countryside. Monasteries could then have become rural landlords, participating in the organisation of economic production, but also ideological production as they created and managed landscapes which enabled and facilitated the communication of their own particular form of Christian belief throughout the countryside. Such landscapes can be read today as complex, multi-layered spaces meant deliberately to overlap the concerns of the sacred and the profane, and thus the monastery and the village.*

#### 2.1 The debate so far

The previous chapter left us with the problem that the approaches taken so far to the archaeology of monasticism in Syria have failed to address the full *social* and *economic* implications of the creation and development of monastic sites. How, for example, did the creation of a large number of monumental monastic complexes all over north-west Syria, on the edges of prosperous villages, alter what people thought about who controlled the landscape around them and who guided the political affairs which affected them? The previous section also sought to point out that part of the reason for the failure to address such issues has been the broader intellectual paradigm in which such studies have been carried out. This paradigm, as described by Said, juxtaposes an 'East' which is 'stagnant and despotic' against a 'West' which is, by sharp contrast, democratic and dynamic. The process which has resulted in these portrayals has been a way for Western academia 'to come to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience' (Said 1978, 1). This special place allocated to Oriental subject matter has been defined through the West's regard of the East as 'the source of its civilizations and



languages'. It is where phenomena, such as Christianity and collective monasticism, which we see ourselves as having continued and refined, were begun. Such a *special* place has therefore been afforded *special* treatment, unique forms of description and analysis which do not have to relate to the theoretical shifts in archaeology which have been a feature of the discipline elsewhere in the world since the 1960s. In summary, the previous chapter posed the following three questions:

- How can we use what remains of monastic buildings, the space which those buildings create and the position they occupy within the landscape, to go beyond regarding the monastery as a largely cultural phenomenon?
- How do we explain why monasteries took the form of large, architecturally complex institutions by the late fifth century. How did they go from a position of marginal obscurity to one of monumental proportions within less than a century, and what was the impact of this upon society?
- How can we discuss their link with society, and do so without falling into the trap of Orientalism which Said has defined?

I have argued thus far that the contemporary political milieu always profoundly affects the formation of archaeological agenda. Therefore, if heterogeneous politics are to be set against the climate of neo-orthodoxy and religious polarisation discussed in section 1.9, our archaeological outlook must be one which seeks to highlight the political diversity of late antique to early Medieval transitions. Yet how can such an agenda sit comfortably alongside discussion of religious control? During a period in which Christian orthodoxy was being hotly debated, is it appropriate to seek to examine evidence for diversity of practice and belief? Insoll has confronted the awkwardness with which archaeologists often approach material evidence for religious practice, especially with regard to world religions still very much believed and followed, concluding that 'the relationship between archaeology and religion is predominantly one of neglect' (Insoll 2004, 1). In order to be clear about the role of the archaeologist in debating the emergence and consolidation of Christian monasticism, a topic often discussed largely in terms of its theological underpinnings (such as, for example, by Dunn 2000), the following section examines the broader topic of archaeology and religion. And since the intention here is to explain the social impact of early Christian monasticism in Syria, it is important to define the relationship between the sacred and the social in more general terms first.



## 2.2 Durkheim and the sociology of religion

Insoll notes that archaeologists have all too often tended to separate evidence for religious worship from 'other spheres of life', preferring instead to concentrate on 'our usual preoccupations, such as economic and political structures' (Insoll 1999b, 2). Instead, Lane advocates 'more nuanced, contextual and landscape oriented approaches which link the overtly religious material elements of these societies with the quotidian, and an abandonment of the 'checklist' type of approach that has characterised so many previous attempts at the archaeological investigation of religion' (Lane 2001, 149). The usefulness of this so-called 'checklist approach', where the elements usually expected of a particular belief system are sought and found, is doubted also by Finneran, who in his synthesis of Christianity in Africa casts doubt on the grounds that 'there are too many variables' in place in each specific locality, preferring instead to seek 'broader themes' (2002, 35, 186). This notion takes us well beyond Hawkes' 'ladder of inference' which long ago placed 'religious institutions and spiritual life' furthest from our reach, and encourages concentration on the lower rungs of technology and 'subsistence-economics' (1954, 161-2). Although written half a century ago now, the idea of incremental inference still seems to represent a kind of *modus operandi* for archaeological interpretation. Of course, when dealing with literate faiths, especially so-called 'religions of the book', we have the advantage of documentary support. But however useful such documentary support may be, it often takes the form of liturgical, hagiographical or eulogistic accounts and therefore, in general terms, expresses an ideal. The idea that faiths must be understood as an intrinsic part of everyday life and 'not necessarily a stand-alone category' is a fruitful one (Insoll 2004, 3). The origins of specifically *social* views of religion can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century, and particularly to the French sociologist Emile Durkheim. His ideas have been so fundamental in shaping the ways in which the social sciences view religious organisation that it is worth spending some time now reviewing Durkheim's work on this subject.

Durkheim was influenced by the ideas of the religious scholar Robertson Smith, whose study of *bedu* tribes in North Africa had led him to conclude that 'religion pertains to the common good, not private interest; it expresses a community's public hopes and goals, thereby strengthening the social bonds between its members' (Cladis 2001, xiv). Robertson Smith wrote in 1894,

'Every act of worship expressed the idea that man does not live for himself only but for his fellows, and that this partnership of social interests is the sphere over which the gods preside.' (Robertson Smith 1927, 164-5)



Following directly on from this, Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* published in 1915, sought to argue that the relationship between belief systems and what he terms 'mechanical solidarity' (that is, the ways in which people group themselves) gradually change through time. By the time Durkheim was writing, in early twentieth century France, he saw society as one whose moral and religious systems were essentially removed from scientific, economic and political functions. However, at an unspecified point in the past, religious thought was entirely bound up with the ways in which societies collectively represent themselves. He writes that:

'Originally it pervades everything; everything social is religious; the two worlds are synonymous.' (Durkheim 1964, 169)

At the time of writing, Durkheim was deliberately opposing the views of Fustel de Coulanges, who held that religious ideas are the primary factor in social phenomena, and thus the *cause of* social change (de Coulanges 1964, 179; Morris 1987, 112). For Durkheim, the reverse is the case, with religious ideas and their organisation essentially *deriving from* social experience. He argued that 'religion is a form of authority and custom that powerfully links the individual to society' (Cladis 2001, xii).

I will return to Durkheim's sociology in more detail later. However, for now, it is worth noting that his views have been criticised for various reasons. Most notably, he was essentially an evolutionist, implying a primitive, somehow 'original' past, which has been refined through history to the 'advanced' point of French, secular republicanism. His use of Australian Aboriginal ethnographic material seems to us today rather crude. Some critics have doubted the suitability of this case study in the formation of conclusions which are supposed to be applicable to a global theory of religion. More recent critics have drawn attention to Durkheim's fundamental conservatism, in that in order to prevent social change in the 'modern' world, he sought to diminish the role of the individual in favour of the broader social order. Nevertheless, it is important to address his views since they were the first to really analyse the social workings of collective religious organisation. Moreover, the fact that he relates the structures of religion directly to the structures of collective representation is regarded here as a *useful* concept with which to analyse the social effects of monasticism. It is through such a notion that we can now move away from an emphasis on the archaeology of religion simply 'dictating the nature of places of prayer', or a 'check-list' approach whereby the specifics of religious practice are identified through texts, and then the material culture is 'ticked off' against this (Insoll 1999b, 1; Lane 2001, 149). 'Religion is



more than the idea of gods and spirits', wrote Durkheim, 'and consequently cannot be defined in relation to these' (1964, 35). Indeed, the recognition that religion and religious organisation is inextricably entwined with other spheres means that specifically 'sacred' space, as opposed to the 'profane' is no longer applicable. Here we must again be cautious about using Durkheim's sociology too much, since he placed stark emphasis on a divide between what is sacred and what is not:

'All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic; they presuppose a classification of all the things, real or ideal, of which men think into two classes...generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words profane and sacred.' (Durkheim 1964, 37)

Such a dualistic, binary opposition was later to be taken up by structuralist thought. The influence of Lévi-Strauss, Chomsky and others led some archaeologists to argue that humans are guided in their behaviour by underlying structures of thought, some of which take the form of sets of directly opposing instincts, like dirty/clean, cooked/raw, male/female (Levi-Strauss 1966, Leach 1970, Deetz 1996). However, the opposition of sacred and profane within the context of early Christian monasticism has been demonstrated by Binns to be an invalid concept (1999). His study of Byzantine monastic sites in Palestine led him to conclude that monasteries were in fact integral parts of their environment and were rooted *within* society, rather than being clearly divided from them. The complexity of this relationship implies that although Durkheim's ideas are useful in highlighting the essentially *social* derivation of religious practice, they are, in specific terms, to be used with caution.

The social context of religious practice has, in recent years, received a certain amount of attention through both publications (especially by Insoll 1999a, 2001, 2004, 2004a) and also conferences and symposia (such as Insoll 1999b, Carver 2003). These have led to more open discussions of subjects such as landscape continuation at religious sites (Shaw 2000), politics and the ethics of religious control of archaeological sites (Friedland & Hecht 1991, Shaw 2000), processes of inter-regional conversion (Carver 2003), the role of religious iconography (Hachlili 1999), social structure (Coningham & Young 1999) and interdisciplinary comparisons (Insoll 1999b). All of this has brought us closer to an understanding of both how religion and religious authority interact with society on an everyday basis, but also the crucial role which archaeology can play in this analysis. As a



result, explicit discussion of theoretical perspectives about how religion relates to society and how we might investigate this through archaeology no longer seem out of place. Attempts to relate theoretical discussions directly to western Asian material have so far been slight, partly because of notions of the *uniqueness* of the 'East' as discussed in section 2.1, but partly also because of anxieties about the role of archaeology in a region so rich in documentary material. This latter point is discussed now: when archaeological analysis is made of religious subject matter, how should that analysis treat and regard documentary material? Indeed, how does this thesis, which examines primarily archaeological evidence, make use of documents?

### 2.3 Documents and the role of material culture

Nowhere in archaeological scholarship is the subject of documentary support more hotly contested than within the context of world belief systems. This is especially the case where that world belief system is still active - albeit perhaps in different forms - today, such as the 'religions of the book'. Approaches to this subject have changed markedly over the past century and a half, as Chapter 1 described. We may ponder, for example, on the following statement, made in the 1870s:

'The work proposed by the Palestine Exploration Society appeals to the religious sentiments of the Christian and the Jew: It is of interest to the scholar of every brand of linguistic, historical, or physical investigation; but its supreme importance is for the illustration and defence of the Bible' (from the constitution of the American Palestine Exploration Society; cited in Whiting 2002, 2).

This quotation may seem to us today to be deeply limiting in its remit. Nevertheless, for at least a century, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, 'scholars from a western Christian background have tended to focus on issues defined by the biblical framework, by connecting particular material culture remains with specific events and figures mentioned in the biblical narrative' (Whiting 2002, 2). Indeed, the fact that monastic sites were at times placed in locations believed to have been the site of significant events in biblical history, has often led scholars into discussions of archaeological material along research lines defined strictly by theological documentation. There has been much speculation about whether the monastic site of Dayr 'Ain Abata in south-west Jordan is the site of Lot's cave, for example (Politis 2001, 2004, 2006). Similarly, there have been attempts by the Syrian Orthodox Church to relate the site of Dayr Tell 'Ada in north-west Syria to the foundation of 'Teleda'



by Eusebius and Ammianus, as attested by documentary sources (and discussed by Tchalenko 1953 I, 147-151; Ruggieri 1992, 160-2; Dalrymple 1998 148; Theodoret of Cyrrus describes the foundation of the site [HR IV]). The nearby church and monastery at Qal'at Sim'an have received much archaeological attention not only because of its fine architectural construction, but also because of its strong association with St. Simeon the Stylite, and the textual accounts which have followed him (Biscop & Sodini 1983, Butler 1907 & 1909, Écochard 1936, Guyer 1934; for documentary accounts see especially Doran 1992). The scholarly tradition of relating archaeological evidence directly to events, figures and places in religious texts is far from unique to Christianity, and has had a long history in both Judaism and Islam also. Nor indeed has this intellectual tradition been unique to the Middle East, although the Holy Land (however one defines this in geographical terms) has received more attention in this field than elsewhere. There is limited space to discuss here the complex issues associated with such a relationship. Nevertheless, it is important to state that there is a body of literature which has emerged especially since the 1980s which has criticised and sought to redress archaeological research intended to find 'proof' of religious texts (for example: Ahituv & Oren 1997, Auld 1999, Bartlett 1997, Brett 1996, Finkelstein 1998, Finkelstein & Silberman 2001, Meyers 1984, Miller 1982, Silberman 1991, Stern 1987, Whiting 2002).

It is certainly not the intention of this thesis to pursue archaeological research which is guided by religious texts. Of course, such texts are important both in describing the broader historical narratives formed by significant people, places and events of the early Christian period, and also in constructions of religious discourse and identity today. However, important advances have been made in the last few years which have begun to reshape the ways in which archaeological research interacts with textual material. What follows is a brief exploration of some of this recent work. Through such a discussion, a direction will be established by which the material evidence which forms the basis for this current study will interact with the documentary record.

In her recent, inter-disciplinary study of the *bema* platform, Loosley comments that,

'Whilst they have been considered from an archaeological perspective and have been discussed by liturgiologists, surprisingly nobody has yet used first hand knowledge of the buildings coupled with the existing Syriac texts in order to reconstruct them. The liturgiologists have not spent time visiting the remains and the archaeologists have not read all the Syriac texts.' (Loosley 1999, 96)



Yet the benefits of such a combination of evidence are there to see. David Phillipson has recently described his efforts to unite the evidence provided by archaeology on the one hand and both art historical and documentary scholarship on the other in first millennium Ethiopia (Phillipson 2003). Archaeologists had previously been able to enlighten the period until around 700 AD, and historians from around 1150 onwards. There remained a period of at least 400 years in which little knowledge existed. His intensive programme of new archaeological investigation, coupled with a reassessment of the work produced by German scholarship in the early twentieth century, has produced a credible closing of this gap for the first time. Indeed, many have combined evidence forms in order to fill perceived 'gaps', of a chronological, thematic or other nature. Some are optimistic about this template. For Loosley, '(i)n many cases the churches fit exactly with the textual descriptions and fill in the missing gaps' (Loosley 1999, 24). The archaeologists described in Chapter 1 of this thesis worked in a similar fashion, though the other way round. Tchalenko, for example, used the so-called 'Four Letters' sent by Monophysite institutions to Constantinople between 567 and 569 to put place names to the ruins he had found (Tchalenko 1953 I, 150). Alternatively, the texts inscribed upon those ruins gave him dates (for example at Dayr Tell Ada, 1953, I, 173), and even the name of the architect who created them (as at Qasr al Banat, 1953 I, 160). However, the evidence forms do not always necessarily match, so that the issue of 'plugging gaps' becomes distracting, even irrelevant.

In such cases, there have been 'anxieties of alignment' expressed by both historians and archaeologists (Carver 2002, 467). And since the 'varying imbalance of academic power' has usually favoured the text at the expense of the artefact, such anxieties have been felt more acutely by the archaeologist. They have led to attempts by archaeologists to suggest altogether different lines of enquiry and provide alternative angles, thereby creating an agenda of their own. This is a debate which has raged in archaeological and historical circles in Europe since the early 1980s. Philip Rahtz, for example, declared in the early 1980s, that archaeology should *not* be the 'handmaid of history...working wholly within a framework provided by written sources' (1981, 3). Others have gone further. Gilchrist deplored the fact that archaeology, when working within historical periods, was 'stripped of its own identity in order to serve a reproductive function - in this case reinforcing another discipline's idea of the past' (Gilchrist 1990, 2). Indeed, this bold sense of independence has raged anew with the additional fuel provided by borrowed postmodernist thought. Some have argued that in an age which recognises multivocality, we should recognise that each discipline, each form of evidence, should be recognised as 'simply different kinds of mechanism through which particular levels of discourse (are) structured' (Giles 2000, 3). This recognition gives



archaeologists the opportunity to work within a theoretical and methodological framework of their own, which is not exclusive and does not exclude other disciplines, but bring to the debating table approaches of their own which may then be used in combination with art and documentary history. It is perhaps surprising that for the areas of western Asia which lie east and north of the Holy Land, this debate is relatively young.

Where such a debate *has* occurred, it has been contributed to, in part, by archaeologists of Islam. Concerns have been expressed, for example, that the material culture has been asked merely to fit within paradigms already created by other disciplines. In 1971, Oleg Grabar, in an overview entitled 'Islamic archaeology an introduction' applauded archaeology as 'an indispensable tool for the authentication, the dating, the localisation and explanation of works of art' (1971, 198, cited in Insoll 1999a, 5). Indeed, for much of its development, Islamic archaeology has been concerned with the recognition and interpretation of architectural motifs and space, with the high status decorative arts, and with the fitting of material culture within period categories which conform to political events as discussed by historians.

In a recent discussion, Carver (2002) has moved away from what texts and archaeology can provide for one another, or indeed what they may provide for themselves, and instead considers the *range* of conceptualisation which is present in each medium.

'The differences between these media are often stressed and some believe they merit independently managed disciplines of their own; but for me differences between media are less significant than the differences in the purposes of expression within them.' (Carver 2002, 466)

It is argued that as well as the fact that the two have much to offer one another, there is also a healthy overlap in terms of what each represent. 'Text and artefact are equally artful at conveying their meaning' and furthermore, both are monumental in their way, since 'monuments also have an afterlife, in which they challenge and influence the politics of subsequent generations that see them' (2002, 466). This discussion allows for much greater interchangeability between the two, and a concentration not so much upon dichotomies of evidence *type*, but of differences of evidence *substance*, such as 'that between the expressive and the inert, the conscious and the unconscious, the emic and the etic, which can be found in each medium' (2002, 467). Such interchangeability allows us to discuss particular subjects with greater fluency, switching between the two where one is more abundant than the other,



led more by an overarching theoretical concept than by a concern with redressing an imbalance.

In the case of this thesis, that concept, in a hypothetical sense at this stage, is the social impact of early Christian monasteries, as revealed by their relationship with the landscape. Since I am not trained as an historian, and because there is so much documentation available, this thesis uses the documentary sources with a sense of reserve. However, it is intended that the written word, whose study has been more abundant in the past, will be used to *establish a context* for the research at hand (especially in Chapter 4). And indeed, some of this research, since it concerns matters of labels, identity and of language, is perhaps more readily evidenced by text than by materials. Moreover, as the discussion above has highlighted, historians have so far discussed the political context more readily and more extensively than archaeologists. Because of this previous domination of the subject by historical material, it is necessary to make the case for the use of material culture at all. What follows is a summary version of that case.

One of the central issues in this study is the social impact of monasticism in Syria. In order to gauge this impact as carefully as possible, an attempt will be made to observe how the creation and development of monasteries changed what was already in place, and how those monasteries and their environs then developed within their landscape. In order to do this effectively, an overview of the whole period from the fourth to the seventh centuries will be made, but specific moments within that period will be illustrated using particular case studies. Fernand Braudel has defined an approach whereby different levels of historical understanding can be distinguished and dealt with separately (Braudel 1972, Knapp 1992, Gosden 1994). The specifics of everyday life, he termed *l'histoire événementielle*. Next come the slower rhythms of decades or more, or the 'history of conjuncture'. Finally, Braudel defined the long term perspective, or the *longue durée*. It is argued here that archaeological evidence is well suited to dealing with both the 'snapshot' and the 'big picture' approaches. Indeed it could be argued that material culture is a particularly good observer of long term change, since it provides (in ideal circumstances at least) a comparison between the same set of variables over centuries (Greene 1986, 13; Sherratt 1995), whereas documents tend to be more specific to time and place (with important exceptions). Comparison of such factors as ecology, pottery production, building projects and maintenance of public space, may highlight the direction of certain trends, whether economic prosperity, or decline, for example, or, increasing isolation or broadening links with other regions. By taking one artefact type, such as amphora in general, or indeed the use of one particular building, and



comparing its trajectory across both time and space, the *longue durée* of social processes can be examined in a way arguably not provided by documentary evidence (for amphorae, see, for example, Arthur & Oren 1998, Callender 1965, Manacorda 1977, Peacock & Williams 1986, Ponsich 1974 & 1979, Ponsich & Tarradell 1965, Reynolds 1995, Wickham 2005).

A further justification for the use of archaeological evidence here is that it sometimes tells a different story to that of documents. For example, Theodoret of Cyhrrus' *Historia Religiosa* is an invaluable document in providing evidence for the intentions and methods of a whole network of individual ascetics living in the northern Syria and south-east Anatolia (HR, translated in Price 1985). Yet the peripheral, economically poor, other worldly status of figures such as Romanus, who 'continued into old age neither using fire nor accepting the light of a lamp; his food was bread and salt and his drink spring-water' (HR XI:1), contrasts markedly with what we know of the archaeological evidence. Although much of what Theodoret tells us derives from accounts of a generation or longer beforehand, it was written down, it seems, at some point in the 440s (Price 1985, xiv - xv). Yet at about the same time, monastic complexes of a truly institutional nature, such as Qasr al-Banat or Dayr Dehes, had already begun to emerge, and were certainly a reasonably widespread dominant feature of the landscape within just four or five decades of that date. The nature, scale and position of such institutions, as will be explored more thoroughly in Chapters 4 to 6, often seems to contrast with the impression given of the nascent forms of Syrian monasticism described by Theodoret. So here we have a stark example of material evidence bringing not just a new angle, but actually a fresh line of enquiry, to the debating table.

## 2.4 Processual theory and monasticism

In spite of the advances made over the past 5 years or so with regard to the relationship between archaeology and world religions, there is still a tendency for archaeologists to consider the theological underpinnings of the religion itself (ie the theological framework) as a sufficiently enlightening theory, without seeing explicit, sociologically-derived theory as a useful conceptual tool. The advantages of employing such tools are many, not least that they encourage levels of interpretation and analysis beyond the immediate sphere of the evidence. 'Theory' may be defined, in general, as 'to make explicit the assumptions and inferences which sustain the argument' (Renfrew 1994, 11). It is also defined here as involving a far greater degree of explanation than description of the evidence alone may suggest. 'Description alone...is unsatisfactory in the longer term and explanation is necessary for the development of the subject' (Mytum 1992, 1). We explored in section 2.3 Durkheim's view of belief as a social construct. If this is the case, then the context for that



belief system, as well as that system in itself, must be defined. What follows are various experimental descriptions of how that context may be explored theoretically. In each case, though there is not sufficient room to explore such theories in detail, the relative merits of each will be highlighted. This exploration begins with processualism.

As Chapter 1 sought to illustrate, the majority of previous studies of the archaeology of monasticism in Syria have tended to focus predominantly either on the traditions of architectural decoration (such as Bell 1982, Biscop & Sodini 1983, Écochard 1936, Dodd 1992, Kaufhold 1995), or on 'la discipline spirituelle' and the remarkable nature of the monks themselves (especially Tchalenko 1953, but also Peña et al 1987), though there have been exceptions (such as Biscop 1997, Loosley & Hull 2002). For many areas of western Asia, a broadly culture-historical approach has been followed, with extended descriptions of the architectural complexes of monastery sites, explanations of these using textual evidence (especially relating to monastic codes or laws), and the broader context based on conventional grand narratives of history. This has largely been the case in Upper Egypt (Meinardus 1989), for example, Jordan (Politis 2001, 2006), Judea (Hirschfeld 1992) and also in the Arabian Gulf (King 1997). Useful though these publications are in terms of specific information about the sites concerned, we may have to search elsewhere for examples of different *theoretical* frameworks.

To a certain extent, processualist ideas have tackled the subject of early Christian monasteries (for example, in an experimental fashion in Mytum 1989, then with specific reference to early Christian Ireland in Mytum 1992). Processualists argue that archaeological evidence is best suited to the definition of general, large scale forces between and within societies (Mytum 1992, 8; Clarke 1968). Such definitions centre around discussions of systems, which describe 'a set of elements so interrelated that changes in any one require changes of some sort in others...(and) the whole (system) is greater than the sum of its parts' (Saxe 1977, 108). Systems are often defined as convenient geographical areas, like the North Sea (Hodges 1982) or Ireland (Mytum 1992). Such systems often feature interrelations between discrete subsystems like belief system, subsistence, technology, exchange and society, with arrows demonstrating in diagrammatic terms the nature of influence from one to another. These interrelations are usually described as inherently stable, since they are maintained by 'regulators', which 'remove or muffle the variability and so reduce stress elsewhere in the system' (Mytum 1992, 14). Regulating factors might include things like laws and rules imposed by the state, which prevent or limit certain outcomes. However, change can and does occur within such systems, as a result of either internal or



external 'triggers', which may affect one subsystem to begin with, but which have an eventual impact on the whole.

Mytum describes early Christian Ireland as such a system. The primary stimulus in the creation of this system was contact with late Roman Britain, and the arrival of Christianity. Christianity as a belief system created a 'change in attitude in Ireland that allowed the absorption of many new ideas over a very short period of time, ideas that revolutionised the whole culture' (1992, 43). The role of monasteries within this was always crucial, since early missionaries and ascetic figures often set up monastic complexes to act as centres of learning and devotion. However, in the earliest phase, Christianity had little impact on the overall system, as monasteries were established in distant, deliberately isolated locations such as Skellig Michael (although the isolated nature of this monastery has been debated recently by Ó Carragáin [2003, 141]). 'There was no conscious policy of changing social or political organisation, though changes inevitably followed from the adoption of the new faith' (1992, 73). The development of monasteries was associated directly with the growth and consolidation of a church hierarchy. This hierarchy, by giving ideological support to the secular elite, eventually took control of elements of the legal system. This is visible in the seventh and eighth centuries in documents such as the *Críth Gablach* and the *Cáin Adamnain*, which suggest that a series of laws by this time connected the Christian belief system to society as a whole in a very direct way (1992, 74). Large monastic estates such as Armagh and Clonmacnois suggest a concentric subdivision of space which gave central position to a church, a middle enclosure for craft working and accommodation, and an outer area for farming. The influence of these monasteries is clear in the practice of the circuit of relics, by which the relics of a monastery were carried through various districts, and payment demanded wherever they visited. Indeed, '(t)heir success in acquiring lands and wealth led to an increasing involvement with wider political issues' (1992, 75). Once monastic institutions had become not only places of learning but of high quality craftwork also, monasticism facilitated links to other economic and social systems in Britain and the Continent through the exchange of goods like the Bobbio shrine.

Yet Mytum does not explain in detail *why* Christianity was adopted by the population of Ireland. For him, it was simply the 'dramatic emotional power, particularly the promise of external salvation, something lacking in pagan beliefs' which persuaded large numbers of adherents, as well as the fact that it 'offered hope' (1992, 44, 46). Furthermore, 'the early missionaries must have had great personal presence', and '(t)heir faith and vision were such that they would have arrested the attention of many whose pagan religion provided little



emotional comfort'. This may indeed be true. However, it does not suggest that Christianity, in the various ways in which it was managed, organised and spread, had any significant social or political processes of its own. Instead, Mytum asserts that 'Christianity from the earliest times supported the social and political status quo, and so in that respect was no threat to the elite' (1992, 45; de Ste Croix 1975), although he does acknowledge that it 'could be associated with social change' (Chadwick 1985).

Processualist approaches often make use of spatial patterning to infer the nature of the system in question. Binns has attempted such an analysis in order to explain the role of monasteries in Byzantine Palestine (Binns 1999). He compares the monastic sites in Judaea to urban systems, which were constructed as part of 'a process by which cities were built, the empire extended and the frontiers made secure' (1999, 29). Binns argues that, just like cities, monastic sites in Judaea were 'self-governing communities responsible for the administration of the areas which they occupied constitutionally and administratively' (1999 29; Jones 1964, 2). Monasteries can be identified as essentially part of an urban system by their functional components, which were essentially the same, though on a different scale, to the true cities. The systemic nature of these monasteries can be identified in their distribution, which 'formed a large and complex network of settlements'. This calls to mind Chitty's assertion that Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism made 'the desert a city' (1995). Moreover, this network was extended to connect with the political and economic spheres of the broader Byzantine state system, through a large number of footpaths within and beyond the immediate distribution, which in turn connected with pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem and Bethlehem (Binns 1999, 31). For Binns, the details of the network of monasteries are dictated entirely by function, the most important of which is water. The *laura* foundations are predominantly to the east, for example, as they are 'more suited' to the arid conditions, whereas the *coenobia* are located to the west 'where the rainfall is higher and cultivation possible' (1999, 27).

Because of its deductive aim to investigate the overall functions of society as a system, rather than an inductive reliance simply on what the most obviously available evidence suggests, processualism has brought with it a panoply of new techniques. Indeed, since the late 1960s the increasing use of environmental techniques, and especially archaeobotany and zooarchaeology, have meant that a greater range of information about production and subsistence systems has emerged. Archaeology has been influenced in this by the construction of 'models' in the natural sciences (Rowlands 1982). Concurrent with this has been an increased use of information technology. Statistical and mapping techniques in



particular have been taken up with enthusiasm by proponents of processual theory. This expansion has gone hand-in-hand with a broadening of horizons, to include far more non-invasive survey, across large tracts of the landscape.

'The growing importance of survey has meant an expansion of the spatial realm of traditional archaeological data recovery and analysis from its traditional focus on specific locations on the landscape - archaeological sites - to the incorporation of data both on-site and off-site from across extensive regions.'  
(Rossignol & Wandsnider 1992, vii)

Although such approaches have impacted on studies of the Mediterranean in general, until recently, the use of such techniques was rare in western Asia, partly for the reasons outlined in section 2.1. A notable exception to this is Wilkinson, who has recently published an overview of techniques for examining archaeological landscapes in western Asia (Wilkinson 2003). His overall purpose in the book is 'to place emphasis on the complexities of landscape development that result not only from interactions between humans and the environment but from the recognition of fundamental historical and social factors, an approach that has much in common with settlement ecology' (Wilkinson 2003, 6). This statement seems to be a recognition of the overly environmentally deterministic nature of processual theory throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and an attempt to combine not only rigorous deductive methodology but also a sense of the more cognitive aspects of archaeological theory which have dominated literature in the 1990s. Indeed, there has been substantial criticism of processualism on the grounds that it has often centred around a generalising outlook, which tends to disregard the importance of specific, individual situations (Hodder 1987).

Further discussion of these criticisms within the context of post-processualist theory will be explored later. However, I will now turn to a theoretical school which has influenced the theoretical outlook of this thesis somewhat more than systems theory.

## **2.5 Marxist interpretations of monasticism**

Although it has thus far contributed little to the study of monasteries specifically, Marxism has been used as an interpretive framework for the late and post-Roman periods in general. What follows is a brief summary of the ways in which Marxism – often termed a historical materialist perspective – has been applied to the study of the complex transitions within this period.



Marx saw ideas, beliefs, thought - indeed all human consciousness - as deriving from the material conditions which shape them. These material conditions are dominated by the human need to exist, to create shelter, to grow food etc. Ideas and behaviour essentially derive from the interchange of human beings which takes place whilst carrying out these productive activities therefore. Our study of human history in the present is thus best carried out through an examination of the material conditions from which behaviour and thought in the past derived. Engels stated that:

'The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged.' (Engels 1993, 87)

In this way, 'instruments of labour not only supply a standard of the degree of development to which human labour has attained, but they are also indicators of the social conditions carried out' (Marx 1906, 200). More recently, a useful corrective to this has been to emphasise a more complex, recursive relationship between material culture and human consciousness. Giddens' 'structuration' approach, for example, much used by archaeologists such as Barrett and Graves, asserts that human agency (or choice) is structured by the pre-existing conditions (or 'traditions'), but then that agency in itself can be seen to react to alter those conditions as life moves on (Giddens 1984, Barrett 2002, Graves 1989). In this sense, the material culture left to us today can be 'looked at not just as a reflection of society and its values, but as a medium through which society and different kinds of knowledge can be created and reproduced' (Graves 1989, 297).

For Marxists, production is carried out in a number of distinctive ways each with its own social formation, and each with its own ways of extracting and dealing with surplus, which Marx termed 'modes of production' (Roskams & Saunders 2001, 65). Within each mode of production, a different relationship exists between the producer and the ruling classes, which results in historically-specific ways of extracting and dealing with surplus. These modes of production, according to Marx, have evolved (and indeed continue to evolve) through time. Typically, such an evolution might be thought of as 'ancient', with its



predominant reliance on the use of slaves, 'tributary', where taxation is used, and 'feudal', where rent or labour are taken by the elite in order that the peasant producers may 'retain' the status quo. Modes of this kind have been criticised by some as being reductionist, simplistic or overly rigid (Hodder 1986). However, advocates of a Marxist approach contend that 'they do not represent set periods with simplistic, unilinear processes of development' and that 'any particular society will involve a complex combination of different modes', with one dominant (Roskams & Saunders 2001, 66).

Change from one mode to the next takes place as a result of tension within society. Traditionally, 'classical' Marxists have regarded such tensions as deriving from conflict between classes (typically, for example, those who produce and those who control that production). Others have retained this idea of dialectical, or conflict-driven, change, but have considered tension in other kinds of relationships as causal also, such as between different institutions, or between the sexes (for example, Shanks & Tilley 1987).

In the sense that a generalising, overarching theory is used to account for the organisation of, and change within, society, Marxism is similar to processualism. But the idea of conflict being the primary driver behind changes from one mode to the next contrasts markedly with processualism, which tends to suggest gradual change with one or more parts of the system altering at a time, rather than the entire social formation.

The idea of social conflict driving a modal change from the late to the post-Roman period has been adopted by a number of scholars. One such model, that of Chris Wickham's 'other transition', could be used to anticipate how a Marxist account of the role of monasticism within society might be constructed.

Wickham's thesis relies on an explanation of 'modes of production', in other words, the way in which labour control is carried out by the ruling classes. For Wickham, there is a fundamental change in the course of the fifth century, from what he terms an 'ancient' mode of production to a 'feudal' mode (Wickham 1984). This change means that rural estates are not so much controlled through tax, administered and collected on behalf of landlords based in cities such as Antioch, Apamea and Emessa, but instead through workers paying for their land through the labour they provide. This change is brought about as a result of disruption to the state system by invasions in the fifth century (1984, 16), although the origins of this process of change can be seen as early as the late fourth century. An oration of Libanius from the 380s describes villagers in Syria actively seeking out military protectors



to avoid tax-paying (1984, 17). It may be that a similar process occurred throughout the late Roman Mediterranean, with the large imperial olive growing estates of North Africa being seized by a new, more independent power structure (Leveau 1984, though this has been criticised by Potter 1988).

As a result of this trajectory, monasteries *could* be viewed as the new, emerging power structure of the Syrian countryside, essentially replacing urban tax collectors or landlords, and becoming instead rural lords. Thus, one form of aristocracy is simply replaced by another. The origins of this process may be recognised in Brown's comments on the role of the holy man - arguably the precursor to the slightly later institutional monastery - as a patron, during a period when urban control of Syrian villages was weakening (1971). This association, between Wickham's modes of production and Brown's notion of the holy man as patron, will be explored more fully in the following chapter.

One difficulty with using historical materialism as a framework for understanding archaeological evidence is that Marx left a number of questions unanswered regarding the nature of pre-capitalist societies (Trigger 1989, 219). While historians have made much use of Marxist frameworks (some of which for the Roman period have been based on the work of de Ste Croix 1981), for archaeologists detailed interpretation has been less clear. The kinds of evidence to be used and the precise ways in which, for example, the ancient mode evolved to become feudal, is not always straightforward. There have been some examples of the use of Marxist analysis to interpret the produced items themselves, such as food evidenced through faunal assemblages (Roskams & Saunders 2001). Others have looked at evidence on a spatial and landscape scale, and specifically at the issue of how surplus is exploited in changing ways in the countryside of the early medieval period. Saunders, for instance, has examined early medieval rural settlement in England (1991). He concludes that evidence for relatively fluid, moveable settlement around the landscape becoming 'fixed' within nucleated villages with standardised, open field systems around can be interpreted as a move from a tributary mode of production to feudalism. The rural aristocracy, once collectors of surplus on behalf of the monarchy, initiated a conflict which resulted in them imposing feudal relations over peasant communities. As agrarian production became controlled by these new, feudal lords, rather than them previously taking just the fruits of production controlled by the peasant communities themselves, systems of surveillance and discipline were developed. Saunders used largely evidence from the English midlands, from Raunds, Goltho, Sulgrave and elsewhere, but claims that 'the same method of analysis, however, can be adopted to examine regions without nucleated villages and planned field



systems' (1991, 295). Any variation in settlement type or date, he argues, attest to the fact that this change from tributary to feudal occurred in a piecemeal fashion, since the feudal lords themselves were 'a fragmented class' (294).

The model which Saunders developed for early medieval England may seem specific to its own temporal and spatial context. However, as Wickham has argued for his slightly earlier change from 'ancient' to 'feudal' mode in the Roman Mediterranean, similar processes can be shown to occur across very broad areas, as long as similar social relations were in place (Wickham 1984, 6-7). Indeed, he has more recently complained that archaeologists and historians tend not to make broad, inter-regional comparisons, and thus miss out on potentially stimulating comparisons (Wickham 2003, 386). Perhaps it was the case in Syria then that monasteries became these new feudal landlords. Once the role of the holy man was monumentalised in the form of large monasteries, a tension can be read in the landscape between the network of rural - but non-monastic - churches, which were established with state support from the fourth century, and monasteries which are built in very different ways by independent means from the mid-fifth century. There is a great difference, for example, between the position, internal space and decoration of the central church at Kharab Shams, and the monastery built 250m to the north on the margins of the settlement, which has an altogether different form. As well as the dominant position held by monasteries, their role as the new power structure should be reflected in the levels of investment in such complexes, since they presumably now controlled the surplus from olive, grape and other production in the area.





*Figure 5: The village of Kharab Shams, with the monastery on the hill behind*

Kennedy and Liebeschuetz have argued that from inscriptional evidence, it is possible to see a reduction in investment in domestic architecture after the mid-sixth century, but a continuation of investment in ecclesiastical architecture into the seventh century (1988, 69). A Marxist interpretation of this kind might also expect to see a change in the direction of trade after the change in the mode of production during the fifth century away from the towns and cities which had previously controlled the surplus, and more towards rural markets where monasteries are centred. A disruption in long distance trade may not necessarily be reflected, since this would still have proved lucrative, and would presumably have been invested in still by the new aristocracy.

However, there are problems with this approach. Although changes in local authority and an emerging new control in the fifth century is an attractive theory, such an explanation would not suggest why monasteries *in particular* emerged as the power structure rather than, say, the urban ecclesiastical elite or new rural landlords. Also, observing that monasteries are perhaps new, dominant and different within the landscape does not necessarily explain how they constructed an ideology which was persuasive enough to take hold of what was still, in the mid-fifth century, a large rural population (Tate enumerates around 700 villages in the limestone massif of north-west Syria alone; 1992, 1). Indeed, this is perhaps a common problem with a Marxist approach, in that ideological factors are considered as separate



from, rather than integral to, the workings of society. Classical Marxism is essentially materialist, believing that tangible things are more significant than ideas.

'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.' (Marx, cited in both McClellan 1977, 389 & Johnson 1999, 92).

Thus, ideology is viewed as having a legitimising function, which retains a particular mode of production in spite of the inherent conflicts within society. It universalises a society for the purposes of exploitation by those controlling the means of production. Childe recognised that 'false consciousness' could potentially be visible in the archaeological record, suggesting that belief systems, magic and superstition are created and used in society to mask technological incompetence and to portray exploitation as altruism (Childe 1956, cited in Trigger 1989, 262). Equality is perceived by the peasant classes as existing, where in fact it does not. In this way, classical Marxists have been rather dismissive of ideology, regarding it as part of the superstructure of society, as opposed to the workings of production and the economy which are more worthy of study. Indeed, Wickham only mentions in passing that 'various superstructures (politics, ideology, the state) are organised in an intricate relationship' to the economic basis of society' (1984, 7).

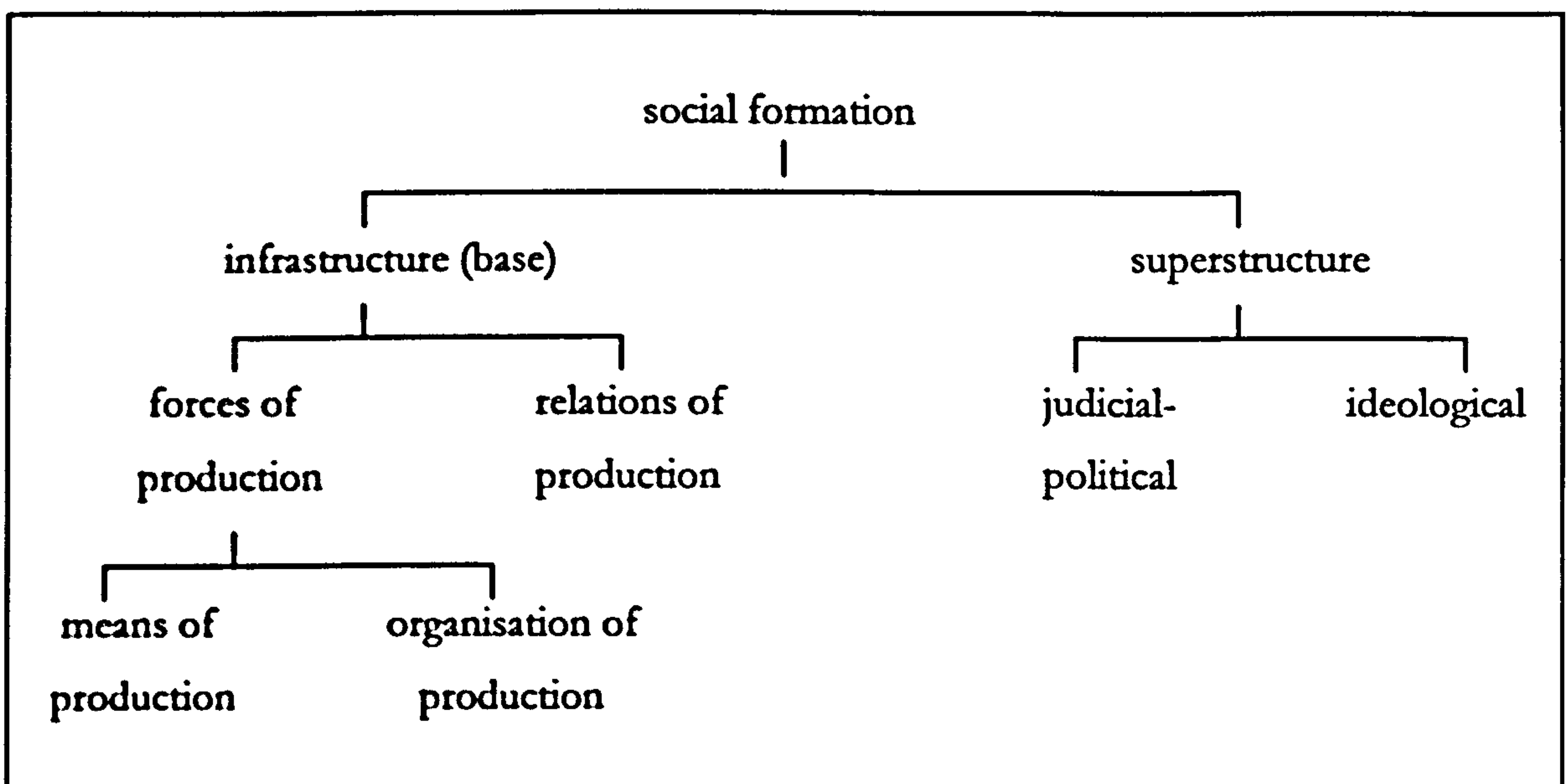


Figure 6: The structure of society, according to a traditional Marxist position

A second school of thought, which may be loosely termed the 'dominant ideology' argument, proposes that ideology is projected towards only the controlling echelons of society in order to retain their interest in the structures of power, and to deliberately exclude



those below (Abercrombie et al 1980; Johnson 1999). In this sense, ideology acts horizontally, not vertically, throughout society. It is therefore still regarded as a 'function' in society which sits *on top of* the true infrastructure, rather than *within*, and was not generally aimed at the producing classes. Yet it is clear from epigraphic evidence that such an assessment of the role of Christianity in fourth to seventh century Syria is inappropriate, as the generation, expression and receipt of religious ideology was carried out by a range of social groups, *and* across the classes (Trombley 2004).

The intricacy of such a relationship, and indeed the role of religion in society in general, is something which requires greater exploration, since it is certainly not often focused on by Marxist interpretations. One could argue, in fact, that there has been a diminution of the acknowledgement of religiosity in general from the 1960s on in the social sciences (Insoll 2004, 2004a). This is partly because most work has been carried out by 'agnostic and atheistic masses of scientifically educated Europeans' who cannot come to terms with the pervasive nature and implications of religion in the lives of the rest of the world's population (Eliade 1978, 12; cited in Insoll 2004, 5). This is partly also because post-processualism, though fond of discussing such aspects as symbolism, ritual and meaning, has such an in-built disregard for 'meta-narratives' that religion within the societies of the past is underplayed.

In short, it has become unfashionable to discuss the potentially complex and determining nature of whole systems, and so the problem of getting to grips with such systems through material culture has been left unfinished. It is all too easy to adopt a traditional Marxist stance and thus relegate religious ideology to a role of 'the reproduction rather than the transformation of the social order' (Shanks & Tilley 1992, 130). And even Insoll, who has done much in recent years to refocus the attention of archaeologists on interpreting the role of religion within society, asserts on the one hand that 'religion can be of primary importance in structuring life into which secular concerns are fitted', but on the other that religion 'is the superstructure' (2002, 3, 5). Yet religion can be seen to play a complex and formative role in the actions of so many within modern world religions, that to regard it as superstructural deceives its potential to effect, rather than merely 'mask', social change. For modern Syria, for example, Van Dam has demonstrated the major role that religious identity played in creating political tension within the armed forces in the 1960s (1996). Furthermore, in failing to confront and understand the role of material culture within religious ideology, we run the risk of rendering archaeology irrelevant as the other social sciences move to recognise the crucial importance of inter-faith understanding today.



In order to try to address the problem of the nature of ideology and its function within society, what follows is a discussion of potential solutions. Structural Marxism has sought to address the rather superficial function traditionally assigned to ideology by Marxists (examples of this include Kristiansen & Rowlands 1998). This movement, born from the ideas of Althusser in the 1960s, tended to appear rather less functional and evolutionary, and considered instead the more philosophical aspects of Marxism (Saunders 1991, 67). In particular, structural Marxism examines the structure and nature of knowledge, and several authors have concluded that ideology could be considered a product in itself, rather than as an element in society which is super-structural to the economic base (Rowlands 1982, 167-171). In this way, ideology could be viewed as having a determining role, rather than merely acting as a 'mask' or a 'cloak', in effecting change in society, since ideological conflict could be as constitutive of social tension, as conflict arising from economic arrangements alone.

This concurs well with the discussion of Derrida in Chapter 1, as well as Foucault's notion of a 'discourse', which sought to conclude that any knowledge and the resulting texts are themselves constructs (Foucault 1977). Some have viewed the development of structural Marxism with scepticism, claiming that it contains inherent contradictions and that it is guilty of idealism by claiming that consciousness can determine action, rather than the material world doing so (for example, Callinicos 1982, Saunders 1991). However, this rather assumes, firstly, that ideology is 'a small step' from consciousness (Callinicos 1982, 76), whereas in fact it is, by definition, not the ideas themselves, but a constructed *system* of ideas (Flew 1979, 162). Secondly, it assumes that those producing the ideological infrastructure are not themselves profoundly influenced by the material world around them, whereas in fact they may very well have been. Therefore, *both* the production of ideology *and* the production of surplus have a material form which is responsible for social being. Structural Marxism may not contradict conventional Marxist thought therefore, since it is not *necessarily* idealist in nature.

The view adopted here, then, is that if we define ideology as a system of ideas structured by those in power to convey special meaning, then the process by which such ideas are constructed and communicated is *itself* part of the base within society. The construction of ideology is far from 'an ahistorical, psychological craving', therefore (Roskams 1996, 178). In this case, it is essential that we strive to understand the way in which ideological production and articulation is carried out, if the mode of production in general is to be properly defined. And so it follows that if we see belief systems in this light, the construction and communication of a particular form of Christianity from monastic centres



to the rural peasantry among whom they lived is *as much* an element in any change from an 'ancient' to a tributary mode of production as the instigation of new economic systems of tribute and rent instead of tax. The challenge for the archaeologist, however, is to identify whether this production and articulation of new and particular forms of Christianity can be recognised at a landscape level. Can changes in cognitive production be as readily understood in material terms as changes in the ways in which surplus was produced and extracted? Does cognitive production, indeed, have a material component, and what forms might it take? Because of its rejection of ideology to the margins of its interest, classical Marxism does not offer ready solutions or approaches to this challenge. And yet how can we observe *both* systems of economic production *and* systems of ideological production at a broad, spatial level?

Within archaeology, post-processualism has raised and wrestled with the latter problem in various ways. For example, its practitioners have often raised the question, how can archaeological research produce convincing statements about the subtlety of belief systems, indeed human cognition in general, through a reading of the landscape? And can theoretical viewpoints and methods for doing so therefore enable broad cognitive shifts to be identified also? Over the past two decades or so, discussion of such questions has examined the ways in which different sections of society inter-connect and shape one another's behaviour. They have done so by combining potentially useful ideas from different disciplines, from geography, for example, anthropology and sociology, with material evidence. Post-processual approaches to the study of 'landscape' may therefore offer exactly the kind of tools required in order to examine the effects that large numbers of monasteries may have had on the communities and villages around them in rural Syria. The next two sections will try to distill which of the many different strains of post-processual thought may be most useful to this thesis therefore. They will do so first by looking at landscapes in general, then by looking specifically at sacred landscapes.

## 2.6 Post-processualist views of 'landscape'

Since the early 1980s, archaeological theory has become influenced by the broad sweep of post-modernism which has profoundly affected all of the social sciences, and in particular has tended to move away from grand theories and 'meta-narratives' (as described by Johnson 1999). It has sought to address rather less universal theories which seek to explain the behaviour and trajectories of social movements through overarching laws and generalisations, like processualism and Marxism, and instead emphasised both the diversity of human thought and action in the past, as well as the multi-faceted nature of



interpretation in the present. Through the work of Hodder, Shanks and Tilley, and Barrett in particular, more nuanced explanations have been sought which emphasise a number of themes (Hodder 1986, Barrett 1988, Shanks & Tilley 1989). In particular, these themes may be summarised, albeit briefly, as follows: there has been an increasing consideration of the importance of social context in interpreting the use of material culture, the recursive relationship between material culture and human behaviour and the effects of modern socio-political circumstances on scholarship. Additionally, human cognition has been understood to be 'readable' through archaeological study. It is especially the latter two aspects which are of relevance to this thesis. The importance of being explicit and self-reflexive regarding the role of socio-political influence on our work today is recognised here, and was discussed in some detail in Chapter 1. Consideration in this section will be given to those aspects of post-processualist interpretation which may be broadly considered under the heading 'cognitive' approaches.

The term 'cognitive archaeology', though perhaps not recognised by many post-processualists as a valid paradigmatic description for their work, serves as a useful reference for a great many approaches. Though it is neither possible nor desirable to discuss the range of such approaches here, they may be collectively described as 'the study of past ways of thought as inferred from material remains' (Renfrew 1994, 3). Wilkinson summarises that through such an approach, elements such as 'memory, power, identity, human agency, or ritual are considered of fundamental importance' (2003, 5). For some, post-processualist considerations of such aspects have in fact offered very little in terms of integration of archaeological data and social theory (Roskams & Saunders 2001, 62). However, the view adopted here is that cognitive approaches may be particularly inspiring, and especially useful, when they allow us to consider the issue of how ideology can be both applied and subsequently 'read' at a broad, spatial level through material remains. An important theme which has emerged from the range of cognitive approaches explored is that there are diverse and interesting ways of considering the term 'landscape' which may provide insights into how the production, setting and make-up of structured space can impact upon human consciousness.

The term 'landscape' is an increasingly common element in archaeological writing, within the project design of data collection exercises (for example, Barker et al 1997), as a framework for heritage management projects (Cleere 1995) and as a broader concept of archaeological theory (for example, Bender 1993). Focusing for a moment on the concept of



'landscape' within discussions of archaeological theory, it is worth examining a brief example of how it has been approached and used in a constructive manner.

Increasingly, post-processualist theoretical discussions have emphasised that landscapes should not be seen simply as the backdrop to human activity, but as playing an active part in *shaping* such activity also. One such approach has become known as 'structuration theory'. Through this, Barrett has sought to demonstrate both that the complexities of social structure can be interpreted in the landscape, and how landscapes continue to play a role in the reproduction of those social relations through time (1988). He does this by starting with Giddens' notion that 'all human action is carried on by knowledgeable agents who both construct the social world through their action, but yet whose action is also conditioned or constrained by the very world of their creation' (1981, 54). Structuration is therefore the relationship between these 'knowledgeable agents' and the social structures which they in part reproduce, and are in part constrained by as they move through time. These relationships, between 'agency' on the one hand and 'structure' on the other, are played out within specific material, spatial settings which Giddens terms 'locales' (1984, 1985). Giddens does not really discuss the role of material culture at length, however, but Bourdieu does, through his notion of 'habitus' or 'the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing circumstances' (1977, 72). These principles are generated with reference to particular material circumstances. In Bourdieu's study of Berber communities, for instance, it is within the house that such principles – 'ways of going on' (Barrett 1988, 8) – are formed. The way in which a particular space is laid out affects how those within it form a sense of themselves, and of how they relate to the status of others around them. Graves has taken this notion of 'structuration' and applied it to the English medieval parish church. Within such settings, 'the organisation of space is looked at not just as a reflection of society and values, but as a medium through which society and different kinds of knowledge can be created and reproduced' (1989, 297). It is within such spaces that discourses are formed, have an affect on those who use them, and then change as time goes on. For Graves, at a broader spatial level, 'the medieval parish was the unit through which the authority of the Church operated and gained sanction locally' (1989, 301). But it did not do so unchallenged and unchanged, because it was in turn susceptible to the actions of 'agents' (in this case, the parishioners), who in part reproduced, in part altered, the dominant discourse of the Church as time went on (1989, 301). An added strength to this structuration approach is that it demonstrates a strong role for the archaeologist, in seeking out and interpreting the 'residue of material conditions which structured, and were organised by, past social practice' (Graves 1989, 300).



This is just one example of how landscape has been defined as a complex, socially-constructed concept within archaeological theory. Yet, as Finlayson and Dennis have recently observed, there are many different approaches within archaeological theory which have sought to employ the term 'landscape' as a unit of study, and use of the term is in fact 'highly variable' (2002, 219). For Darvill, there is a danger that that variation of understanding has led to 'landscape' being applied and used 'with almost reckless abandon' (Darvill 1999, 104). There is certainly a danger, recognised by a number of scholars, that 'landscape studies' and 'landscape survey' are simply a gloss for the form of *en vogue* archaeological survey currently being carried out within the proximity of some of the long-established excavation sites in western Asia. Such surveys, rather than tackling concepts of landscape, are often in essence a reaction to funding cuts, and, in the case of projects attached to the various British Schools of the region, a response to the Wilson Report (1996) which praised the role of such schools in pursuing archaeological survey (Finlayson & Dennis 2002, 221). The following paragraph highlights some of the problems inherent in such variation in use of the term 'landscape'.

'Landscape' has a range of simple definitions. Popularly, some of these focus on concepts of the natural world, of features within that world, and which of those features we can see from any particular viewpoint (Oxford University Press 1998, 446). For archaeologists, these features have traditionally played a role simply in the collection of resources and foodstuffs (for example, the 'site catchment analysis' approach developed in the early 1970s [Higgs 1972]). Yet from the late 1980s, as archaeological theory has increasingly borrowed and adapted the notion of 'discourse', explored by the French sociologist Foucault (1977), 'landscape' has become less imbued with form and function, and is more a culturally-defined entity. Walsh, for example, is cautious in defining it 'as a spatial and temporal context in which the vestiges of historically-connected communities existed' (1999, 1). For Ingold, that 'context' is best observed as a work in progress (1993). Bender renders 'landscape' yet more slippery, by pointing out that people inhabit different landscapes depending on their social situation (2001). This need to recognise and embrace variation in our understanding of the term 'landscape' was described as long ago as 1979, by the geographer Meinig, who pointed out that 'we are never in it, it lies before our eyes and it becomes real only as we become conscious of it' (1979, 3).

There is a distinct danger within the current milieu that Darvill's fears of 'reckless abandon' are being realised. The broader problem of post-modern relativism has already been discussed in Chapter 1 with respect to Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Here again, within the



specific context of landscape studies, this problem is seen as a lurking danger for some. Muir protests that an increasingly relativist outlook, whereby a landscape is only interpreted – or even devised – by the individual who gazes upon it, and thus increasingly remote from the reaches of archaeological data, is ‘a replacement of explanation by sensation’ (2000, 5). Renfrew stresses the need to avoid a full ‘rejection of the methods of scientific enquiry’ (1994, 9). Such criticisms have been prompted especially by Tilley’s conception of the ‘phenomenological’ approach to landscape archaeology, which seeks to combine similar approaches adopted in the fields of philosophy, cultural anthropology, and human geography, to do the following:

‘Phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject. It is about the relationship between Being and Being-in-the-world. Being-in-the-world resides in a process of objectification in which people objectify the world by setting themselves apart from it. This results in the creation of a gap, a distance in space. To be human is both to create this distance between the self and that which is beyond and to attempt to bridge this distance through a variety of means - through perception (seeing, hearing, touching), bodily actions and movements, and intentionality, emotion and awareness residing in systems of belief and decision-making, remembrance and evaluation.’ (Tilley 1994, 12)

This approach is essentially a reaction against environmentally-guided agenda, and those who use such factors as demographic patterning, the identification of trade networks, and explicit social organisation to interpret in a fairly straightforward fashion where human behaviour in the past took place and how that behaviour was structured. Phenomenology is, in common with many of the post-processual stances in archaeology, a deliberate opposition to deductive, positivist and rational thinking. Such interpretations, since they are based essentially on sensual experience, tend to place an emphasis on the individual, rather than on society as a whole. They are an attempt to avoid imposing theories of understanding onto past landscapes which are merely ‘myth-making in which an exclusively modernist Western logic has simply become superimposed on the past’ (Tilley 1994, 2). Others have taken this approach further, even employing neurobiological analysis to understand how humans react to being in particular spaces at a psychological level (such as Clack 2004).

The ‘methodology’ behind this approach assumes that if the basic physical characteristics of the spaces interpreted are the same, then a modern observer can gain some insight into the



way it was experienced by an individual in the past. A wide variety of site-type has been subjected to the phenomenological approach. For example, Tilley applies his ideas to Mesolithic and early Neolithic landscapes in Britain and southern Scandinavia (1996), while Gosden has used various locations in the Pacific (1994). The phenomenological approach has been subjected to much criticism on the grounds that linking modern experience of a landscape with past experience is deeply problematic given that we live today in markedly different socio-political circumstances (Brück 1998). Indeed, it would seem rather pointless here to produce a thesis entirely based on my own experience of the landscape around a particular archaeological site, since such a view would remain entirely personal, and would ignore the particularities of Late Antiquity. Most of all, a truly phenomenological approach as conceived by Tilley runs the risk of invoking the kind of relativism feared and reviled by most scholars, and would render the research conducted by this thesis practically worthless.

However, since society is, by its very definition, made up of coinciding human experiences, it is argued here that if *elements of* the cognitive experience of humans in the past are considered, certain aspects of the interaction between material surroundings and behaviour can be understood. Such aspects may be, for example, the ease or difficulty of access of a particular space, the prominence or invisibility of certain features from particular spaces, a sense of enclosure versus a sense of openness in different areas of a landscape. Such insights into human perceptions of space could be useful, even if 'phenomenology cannot take us further than the most basic generalisations' because of the essential 'historicity of the body' (Brück 1998, 26, 28). And indeed, there are elements of the experiential which may provide interesting insights into how moving around the material world creates day-to-day consciousness, and how, ultimately, we may understand how an individual 'sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, his legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs' (Marx 1976, 283). Examining human perception of space could be used to understand *both* how production (and the labour and experience it entails) creates ideas, *and* how the production of ideology is expressed through the landscape and eventually impacts upon behaviour. Crucially, and with relevance to the overall aims of this thesis, it may also provide some insight into how the physical layout of a landscape enables an ideology to articulate power relations.

The question remains, however, how can consideration of experiential factors in the past be made without resorting to the assertion that landscapes vary according to every individual 'user'? Such a view, adopted by more aggressive post-processualist outlooks, not only implies a level of interpretation which archaeology cannot provide, but it is arguably not



very interesting. Furthermore, it is the intention of this study to examine how ideological and economic production interacted in the landscape, and not to pursue some kind of palaeopsychology (as dismissed by Binford 1987). For these reasons, avoiding what Renfrew terms a 'polarized and polemical philosophically relativist standpoint' is important, and so too is the development of an explicit, developed and demonstrable methodology (1994, 10). How is it possible, then, to combine experiential interpretations of landscape with rigorous methods, thereby producing a credible outcome? In response to the difficulties inherent in such a balancing act, there are two factors which this thesis will use to structure a pre-defined, theoretical position, in order to limit the onset of relativism. They are, admittedly, provisional, but offer a rationale which will be broadly followed throughout discussions of specific data in Chapters 5 and 6.

The first point to make is that archaeology is ultimately concerned with the relationship between material evidence and the actions of human beings. For those human beings to have left evidence at all, there must have been certain conditions in place which enabled survival. Layton and Ucko succinctly state that 'any system of belief, or theory of causation must at least produce behaviour that is compatible with survival' (1999, 8). That is not to say that the environmental determinism which so dominated functionalist theory of the 1970s can complete our picture of any landscape. After all, there is an important distinction to be made between environment and landscape. It is merely that, in the midst of culturally defined definitions, 'reading the landscape as an expression of meanings negotiated in past or present cultures will depend on identifying a community's references to external features that we also can perceive' (Layton & Ucko 1999, 11). Knowing both those external features, and what is physically achievable in and around them (Kristiansen and Rowlands' 'economic possibilism'; 1998, 2), must be demonstrated by the use of scientific data, if any of these definitions are to hold credence (Chapman & Gearey 2000). In other words, experience of a landscape is not random and individual, because communities are affected in a collective fashion by the economic constraints and intentions that they all feel. Moreover, we can read some of that experience archaeologically by building up a picture of the economic activity occurring at any particular time.

The second aspect to limit the onset of relativism in landscape studies is the 'collective consciousness' expressed primarily by Durkheim (1954, 444), but pursued also by Saussure (1959). This notion expresses the idea that certain definitions of landscape outlive and transcend individual members of the community. It could be argued that these definitions are created around a series of commonly understood symbols. Although individual



understandings of these symbols may vary, individuals are bound together and made to feel like communities because 'those who interact in a particular setting can become aware of each others' subjective intentions by identifying the references they make in the course of communicating' (Layton & Ucko 1999, 7). It is asserted here that the defining unit of that collective consciousness, the source and the focus for intersubjectivity, is the collective identity of the group (self-conceived or, more likely, imposed by a particular sub-group or class), as played out through the landscape in question. This may be investigated by analysing what symbols may have been collectively recognised in the past, and the way in which the structuring of a landscape facilitated such recognition. This idea of communities being bound together by the structure of a landscape will be explored more fully in the later section on sacred landscapes.

In these ways, it is hoped that consideration of the experiences of those living in close proximity to monasteries in the fourth to seventh centuries may go some way towards informing us of the levels of control exerted by monastic communities at that time. By drawing in elements of an experiential approach, it should be possible to go some way towards informing and enlivening the sometimes sterile and generalising 'model-based' perspectives taken by the Marxist stance.

To date, no explicitly experiential approach has been applied to a monastic site (though some discussions have taken place of the *presentation* of human experience at monastic sites by heritage managers; Greene 1989, Hollinshead 2001). There have, however, been a number of attempts recently to go some way towards drawing in *some* experiential factors, by bringing the matter of subjective, personal and immediate experience into archaeological accounts of monastic sites. Binns, for example, when describing the Monastery of Mar Saba in Judaea, writes the following:

'There are several factors which contribute to the impression of holiness which it conveys. The landscape is rugged and magnificent. The silence is deep and embracing - accentuated rather than diminished by the occasional sound of desert birds or a shepherd's pipe.' (1999, 26)

Subjective, sensual experience has also been used in popular publications of monastic sites. Finneran, for example, describes a church service in Ethiopia:



'Sitting among the deacons at the back of the Old Cathedral in Aksum, Ethiopia, at festival time, banging drums, shaking sistra, creating a mighty din in clouds of heavy incense, all competing with the senses. An all night service too, the most important time of the Ethiopian liturgical year, fighting drowsiness and the soporific beat of the drums and chants to emerge into the early dawn with the sun rising above the eucalyptus and bare hillsides beyond.' (2002, 15)

These are but brief examples, and neither author sought to use experiential factors as part of a holistic theoretical approach. If experiential factors are to be more fully used to explain the day-to-day influence of monastery over populace, it would be the task of the archaeologist to interpret how the position and layout of a monastic site affects the experience of the individual. What, for example, can we understand and describe of the experience of an individual living in the village of Brad in the sixth century, with the monastery of Qasr al Brad just 400m away across the fields to the south-west? What impression does that monastery convey of its reasons for existence, and what kinds of links does it form with the village? Does its appearance, and the ways in which that appearance reach the village, empower it in ways which contribute to its ideological status? As a monument, what messages does it convey about what it is doing, and why that space was chosen over another? How does that monastery inhabit the consciousness of those within the village, and influence their sense of 'Being-in-the-world' (Tilley 1994, 13)?

Since many of the issues which derive from these questions concern not just a consideration of ideology, but in particular the more specific consideration of *religious* ideology, the next section will discuss some of the ways in which sacred landscapes may be usefully approached.

## 2.7 Approaching sacred landscapes

The issue of sacred landscapes is an important one to consider when looking at the early Christian monasteries of Syria. There are a number of reasons for this. The first and most obvious is that there is a large degree of variation in the kinds of landscape in which monasteries are located. There is a stark difference, for example, between the monastery of Dayr Turmanin in north-west Syria, and Dayr al-Nasrani in the Hauran of the south. The latter example stands alone on top of a 200m high promontory on the margin of the cultivable land to the west and the desert to the east. The nearest settlement in the late Roman period appears to have been close to the modern village of Milih, 8km away.





*Figure 7: The monastic site of Dayr al-Nasrani in the Hauran, demonstrating its dominant location*

By contrast, Dayr Turmanin sits in a region of high agricultural yield, overlooking the Plain of Dana which is edged with numerous settlements and monastic sites. The closest settlement was probably at Turmanin which is just 1.7km away. What are the reasons for this difference, and are such traits 'typical' of their region? As well as the nature of the landscape in which monasteries lie, what *relationship* do they hold with that landscape? At Dayr Turmanin, there seems to have been no enclosure wall, and therefore no clear demarcation with the broader landscape. At Dayr al-Nasrani, demarcation is stark and clear, indicated by the bounds of the volcanic cone on which it sits. Yet even here, it is unclear the extent to which this boundary was ever made truly defensive by the insertion of an external wall.

This contrasts markedly with examples elsewhere in the Middle East, such as Dayr Abu Maqar in Upper Egypt, which is reached via a drawbridge, and has a heavily fortified *qasr* (keep) which is 21m high (Finneran 2002, 82). A central theme of this study will be exploring how the sacred nature of monastic sites influenced the way in which nearby secular communities perceived them. However, to refer unthinkingly to the term 'sacred landscape' without justifying what is meant by it, would be unhelpful, since this term can mean many things, and has been subjected to a great deal of varied use (and perhaps misuse) recently. What follows, therefore, is a discussion of the way in which 'sacred landscapes' are used in this thesis.



Since Bender's *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* in 1993, there has been some recognition that religion and its symbolism can play a role in the 'intersubjectivity' of landscapes (1993). Indeed, as well as discussions of various prehistoric and past faiths, scholars of various of the current world faiths have contributed thoughts on this subject. Schimmel uses the works of the Muslim *Sura* as well as mystical poets like Khaqani and Mir Taqi Mir to demonstrate the 'spacialization of belief': the direct parallels to be drawn between the landscape of the soul and the landscape on the ground (1991). Indeed Insoll has summarised the archaeology of Islam in terms of the 'mechanisms by which landscape can be tied together' (Insoll 1999, 219). An obvious example might be the way in which the territory of Mecca is *haram*, or sacred, not merely in terms of the central *ka'aba* itself, nor indeed its surrounding mosque, but the entire city as far as around 3km outside its modern limits. Those using this landscape as part of the *hajj* are bound together by their common actions and understandings of that *haram*, and by the process of visiting the various holy places, like the spring of Zamzam and the plain of Arafat, in and around the city.

Similarly, though there is no formal process or legislature of consecration in Islam, the landscape surrounding a communal mosque is arguably created in order to draw the faithful into successive layers of sacredness, within which repeated actions and movements create the context for the formation and maintenance of a community. An obvious example would be planned complexes containing a mosque, tombs, a garden, *hamam* and a *suq*, such as the Suleymaniye complex in Istanbul. The Taj Mahal too, with its tomb of Mumtaz Mahal set within the mosque which is itself set within an extended garden complex, draws the visitor into a grand metaphor for paradise. Though these are somewhat exceptional examples, layers of sacred space may also be apparent within the setting of a well-used, congregational mosque. These layers may begin, such as in the Umayyad mosque in Damascus, with the surrounding collection of streets and shops known as the *qaisariya*, whose alignment matches that of the corners and entrances to the mosque. Such an area is often directly under the jurisdiction and financial administration of the mosque, and is referred to as the *waqf*. Moving closer, there is then the external gateway of the mosque, then the outer courtyard, or *saban*, containing areas for ablution, the removal of shoes and conversation. Following this, there is the entrance to the prayer hall itself, whereupon the mosque 'proper' begins, with the *qibla* wall and finally the central *mibrab* forming the focus for the increasingly communal actions of the faithful as they move through the process of attending prayers.



It may well be true that 'by physically dividing up and demarcating space we may classify and control places and relationships more readily' (Parker-Pearson & Richards 1994, 24), but by deliberately connecting spaces and blurring boundaries, relationships may also be carefully formed which would appear to be both spiritual and physical. This *gradual* layering of sacredness reminds us that stark divisions between the sacred and the profane are not always appropriate. Binns comments of the late Roman period that, 'the contrast between sacred and secular is a feature of modern society. In the period we are discussing, all human society had a religious quality' (1999, 30).

Although, of course, the context and intentions differ markedly, comparison may be made in conceptual terms with Hindu pilgrimage centres such as those at Varanasi or Gaya, where 'there may be different geographic layers of sanctity, which will range from the outermost perimeter of the sacred territory in question to the innermost circuit around the place of the deity' (Chakrabarti 2001, 54). Sacred territories may not necessarily be restricted to adherents of one faith alone. Different though overlapping layers may be created by the actions of multiple faiths (Shaw 2000).

So too at the monastery of Dayr Mar Elian at Qaryatayn in Syria, for example, the enclosure wall defines an area held to be sacred by both Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic Christians, but also by Muslims (Loosley & Finneran 2005). For each community, the process of visiting, praying and leaving offerings at the tomb of Mar Elian differs slightly. The properties the saint is believed to have, however, and the fact that sacredness is perceived to increase as one moves closer to the tomb, is similar for all pilgrims.





*Figure 8: The monastic site of Dayr Mar Elian, used today by Muslims and Christians alike*

This example is on a relatively small scale, but there is a parallel here with the broader late medieval landscape of Ballabgarh, north of Delhi, where 'shared social norms and tolerances' between Hindu and Muslim communities have led to shared use of the sacred landscape (Lahiri 1996, 263, in Insoll 1999, 224). On a broader scale still, Kumar relates how the Hauz-i Rani lake unites the various Muslim and Hindu communities living around it in that they both regard it as a focal point, even though their reasons for doing so and actions there have consistently differed through time.

The cohesiveness of the sacred landscape has been recognised on various scales within Christianity. Caseau explains the role played by pilgrimage in creating forms of sacred space throughout the Christian world, during the fifth century. As visits to saints' shrines became increasingly formalised, and the architecture and space surrounding them increasingly suited to the repeated nature of pilgrimage, regularised channels, meeting points and layers of sacredness emerged. This process also has a temporal dimension, in that festival days became increasingly fixed, and thus the possibilities of social cohesion within the bounds of Christian sites increased.

'Celebrations of the discovery of relics and their processions filled up the Christian festal calendar as they did Christian chapels. Both time and space were



made sacred through the idea that the saints are particularly available when and where they are honored.' (Caseau 2001, 43)

Furthermore, this increasing regularisation of space brought with it a sense of how far that sanctity extended. It began to move beyond the tomb itself. Pietri relates the example of St. Martin of Tours, whose festival dates were set by Bishop Perpetuus at some stage in the late fifth century to July 4th and November 11th (Pietri 1984). The Bishop regularised the place of worship by building a new basilica to house St. Martin's relics, and festival days at the church spread to a few days either side of the date, and began to imbue both the building and the immediate area with a sense of holiness.

The symbol of the dead holy man is central to the idea of the spreading of holy space. Brock comments on the fact that the kinds of holy men described so thoroughly by Theodoret of Cyrillus were essentially replacing the Christian martyrs of the first to early fourth centuries, and that they in turn replaced the apostles in the Christian consciousness (Brock 1984, 3). In a sense the relics of these holy men, and the tombs, buildings and complexes which they came to be associated with, can be seen as a monumentalisation of a continuing tradition. This tradition was characterised by the idea of an intermediary: an intermediary between God and the people, and between heaven and earth. They provided an opportunity to make the intangible tangible, and the spiritual real. Of course, this trend was by no means confined to northern Syria. It was an important factor in the Christianising of the Roman world and beyond from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Literature on the cult of saints in the early Christian period is extensive (for example, Brown 1995, Grabar 1972, Musurillo 1972, Pietri 1984, Saxer 1980) and for western Asia important summaries are provided by Lassus (1947) and Seiber (1977). Such works on the cult of saints are relevant to the present discussion of sacred landscapes for three reasons.

The first is that the cult in all its various guises was transportable, allowing cult centres to be established wherever the church deemed it necessary or desirable to do so. This meant that cult centres, often housed in monasteries, could be drawn away, and thus draw their visitors away, from the locations where pagan temples had been.

The second reason is that such relics, when established within such centres, were particularly attractive to visitors because they were 'contagious'.



'The sweet perfume coming from St.Stephen's sarcophagus had healing powers, for it came from paradise. Because Stephen was in heaven and yet still in contact with his body, the healing perfume of divinity emanated from his bones.'  
(Caseau 2001, 43)

Reliquaries could be made, as indeed they were in Syria, in such a way as to allow oil to be poured on to the bones. The oil could then be stored elsewhere or taken away. The bones could in many cases be handled through holes in the side of the reliquary, or just the outside of the tomb could be touched. All of this took the holiness of the saint beyond its immediate bounds.

The third and perhaps most important reason behind the creation of established sacred landscapes focusing on cult centres was that they entailed 'a colonisation of time as well as space' (Lane 2001, 175). As the example of Martin of Tours demonstrated earlier, with the cult of saints came an established calendar for the celebration of those saints. An important facilitator for such events was provided by the Council of Nicaea in 324, which sought to establish a fixed, linear chronology against which the events of the New Testament, the festivals of the present and the events of the future could be measured. Since 'sacred time', as it were, is supposed to be eternal, 'the invariant recurrence of different ceremonies within daily, seasonal and annual ritual cycles is not simply a matter of regulation and imposing order but is central to the reaffirmation of their sanctity' (Lane 2001, 175, citing Rappaport 1986, 20). In order to legitimise and make more convincing the *modus operandi* of the new cult centres, and the monasteries in which they were sometimes housed, a sense of both the deep and the unrelenting nature of the time, as well as the broad, transportable and ambiguous nature of the space which they occupied was emphasised by their physical form.

This brief exploration has highlighted the different ways in which sacred landscapes overlap and interact with profane space. But to what extent can these interactions of spatial concepts actually indicate genuine interaction in terms of social practice? Can we assume that the different groups of people, monastic personnel and the secular population, conversed, congregated, shared or imposed ideas upon one another, or that these factors derived from and contributed to economic interrelationships? Given the proximity of monastic and other settlements sites, an obvious answer would be that such interaction was frequent. But how was this carried out, and to what extent did such action mean that similar views and outlooks were also being thought and felt? Did a kind of interdependency develop? Arguably, it was the *complexity* of social contact which the overlapping layers of



interaction within the spatial and temporal landscape brought to everyday life that enabled the 'intersubjectivity' discussed previously to operate so effectively. In short, the more different ways in which a sacred place affects the landscape around it, the more that users of that space share reasons and modes of interaction. The more people interact under the influence of a controlling, central ideological theme, the more they are bound together through action and thought, and the more potent is the authority of those who produce and disseminate that ideology for a community. Lane informs us that 'all physical objects, structures and landscapes can be said to be imbued with their own particular temporality and cultural biography' (2001, 175). Kumar's example of the Hauz-i Rani implies that that sense of cultural biography can have a direct impact on the everyday practicalities of socio-politics:

'The 'perception' of a landscape, as much as the self-perception of a social group, is deliberate in its construction and acceptance; it has historical actors, a temporal context, and it attempts to obscure internal dissent and/or marginalize challenge from groups defined as 'outsiders'.' (1999, 159)

In other words, ways of interacting within a landscape could have been deliberately created as complex and frequent by one group in order to facilitate the espousal and communication of an ideology over time. In this sense, landscape is a creation meant to structure what Marx and Engels termed an 'ensemble of social relations' (1970, 122).

## 2.8 Contemporary definitions of landscape

Having established some of the ways in which, theoretically at least, monastic personnel could have interacted with the secular population in northern Syria, it is important to recognise the extent to which the approaches explored so far in this chapter derive from our current, largely western academic milieu. And does the whole concept of 'landscape', so susceptible to the changing moods of theoretical trends over the last half a century or so, in fact derive *completely* from modern, western thought? How far should we regard Derrida's notion of a 'text' to render these ideas today as just further texts, potentially far away from what was actually thought and felt in Late Antiquity? In order to examine this issue more closely, and to determine whether the idea of using 'landscape' as a unit of study for this thesis is appropriate at all, the following is a discussion of the ways in which commentators of late antique Syria have viewed the landscapes around them. In particular, how did they see the idea of a sacred landscape and the ways in which such a concept interacts with the secular?



In some of the earliest sophisticated theological literature in the Syriac language, there are broad comparisons, between paradise and a mountain that is supreme above all others. Ephrem's *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, written in the mid-fourth century, describes how Adam was relegated to the foot of that mountain, in an area which he calls the 'fence of paradise' (Murray 1975, 258). In order to re-enter paradise, he must pass through a guarded gate, opened by Christ. Once inside, the mountain is divided into various levels, with only the summit representing truly divine glory. Along the way, the believer must pass through the areas for the penitents (*tayyābê*), for the righteous (*zaddiqê*), and above that for the glorious (*naṣṣībê*). The division of the landscape of paradise goes further, through a comparison with the various decks of the Ark, and finally with Mount Sinai. In the *Hymns on Paradise*, Ephrem continues to discuss a physical layering to paradise, even equating these levels with precise groups of people: the penitents of the lowest level, the good Christians of the middle, and the martyrs and ascetics of the uppermost rank (Murray 1975, 259). In stanza 7, paradise in general is explicitly compared with the Christian Church:

'He planted the garden most fair,  
   He built the Church most pure.  
 On the tree of knowledge  
   He set the commandment.'

But although texts such as these tell us that physical ideas of paradise were being conceived and written about, the ways in which such conceptions were actually *created on the ground* in material terms are more difficult to deduce.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus describes many instances of the ways in which fourth and fifth century ascetics viewed their landscape. For them, the secular was the arena of the corrupt and unholy, with purity lying in the unkempt wilderness where no human intervention existed. In his vivid description of James of Nisibis written in the 440s, Theodoret explains that:

'...the great James embraced the eremitical and quiet life, and gaining the tops of the highest hills lived upon them. In spring, summer and autumn he used the thickets, with the sky for a roof; in the winter season a cave received him and provided scanty shelter.' (HR I:2)



Ephrem's implication is that paradise is a hierarchically divided landscape, with the glorious ascetics physically removed from the ordinary Christians. Theodoret's descriptions a century later suggest that that removal need not necessarily be very far away, and indeed may in fact be very close to areas of contemporary settlement. Thalassius could build 'an ascetic dwelling' apparently just south of the village of Tillima, 'on a ridge neither rough nor flat' (*HR XXII:1*), for example. Marana and Cyra of Beroea (Aleppo) could build theirs 'in front of the town' (*HR XXIX:2*). Also a city-dweller by origin, Romanus of Antioch 'pitched his tent outside the circuit of the city by the foot of the mountain' (*HR XI:1*).

Yet, in spite of this proximity, when it came to establishing a built environment within a landscape, there is a sense of the pioneering spirit in the actions of the ascetics. They were conquering the wild in order to establish a new kind of landscape, suitable for their coenobitic enterprise. Eusebius and Ammanius are described as creating the new sacred space of Dayr Tell 'Ada within a pre-existing landscape which is mapped out in some detail for the reader:

'Lying east of Antioch and west of Beroea, there is a high mountain that rises above the neighbouring mountains and imitates at its topmost summit the shape of a cone...To the south stretches out a plain curved in shape, surrounded on either side by not very high lines of hill; these extend to the road for horses and admit paths from either side that cut from south to north. In this plain have been built villages both small and great, adjoining the hills on either side. At the very skirts of the high mountain there is a large and well-populated village, which in the local speech they call Teleda. Above the mountain-foot there is a dale not very steep but sloping gently towards that plain and facing the south wind. Here one Amminaus built a philosophical retreat...' (*HR IV:2*)

We might ponder on why this detail is inserted so thoroughly, in a text which otherwise concerns itself with largely spiritual endeavours. It could be speculated that the sense of where the new sacred site lay, how it was sited and what lay around it was of crucial importance to the builders of these monastic sites. Concepts of 'landscape' and its complexity existed then which were far from meaningless or incidental. For contemporary commentators, the sense of structure and meaning to their landscape was very real, and the positioning of new monastic complexes meant that the delineation of sacred space was unlikely to have been accidental or casual.



Finally then, the next section explores ways in which previous scholars have accounted for the landscape setting of monasteries: what could their siting reveal of the intentions of those who built and used them?

## 2.9 Monasteries and the significance of location

Finneran and Tribe have noted the significance of site placement in Ethiopian monasticism, and especially that 'their siting was motivated by the need to command a landscape, ideologically and socio-economically' (2004, 71). However, previous consideration of this issue in Syria has not tackled monasteries in terms of their broader setting. Instead, it has largely taken the form of a fairly simple question: why were monasteries placed where they were? Some, like Restle, have been content only to describe where monasteries tend to occur, rather than confront the more interesting issue of *why* they were placed in such positions and not others (Restle 1985 993). Most commentators have at least attempted to tackle this issue and acknowledge its importance. Indeed, the discussion above pointed out that the forms taken by landscape and the significance of placing a community in different positions within that landscape was of great importance to contemporaries of Late Antiquity. The complex answers which they provide suggest that straightforward uni-causal explanations are unlikely to be an adequate explanation about why a building or complex was placed where it was. Yet scholars of the twentieth century have tended to offer largely functionalist accounts of these important decision-making processes. These accounts have taken a variety of forms.

Tchalenko, for example, notes that monasteries are often sited close to villages and speculates that either this was due to their need for subsistence, or that the villages themselves developed because of the possibilities for work created by monastic agricultural production (1953 I, 177; the latter possibility would seem very unlikely now, given the careful dating analysis by Tate 1992, 318). Either way, for him it was agricultural priorities which drove decisions behind their placement in the landscape. He was no doubt profoundly influenced in this by the position of the majority of the monasteries which he focused on, around the edge of the Dana Plain which, since the widespread resettlement in the region from the nineteenth century, has been the centre for agricultural production in the limestone massif. For Price too, the position chosen by the precursors to the monastic complex, the holy men which Theodoret of Cyrthus describes, is obvious to us today:



'...the typical habitat of Theodoret's holy men was neither town nor desert but the intermediate region of the fringe of inhabited areas. This followed naturally from the nature of the terrain.' (1985, 57)

There was, therefore, no alternative it would seem, than to hover on the margins of settlement. But why not an alternative, since the limestone massif region does afford some areas of land which display no evidence for late Roman habitation (such as the area between Mashad Ruhin and Eski Jalama in the Jebel Halqa, east of Mshabbak or north of Kalota in the Jebel Sim'an)?

Others, like Tate, have recognised some variation in the placement of monastic sites, but have again regarded the only explanation to be agricultural production. He assigns, for example, every monastery within the limestone massif to either the category of 'isolé' or 'dans une agglomération'. On this basis, he argues that the former were probably centres of their own domains and therefore owned large amounts of land to be rented out, and the latter were more or less like any peasant land owner, in processing small amounts of their own agricultural product (1992, 339-340). This would seem to imply that site selection was made on the basis of the economic intentions of the monastery: whether to exploit or simply to subsist. A similar conclusion was reached by Patlagean, who uses documentary evidence to conclude that different locations were chosen by monasteries according to their economic intentions (1977, 328-9). Whether these economic intentions were mingled with other reasons is not made clear.

For Vööbus, there are a number of reasons why monasteries were placed initially where they were, though the overriding factor, he states, is the sheer functional necessities of survival:

'In many cases, the question of the site of the monastery did not arise, and the founding was guided solely by practical considerations.' (1960, 163)

These considerations are factors such as a water supply, self-protection, a need for alms provided by villages and labour in agricultural production. For him, it is the 'natural facilities' sought in order to secure existence on a day-to-day basis which dictated where monasteries were founded. For Vööbus, it was sufficient that some monasteries were merely consolidated versions of places of earlier, ascetic activity. Because of the sheer holiness of the ascetic on the one hand and the desire of others 'to live under the guidance of experienced spiritual fathers' on the other, sites for large, complex monastic institutions



could gradually develop without the need for a decision-making process as to the suitability of that location (1960, 167).

Yet Vööbus was, it would appear, aware of broader considerations, since he states that both 'religio-ethical' motives' as well as 'socio-economic conditions' would have been factors (1960, 120). But again, it is not made clear quite how such motives affected the placement and formation of monasteries in the fifth and sixth centuries.

More recently, Biscop's excavation at Dayr Dehes did not prompt him to conclude why the monastery was founded where it was (1997, 44-5). Although he describes the layout and early foundation of the site, the reason for its positioning, and ways in which this location may have affected relations with the nearby village of Dehes, are not discussed.

## 2.10 Conclusion

It can be seen that discussions of monasteries and their landscape setting have tended to be regarded as either self-evident or unimportant in the past. And though the various interpretations of the impact of monasteries on their environs summarised in this chapter have been useful in establishing debate, they are lacking in two main respects. The first is that there has been insufficient consideration of the *variation* which may exist in the placing of monastic sites. Essentially, this problem derives from the lack of a clear definition about what a monastic site is, which has led to a number of site types being ignored (this point will be further pursued in Chapter 4). The second problem is one which this thesis has sought to highlight from Chapter 1 onwards, and that is the failure – on the whole – to understand the broader social and economic significance which the establishment and development of monasteries had upon society at large. Because of this, the effect which the placement of monasteries had on areas of secular settlement has been insufficiently considered.

This chapter has reviewed a number of ways in which these lacunae may be addressed. The approach adopted here asserts that changes in the landscape imposed along with the establishment of monastic sites may indicate for us both the economic impact of early monasticism, but also its ideological effects. This study will be guided in part by Braudel's two contrasting impressions of time. The extended themes of *longue durée* will be explored through general observations of the socio-economic context of monasteries through time. The theoretical position at its broadest level will take a partially Marxist stance. This assumes that society is inherently unstable, and that profound changes in the mode of production as outlined by Wickham (1984, 2005), and the ensuing social conflict, caused the structures of



power at the local level to change. Because of the difficulties of understanding how accompanying ideological change may have affected society on a day-to-day basis, aspects of *bistoire événementielle* will also be examined. This will be attempted through an exploration of the relationship between broader socio-economic trajectories throughout the fourth to seventh centuries, and the specifics of how monasteries altered the way people thought of themselves within society. It seems plausible that as well as the longer, much broader impact of monasticism, short-term and very real changes could have influenced surrounding populations. For this latter point, it seems fruitful to consider more recent, more broadly cognitive approaches to account for changes in the way people thought about themselves as a result of monastic development. In particular, Layton and Ucko's assertion of the importance of 'identifying a community's references to external features that we also can perceive' (1999, 11), and notions of the deliberate blurring of such features within sacred landscapes (Caseau 2001, Schimmel 1991) will be employed.

Examination of monastic landscapes should therefore lead us to a broader functional and intellectual understanding of the roles which monasteries performed in society. This research will be structured as follows: first, the social and economic changes within Syria in general are examined in Chapter 3, in order to contextualise the more specific discussion of the evidence types available to us for the arrival and early development of monasticism, in Chapter 4. Then, a study area within the north-west of Syria is selected so that more specific analysis can be carried out on a defined set of monastic sites. This will take place in Chapters 5 and 6, and is structured first of all to examine broad trends across the whole study area, and then in order to contextualise these conclusions by looking more specifically at three case studies. My objective throughout this work will be to show, using modern archaeological methods of landscape analysis and interpretation, that monasteries were deeply embedded in the communities of their day. In this way, I hope to scrutinise in particular their role in the socio-economic changes of Late Antiquity.



## Chapter 3

### Building a Model: The Late Roman Socio-Economic Context

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*The previous chapter explored different ways of studying and interpreting the expansion and consolidation of monastic sites in the Syrian countryside in the fourth to seventh centuries. The outlook adopted as a result of that chapter explores the 'array of modes' set out by Wickham (1984), and particularly his notion of a change in the collection of surplus from a city-based tax to a local rent system. It is suggested here in Chapter 3, through Brown's 'Holy Man as patron' model (1971, 1982a), that monasteries controlled this change from tax to rent. This chapter explores the possible evidence base for this idea, and especially its socio-economic context. This will take the form of a summary of the ways in which conclusions about the economy in Late Antiquity have been informed by archaeological evidence, followed by an exploration of the ways in which monasteries in particular may fit into such conclusions. It focuses primarily on the Syrian countryside, since it is here where most of the evidence for monasteries exists, and especially on the limestone massif of the north-west.*

#### 3.1 Previous studies of the Roman economy in Syria

There have been many previous attempts to summarise the economy of late Roman Syria. These have tended to be largely historical, and included in more general syntheses of the late Roman world as a whole, rather than an archaeological area study specific to Syria, though there are one or two notable exceptions. One of the earliest credible attempts at this topic was the Russian scholar Rostovtzeff (Rostovtzeff 1932). His approach was impressively wide ranging, but tended to conflate the 'Roman' and 'Byzantine' economies into one, without applying any especial significance to the massive political and economic changes of the fourth and fifth centuries. Furthermore, Rostovtzeff presented a romantic, impressionistic and deeply Orientalist view of the cross-desert caravan trade, which tended to over-emphasise the role of inter-regional exchange instead of agricultural produce in the economy (Rostovtzeff 1932). Heichelheim's work offered a valuable corrective to Rostovtzeff, in that it presented a series of discrete case studies through historical documentation, though his selection of texts was ultimately rather indiscriminate (Heichelheim 1938). Of course, Syria as a region was, in antiquity even more so than today, composed of a great many contrasting landscapes and production zones. Ranovich was the first to explore this diversity in full, breaking down the assumption that Syria was commercially a monolithic entity (Ranovich 1958). He went further still, in arguing that this heterogeneity was actually a policy of the Roman state in order to prevent tribal cohesion. Bowersock also urges us to think of diversity when he comments that contacts between different parts of the Syrian countryside were 'neither close nor unified' (Bowersock 1989, 63). Indeed, the concept of a 'Syrian countryside' at all is an anathema to Bowersock, who observes that,



'it looks very much as if the whole of Syria was apportioned into vast *territoria* with a city in control of each' (1989, 66). The origins of this proposal that the empire was, from the fourth century, composed of a series of semi-autonomous city states lies with A.H.M. Jones.

'The Byzantine Empire was an agglomeration of cities, self-governing communities responsible for the administration of the areas which they occupied...constitutionally and administratively...the cities were the cells of which the Empire was composed.' (1964, 712).

Indeed Jones, along with Moses Finley, have traditionally been the most influential thinkers on the late Roman economy (there are many references here, but the main works are Jones 1964 and Finley 1973). Although they commented little on Syria in particular, there are a number of conclusions which both scholars came to which have a significant bearing on Roman Syria. The first is that they directly contradicted Rostovtzeff, in that they asserted that agriculture was the dominant unit of economic activity in the Roman world, as opposed to long distance trade. For them, most of the products of this agricultural activity were consumed locally, rather than traded. The primary consumers were those living in the cities, whose income was not derived from trade, but instead from tax and rent drawn from the countryside. The towns were not only the consumers, but also the centres of religious activity, political life and administration. The long distance trade which Rostovtzeff emphasised was in fact restricted to a small number of luxury items. It certainly was not, in the eyes of Jones and Finley, an open mass market. The tax which was collected by these cities was both civilian and military in purpose, with the *annona* in particular undergoing substantial reform under Diocletian after AD 284, prompted by the wars with Sasanian Persia (see sections 3.6 and 3.7, below). These taxes were sometimes collected in coin, though the coinage systems used in Syria remained highly provincial with denominations and mints varying according to the *territoria* (Butcher 2003, 212-3). More usually, and especially following the Diocletian reforms, tax was collected in kind, according to whatever the hinterland of each city produced. For the countryside of the north-west, the region which most concerns us here, Antioch was the primary consumer and collection point for such taxes. There were others, however, such as Apamea (north-west of modern Hama) to the south, Chalcis (Tell al-'Iss, near modern Qinnasrīn) on the margins of the eastern steppe, and Beroea (Aleppo). The relationship between such cities and their *territoria*, according to the Finley/Jones model, was one of exploitation. The countryside



produced and the city consumed. Consequently, the population of the villages in each hinterland suffered, while the urban population administered and enjoyed. This generally pessimistic view was also followed and furthered for the ancient world in general by the historian de Ste.Croix (1981), and for 'Byzance' in particular by Patlagean (1977).

However, more recent models have sought to bring greater complexity to this relationship, choosing instead to emphasise differing degrees of symbiosis (there are many references for this, including Bowersock 1989, Greene 1986, Hopkins 1980). Butcher, for example, argues that, 'year by year the archaeological support for an elaborate economic interrelationship between city and country is growing' (Butcher 2003, 137). There is some evidence that the city actually produced rather than merely consumed. This is suggested, for example, by murex processing at Gaza, glass production at Tyre and a lime kiln at Gerasa. Projects which were deliberately created in order to carry the resources of the countryside to the city may also 'benefit' the rural communities through which they travelled. This is perhaps the case with the dam at Harbaqa (though recent work by Qenequand instead suggests an Umayyad date for this; Denis Genequand *pers comm.* March 2006), or transport networks throughout the Hauran or between Palmyra and the Euphrates. Furthermore, it is not always necessarily well defined what a city and its countryside represent in real terms (Millar 1993, 256). The definition of a *polis* or *civitas* and its *territorium* may seem clear enough in legal terms at any particular moment in time, as argued by Haldon (1999, 100). However, the status of certain small, rural settlements could change through time. An instance of this is illustrated by the village of Dionysias which, at some stage in the late second century, was granted city status. Archaeological work by Dentzer and others suggests that Dionysias then acquired a municipal infrastructure as a result (Dentzer & Villeneuve 1985). Such examples have prompted Butcher to argue that, '(v)illages were *potential* cities, if the right conditions prevailed' (2003, 136). The following section will explore the range of views which have derived from this recent appreciation of the complexity of rural-city relations. This section will also function as a descriptive backdrop to the landscape and conditions into which monasticism emerged. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 will then go on to address the issue of how the late Roman socio-economy in the north-west has been accounted for by previous scholars. 3.5 will then attempt to suggest a new model. The specific economic evidence for such a model, and especially the issues of land ownership and taxation, will be assessed in 3.6 and 3.7. Finally, the discussion is broadened in 3.8 and 3.9, as we consider how conditions specific to the countryside of



northern Syria may have related to the imperial economy as a whole, and what the role of monasteries may have been in this.

### 3.2 Landscape, climate and foodstuffs

It is useful before embarking on a summary of recent views of the late Roman economy in Syria to summarise quite what that economy consisted of in material terms. What was being produced in the Syrian countryside, and where was it consumed? The following two sections will explore these issues, before sections 3.4 to 3.6 attempt the more complex issue of how and why that consumption took place in the way it did.

The Syrian countryside is distinctly varied in topographical, hydrological and pedological terms. Chapter 1 described the bounds of historical Syria, as opposed to the modern state of the Syrian Arab Republic. The region of greater Syria, or *Bilad ash-Sham*, has four discrete regions of mountainous topography, consisting of the basalt Jebel al-'Arab (now often called Jebel Hauran) to the south, the cretaceous limestone of the Lebanon, anti-Lebanon and associated ranges which run from Damascus to the coast, the Jebel Ansariyya which runs parallel to the Mediterranean coast in the north and the Jebel al-Amanus west of Antioch in the far north-west. Extending out of each of these ranges, there are areas of hill country which have provided – and indeed still provide – substantial agricultural opportunities due to their favourable climate. These are the lava-rich plain of the Hauran around the Jebel al-'Arab in the south, the Beqaa' valley between the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon ranges in the west, the basalt steppe of Chalcidice east of Hama and the so-called 'limestone massif' (called the *Belus Massif* in antiquity) between Aleppo and Antioch in the north-west. These regions would have required a degree of assarting to clear fields for agriculture. The very fertile lowland areas, which run in a north-south band inland from the Jebel al-Ansariyya predominantly between Homs and Aleppo, have probably been farmed since the Neolithic period. With relevance to this thesis, archaeological evidence for the late Roman and Byzantine periods has tended to be more rare in this zone, however, as later activity has obscured and moved the material remains. The vast majority of the land area within Syria is taken up by the Badiyyat ash-Sham, or the Great Syrian Desert, whose topography is itself varied. Most of the 'desert' in fact consists of steppe country which is entirely usable for pastoral purposes during the cooler, wetter months. It is only in the far south-east of this region that very little production took place. The desert is broken by the shifting course of *Nahr al-Furat*, the Euphrates, which marks the eastern boundary of our interest here. Approximately halfway between this river and the fertile lands to the west lies the



oasis of Tadmor, or Palmyra, whose associated hinterland – collectively termed ‘Palmyrene’ during the Roman period – has probably fluctuated in size through time.

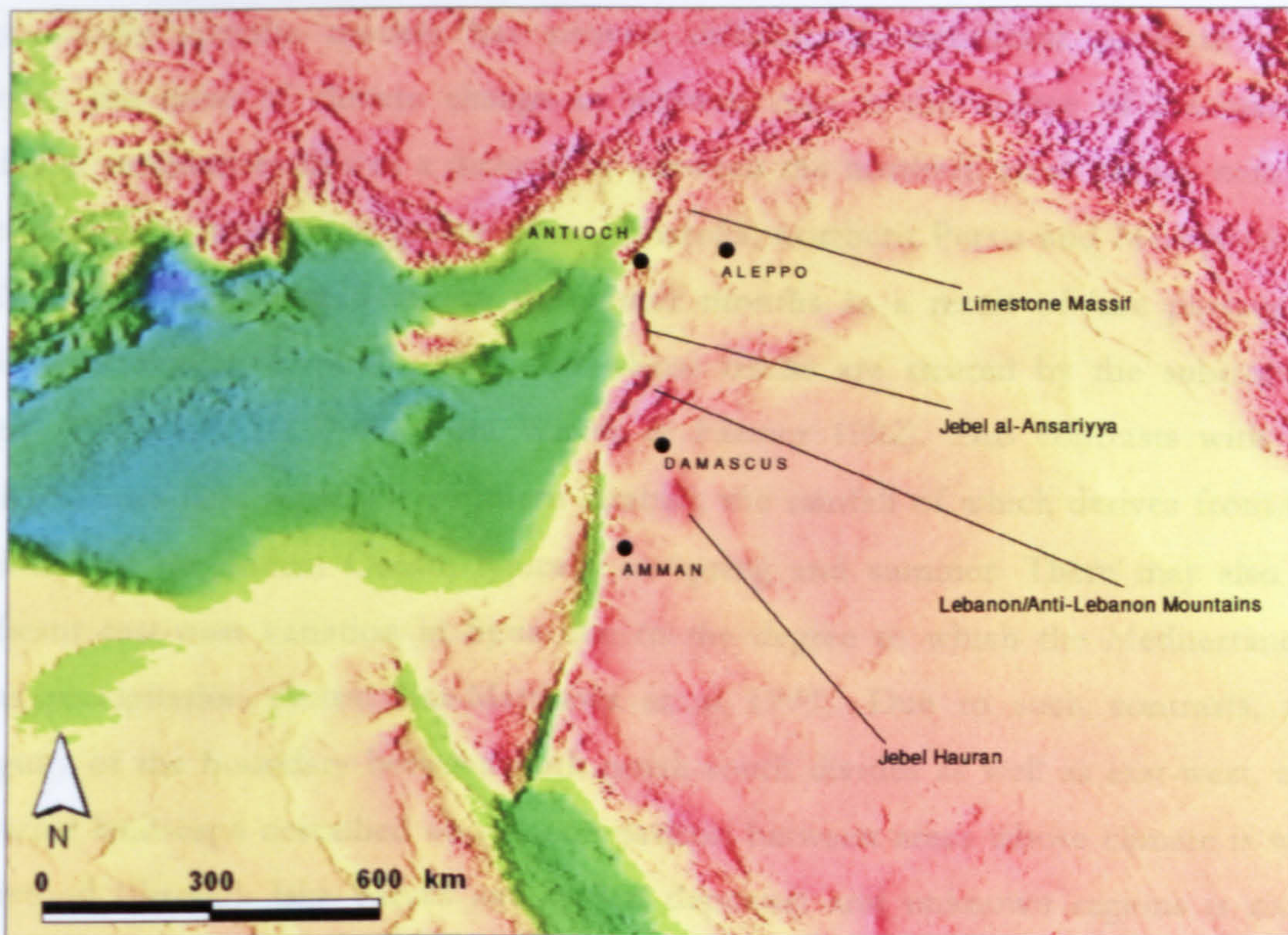


Figure 9: Map of the eastern Mediterranean showing the regions and places mentioned in the text

It is tempting when describing conditions in these various zones to draw parallels between modern and Roman Syria. As Rösner and Schäbitz point out, ‘(t)he climate probably did not differ significantly from the present one, either in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine ages or later’ (1991, 77). However, the issue of climate change and increased desertification in specific areas since the Roman period is far from clear-cut. Studies thus far have been few, and where they have taken place have often concentrated on fluctuations from the Neolithic to the early Iron Age (for example, Bar-Matthews et al 1999, Dalfes et al 1997, Lemcke & Sturm 1997, Neumann & Parpola 1987, Sirocko 1996, Weiss 2000, though there are many others). What follows is a brief review of climate change and desertification. Such a review, although severely restricted by the lack of specific, regional studies, has two purposes. The first is to assess the extent to which we can draw parallels between the modern landscape and agricultural regimes of Syria with the fourth to sixth centuries. The second is to assess any significant impact on the potential agricultural yield throughout that period.

The issue of climate change is often examined from the point of view of broad scale global climate models, such as those produced by the Greenland ice cores. Such models



tend to show a climatic optimum from around 200 BC to 200 AD (Alley 2000, 123). However, quite what such an optimum 'meant' in real terms for different regions of the world is likely to be highly variable. The task of producing more temporally and geographically specific models has proved difficult. A significant problem when assessing the issue of climate change in western Asia is the degree of localisation. Wilkinson summarises this as a dichotomy between the northern areas (which concern us most here, as they cover greater Syria, Anatolia, northern Persia and Mesopotamia) which receive their rainfall during the winter months as a result of 'the passage of depressions moving from the west and whose tracks are steered by the subtropical stream' (Wilkinson 2003, 17, from Wigley & Farmer 1982). This contrasts with the southern zones (and especially southern Arabia), the rainfall of which derives from the monsoons of the Indian Ocean, typically in spring and summer. There may also be significant east-west variation in Syria due to the degree to which the Mediterranean affects precipitation cycles (Bar-Matthews et al 1999). Due to such contrasts, the ambiguity of the boundary between both north-south divides as well as east-west, and the varied landscape described above, comparison between areas whose climate is well understood (through lake varves and pollen deposits) and unknown regions is risky. Furthermore, the hilly, thin-soiled landscape of north-west Syria provides very few opportunities for the sort of deeply stratified sediments and lacustrine environments suitable for research into climate change.

However, in spite of these problems, it may be worth outlining some general ideas about climate change, in order to at least begin to elucidate the possible situation in the fourth to sixth centuries AD. The data employed in the following sections are summarised in Appendix C, for ease of reference. It must be borne in mind though that there are potential problems deriving from the geographical and methodological diversity of the case studies used.

In an overview of the climate of Jordan through time, using documentary records, archaeological and sedimentological evidence, Shehade suggests that in 'the beginning of the first century BC, rainfall improved and the first two centuries of the Christian era were moist; rainfall was probably somewhat greater than the present rainfall' (1985, 27). This 'period of abundant rainfall ended by the beginning of the third century and simultaneously the level of the Dead Sea in 333 AD became as low as it is today'. This situation 'persisted until the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD'. However, the source of Shehade's evidence is at times ambiguous. A more clearly



sourced example is a range of analyses used by Lemcke and Sturm to produce a relative humidity graph with calibrated radiocarbon dates from deposits at Lake Van (1997, 669). This suggests a sharp rise in humidity from the late Iron Age going into the Roman period. Humidity dipped again towards the end of the third century, and did not rise to the same levels until the seventh century. Fluctuations between that date and the present day have been significant, but suggest that moisture between c.700 AD and the present day may be comparable. This impression is corroborated by further analyses carried out at Soreq Cave in Palestine (Bar-Matthews et al 1998, fig.9.5), which suggests increasing moisture from the early Roman period onwards, a sudden dip c.1000 AD, and levels today perhaps slightly wetter than the late Roman period (though this chronology is based on as yet un-calibrated radiocarbon dates). Besançon's analysis of carbonate deposits in the Palmyra region demonstrates that two samples, from 20 AD  $\pm$ 30 and 90 AD  $\pm$ 70, suggest rising levels of humidity (Besançon et al 1997). Unfortunately, dating of other samples from this region is not fine enough to show whether that humidity later declined or not.

Moving further east, an interesting example of a more refined chronology is presented by Rösner and Schäbitz for the Khatouniye area of the Syrian Jazira. Although this area is strictly speaking outside the Roman province of Syria, it provides an interesting comparison (1991). Palynological and sedimentological evidence suggest that from around 90 BC to 243 AD, there was increased sedimentation and soil improvement, which coincided with increased pollen activity, and significantly a shift away from species typical of a steppe environment. This coincided with a spell of increased humidity. The authors suggest that such changes imply 'a stronger anthropogenic influence' which probably derives from intensive farming activity (Rösner & Schäbitz 1991, 85). After around 243 AD (or even as late as 343 AD if the standard deviation of the calibrated radiocarbon dates is taken into account), 'coincides with a time for which the sedimentological and palynological findings in the Khatouniye profile indicate drier conditions again'. Whether this evidence is strong enough to suggest a reason for the late Roman retreat from the Tigris frontier is doubtful, but it certainly provides an interesting environmental context. The overall picture which emerges from this rapid summary suggests a rise in humidity coinciding with the early Roman period. The climate then becomes more arid later in the first millennium. There is conflicting evidence as to exactly when that aridity takes hold, although it may be as early as the end of the third century, or as late as the mid-fourth. Precipitation then increases again later



in the first millennium. This could have been as late as c.700 AD, or as early as the sixth century (Neil Roberts *pers comm* 27.5.04).

Hirschfeld has attempted to correlate archaeological evidence in Palestine with what he describes as a climatic optimum in the region. He states that 'palaeoclimatic studies have indicated that the period of the fourth to sixth centuries was a humid one in the Levant' (2004, 133). This period of increased humidity coincides, according to Hirschfeld, with 'maximal settlement' which indicates the incontrovertible 'influence of climatic factors on human behavioural systems'. He cites as evidence of human reaction to this increased humidity the installation of terrace agriculture at En-Gedi, the initiation of balsam manufacture at Mezad 'Arugot and the increased exploitation of the desert by monastic communities. Yet there are two important problems with Hirschfeld's approach. The first is that his assumption of increased humidity for 'the fourth to sixth centuries' indicates a degree of contradiction among the various sources for climatic data cited above (in general, though with certain variations of data quality and interpretation). In more northerly areas and inland, the data indicates a fall in precipitation from some point in the mid- to late fourth century, then a rise again in the sixth century, or perhaps as late as the early eighth. In the case of the data for Palestine (such as Soreq Cave), this suggests that rather than a drier climate from the fourth century, in fact a wetter climate prevailed until later in the first millennium AD. This paradox may be due to the high degree of localisation discussed above, with the south-eastern Mediterranean regions experiencing quite different weather patterns to the north-western and inland areas. Alternatively, this difference may be down to similar broader climatic changes, but in fact localised *consequences* on the ground. A slight temperature rise for the areas close to the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea may have resulted in higher humidity and thus higher precipitation therefore, but a rise in temperature in upland and inland areas may have meant that in these zones, precipitation actually decreased.

A further problem with Hirschfeld's analysis is that he interprets increasing control and regulation of water resources as evidence for an increase in that water supply. In fact, such facilities as agricultural terraces, standardised wells and cisterns and increased irrigation may suggest an actual decrease in the availability of water and/or increasing reasons why regulation of that supply is important, rather than 'as an expression of joy and gratitude for the new abundance of water sources' (2004, 141). Unfortunately, the dating resolution at a number of the settlement sites discussed by Hirschfeld is not sufficient to indicate reliably



exactly when such regulation occurred, since most are simply described as 'fourth to sixth century' or simply 'Byzantine' (2004 141, 137).

The issue of deforestation may also provide information regarding the late Roman economy, and especially when, and in which areas, intensive exploitation of marginal zones may have taken place. Research conducted by LaBianca and others in the Tall Hisban region of northern Jordan has sought to investigate the issue of deforestation throughout the Holocene and to the present day. This research is relevant here due to its preliminary conclusion that, contrary to the prevailing view that deforestation accelerated from the early Islamic period onwards as a result of the rise of nomadic pastoralism (for example, see Butler 1907, 7-10; Mattern 1944, 139; Rösner & Schäbitz 1991, 79, 85; Schwab et al 2003, 1730; as opposed to the far greater impact of recent nomadic pastoralism, as discussed by Beaumont 1985, 294, Jaubert et al 1999, 5), a great deal of deforestation was actually carried out during the Roman and Byzantine periods. After this time, a period of renewed growth ensued. It could be suggested then, that an emphasis on assarting<sup>1</sup> and land reclamation driven by increased agricultural production was responsible for the completion of a process of deforestation begun as early as the Bronze Age, and continuing throughout the Roman period and until the arrival of Islam. This concurs with observations made by Casana in the city of Antioch, where large amounts of sediment sealed deposits 'of late antique date', presumably deriving from denuded hillsides above (2004, 112). Such clearances may have been carried out in order to make way for managed arboriculture and crops. Schwab et al's presentation of pollen evidence from lacustrine deposits at Birkat Ram in the Golan shows that 'a steady increase of *Olea*, *Vitis* and *Juglans* values can be observed' demonstrating 'the expansion of agriculture (2003, 1729-30). Forests began to return, it seems, after the arrival of Islam, and were flourishing again by the time of renewed clearances from the late nineteenth century. It may be the case, therefore, that the current, severely denuded state of the countryside of northern Jordan is similar to conditions in the late Roman and Byzantine period. However, whether precisely the same regions of the landscape are without trees as in Late Antiquity is more difficult to ascertain. Similar evidence is represented by pollen sequences much further north-west in the Beyshehir region of south-west Turkey. Here, regions over 1000m in elevation appear to have undergone intensive deforestation from the later second millennium BC, continuing until around 600 – 700 AD (Eastwood et al 1998, 70, cited in Wilkinson 2003, 28).

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<sup>1</sup> The clearance of land for agricultural purposes.



Conversely, pollen evidence for tree species from the Söğütlü region of Lake Van, south-east Turkey suggests a peak of arboreal activity around 1535 BP  $\pm$ 50, which when calibrated suggests dates of 540 - 602 AD (Bottema 1995). The predominant species responsible for this rise is the Turkey Oak, *Quercus cerris*, which germinates readily in a moist landscape. Consequently, it could be argued that the increase in such a species indicates a rise in precipitation. Although it may be premature to do so, it could also be suggested that human activity is decreasing in the uplands and deforestation is diminishing, as activity in the lowlands increases (K. Walsh *pers comm.* 3.6.04). At the very least, it implies climatic conditions conducive to high levels of plant growth.

A similar analysis from lake cores and marshlands in the region of Gravgaz and Çanaklı in south-west Turkey has produced an impression that tree pollen in the area was dominated by 'cultivation indicators' (especially olive and walnut trees), but that this cultivation ceases around 600 AD (Vermoere et al 2002). From this point onwards, pine pollens increase rapidly which the authors attribute to 'degradation and overgrazing' (2002, 579).

Evidence for climate change is therefore somewhat less conclusive than evidence for changes in tree cover. The former is ambiguous, largely because of the degree of localisation present throughout the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia. It would seem in general though that two contrasting trends are apparent, with the areas to the south of the region showing signs of increased humidity with increased precipitation in the fourth to sixth centuries, with areas to the north and inland undergoing the opposite effect at approximately this time. Deforestation on the other hand is clearer, demonstrating a general continuation in deforestation of upland regions throughout Late Antiquity, until a slowing or cessation of this process at some stage from c.600 AD. This could be suggested as evidence of continuing rural production in spite of any suggestions of a hiatus in the cities or in Mediterranean trade. For climate change, different trends in different regions contribute to a larger picture of increasing rural settlement in the sixth and seventh centuries in Palestine and Jordan, but something of a stagnation from the later sixth century onwards further north<sup>2</sup>. The relationship between climate and settlement, whether declining, expanding or simply changing, is unlikely to be as straightforwardly reflective of one another as Hirschfeld has indicated. Climate is assumed here not to have been directly causal, though it may have contributed to

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<sup>2</sup> This contrast in rural settlement in the two geographical zones is discussed in relation to Magness' (2003) study of rural settlement in Palestine, in the next chapter.



incentives to control water supplies and rural production more closely in times of shortage.

Having looked at evidence for climatic change and deforestation through time, let us turn to what these environmental factors imply for the late Roman period. Now that we have established that there is at least some comparability between that period and the present day, some of the conclusions which follow of necessity rely on retrojecting from the modern situation in Syria.

Landscape, soil and climate in Syria are highly variable. The following description will deal with each of three discrete zones separately. First, the uplands will be described, then the fertile, lowland zone. Finally, the steppe and desert are summarised.

Most of the coast and highlands today receive in excess of 600mm of rainfall per year, most of which falls in the winter, with dry but often humid summers (Roaf 1990, 22-3, Anon 2001a, 13). The soils in this region consist in part of mineral-deprived inceptisols and fairly fertile clay-rich vertisols (Ibrahim 2002). The latter can be as thin as 0.1m in depth in the highlands, but are much deeper and more productive in the lower lying plains such as around Dana and Mi'az in the northern limestone massif. Some have described the soil and terrain of this region as difficult to farm (such as Ward-Perkins 2005a, 142). In fact, the calcareous crust present in this region makes the soil particularly well suited to arboriculture (Jaubert et al 1999). Today, and probably since the early Roman period, this zone has been used to grow a variety of orchard crops. This crust, which is generally between 0.2 and 0.4m thick, was broken through as part of assarting schemes in antiquity (see below for further discussion), to enable the trees to make use of a silt and marl horizon situated just under the crust. The latter acts as a screen, limiting water loss by evaporation. The likely crops consisted of olive, grape and fruit trees (especially pistachio, walnut, apricot, peaches, almonds, pomegranate and figs).





*Figure 10: A modern olive grove in the north of the Jebel Sim'an region of the limestone massif, showing the nature of the cleared area and the limestone 'crust' surrounding the orchard*

An element of animal husbandry is also likely in this zone. Evidence for crops of any kind has been rare due to the limited archaeological methodologies used in the region so far. Presses, crushing platforms, animal mangers and field systems, as well as amphorae and other storage containers will be discussed below. Cereal crops may have been interspersed throughout the trees, although cereals are notoriously difficult to farm in the limestone uplands. Evidence for cereals is slight due to the fact that archaeological flotation has rarely been used. In spite of this, Sodini concludes that the ground floor of certain buildings in Dehes may have been used for grain storage (Sodini et al 1980, 293, see below for further discussion). Much of the agricultural land in the uplands has required substantial assarting in order to make it economically viable. For this region, assarting meant the clearance of stones and breaking of the calcareous crust to reveal the silty soil beneath. The issue of when and how this took place will be addressed further below. However, once clearance had taken place, this region became suitable for a range of crops. The fertile lowlands to the immediate east of this zone receive between 300 and 600mm of rainfall annually. The soils in this zone consist of the fertile, classic Mediterranean *terra rossa* silts (Yaalon 1997). Crops in this lowland zone are likely to have been dominated by cereals. In the modern period, these have taken the form of wheat and barley, though the situation in the past is not known.



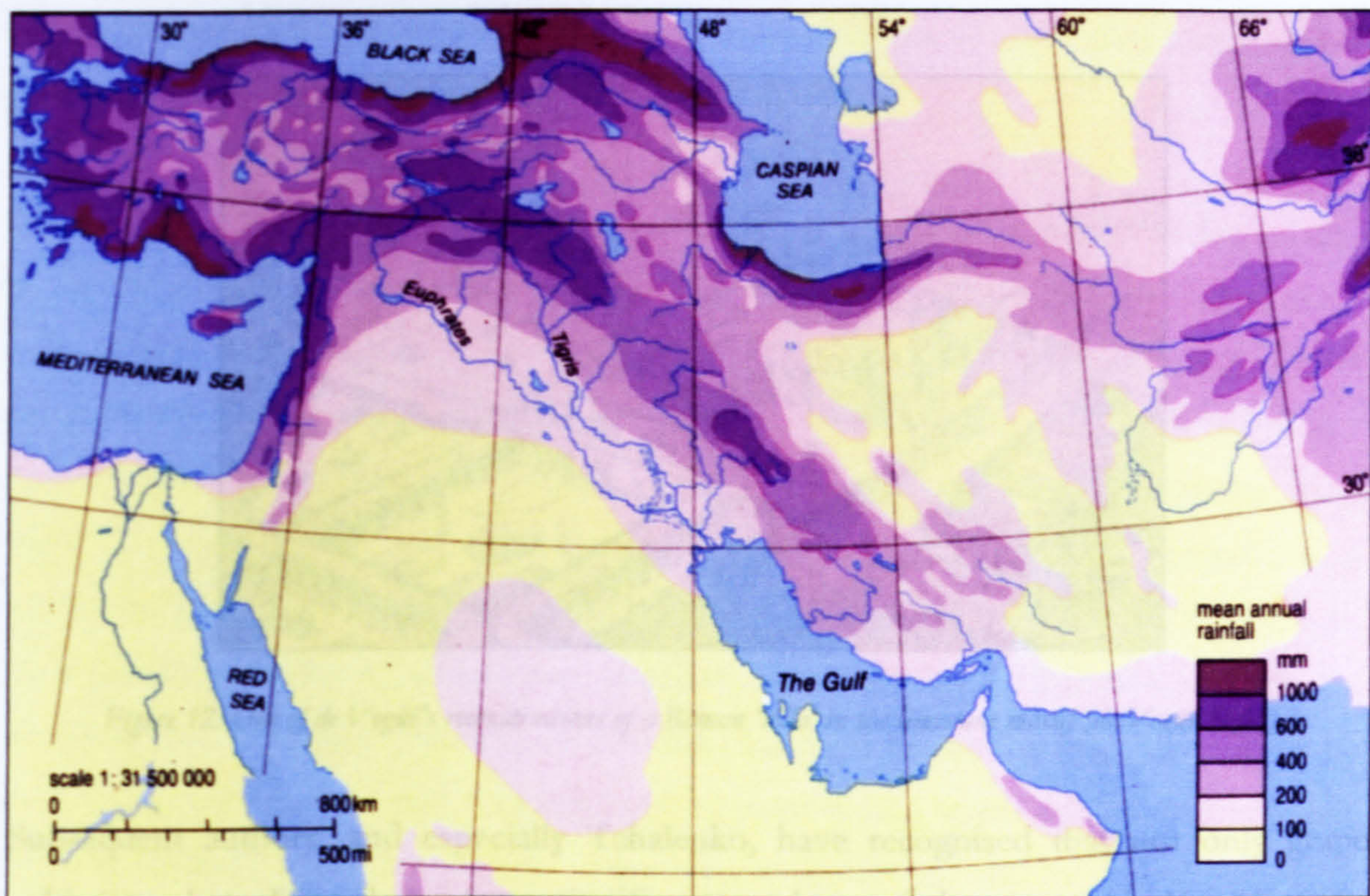


Figure 11: Map showing differential precipitation zones throughout Syria (Roaf 1990, 22)

Beyond the fertile zone, the land quickly gives way to the steppe and desert which stretches out towards the Euphrates. This zone receives just 100 to 200mm of rainfall per year. Arable agriculture is possible in this zone, though irrigation is generally required for crops which extend beyond the winter months. For this reason, animal husbandry was probably the dominant product of such areas during the late Roman period, with sheep and goats predominant (though camels may also have been bred). Only the far south-east receives less than 100mm, and with a mean annual temperature of over 25°C, is not viable for agricultural use where wells do not exist. The soils in this region consist of aridsols, and are unsuitable for any kind of agriculture apart from basic grasses (Ibrahim 2002).

### 3.3 Studies of the Syrian Countryside

The activities which took place within these conditions in the fourth to sixth centuries have been explained in various ways. Chapter 1 has already presented a brief summary of these. I will here attempt to assess interpretations of the economy in the north-west of Syria in particular, since this is the region which has been most studied, and from which the case studies to be presented later in this thesis derive. The first to attempt an understanding of the late Roman economy of the region was de Vogüé, who associated the apparent largesse and refinement of the architecture with private villa estates, whose primary source of income was the grape vine.



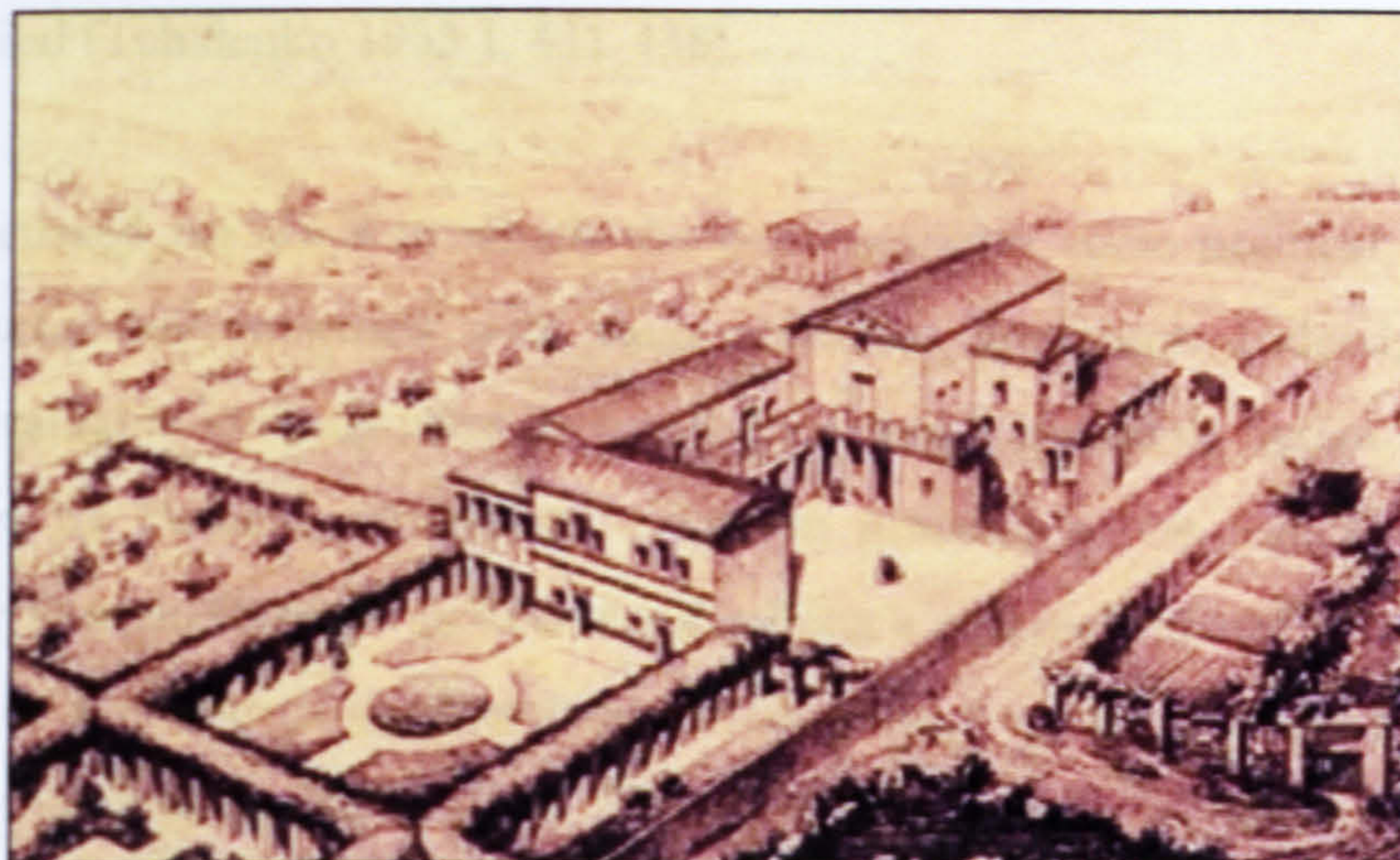


Figure 12: One of de Vogüé's reconstructions of a Roman 'villa' in the limestone massif (de Vogüé 1865)

Subsequent authors, and especially Tchalenko, have recognised that not only grape cultivation but olive oil also were significant products of the region (de Vogüé 1865). Indeed for Tchalenko, olive oil was by far the predominant product.

There are a number of problems with Tchalenko's thesis. He argued that the inception of this industry was carried out by Roman army veterans early in the second century AD, with the support of the Roman state economy. Large numbers of olive groves were laid out as part of a long term investment strategy, and a building hierarchy was established, with fine, two-storey villas at the top of that hierarchy. The massive surpluses of olive oil derived from large, private estates owned by army veterans, officials and local native notables (Tchalenko 1953 I, 382, 400, 404). The products were then traded via Antioch and other towns, and thence to the coast to international markets across the Mediterranean (1953 I, 423). A significant element of Tchalenko's argument was that long-term, skilled labour was used to produce the oil, which may have been on a form of contract, more recently known as *muğārāsa*, which resulted in part ownership of the land (Tchalenko 1953 I, 413-15, Latron 1936, 65). The increasing number of such labourers, he argued, explains the size of the churches which were built throughout the region from the 370s. By the time of the emergence of monastic estates from the late fifth century, the earlier villa estates had diminished through the subdivision of their land. The former estates evolved into villages with many individual buildings, each with its own olive press (1953 I, 408). In addition, these villages retained the bath houses, market places and inns which they had displayed since the second and third centuries. The reasons for the eventual decline of these villages were the Persian invasions of 540 to 573 and 603 to 630, and the Muslim invasion of 637, which isolated



the olive oil-producing villages of north-west Syria from the Mediterranean markets on which they relied (Tchalenko 1953 I, 431-438).

Chapter 1 discussed the ways in which the contemporary socio-political milieu of the scholar is inextricably entwined with their academic argument. Indeed, Tchalenko's work, though valuable in many ways, is firmly rooted in a period of Syrian history which was dominated by French colonialism, either in practice or by legacy. A significant element of the French Mandate period was Carbillet's agrarian reform programme. This sought to create a nation of peasant landowners, who were economically enfranchised and able to compete in market systems (P.Khoury 1987, 156). Tchalenko's assumption that a market economy lay at the heart of society in north-west Syria is clear in both the conclusion to his *Villages Antiques*, and also the very tools of analysis which he employed when discussing the economy. His emphasis lay in assessing which fields could be most profitably farmed according to soil, cleared areas, hydrology and geology (Tchalenko 1953 II, 24, 27, 28, 31, 32, 45) and how the resulting goods could be brought out of the region to international markets as effectively as possible (1953 II, 37). Furthermore, he concluded that market trading areas had existed, and that certain villages acted as an entrepôt for the gathering and onward movement of goods (1953 I, 21, 28-30).

### 3.4 More recent approaches

Such assumptions, that international markets and capitalist exchange mechanisms drove the economy, are common in Roman studies. There have been many criticisms of such unspoken assumptions, and about the inappropriateness of applying modern economic models to the Roman period, the most vehement of which is Finley (1973; but also Mattingly 1997). Since the publication of Tchalenko's study in 1953, there have been a number of attempts to reassess his conclusions. In 1976, Georges Tate and Jean-Pierre Sodini of the Institut Français d'Archéologie du Proche-Orient began the first concerted excavation in the limestone massif, at the village of Dehes on Jebel Barīša (Sodini et al 1980). This and subsequent work up to the present day has produced not just more information, but actually a more nuanced approach to the economy of late Roman rural Syria, which this section now seeks to explore.

Sodini and Tate's excavation at Dehes has added a great deal of detail to what was otherwise an extensive, rather than an intensive, knowledge of the Syrian economy. They focused on 6 buildings in the centre of Dehes. Tchalenko had described these buildings as part of a commercial quarter, with market buildings, a *stoa*, an *andron* and an inn (Tchalenko 1971, 85).



The surrounding buildings, Tchalenko argued, were large villas (1953 II, 137). Yet Sodini and Tate interpreted all of these buildings instead as entirely agrarian-domestic structures, with human accommodation on the top floor, and part animal accommodation and part grain storage on the ground floor. It seems that Libanius' description of the countryside around Antioch inhabited by 'men who work the land and sleep in hovels with their oxen' may have been correct (*Oration XXXIX:10-11*). A number of animal troughs, which Tchalenko (and Butler before him) had interpreted as being for horses, were in fact for sheep and goats, as well as for beef and dairy cattle. An assemblage of iron tools, including an adze, a pick and a hoe, were found in one room. The yard outside the structures was not a thriving meeting place for merchants, but instead for poultry. François Poplin's animal bone report, though very brief, included all of these species. Also represented are pig or boar bones and donkey. Fish hooks are present, and the bones of hunted species such as lion. All of this, Sodini and Tate argued, indicates a distinctly mixed economy, practised by a peasant population with little architectural differentiation between houses. There are certainly none of the communal or public buildings which Tchalenko described, apart from the presence of two churches. Suddenly, it would seem, inns, bazaars and meeting houses have disappeared from the archaeological record.

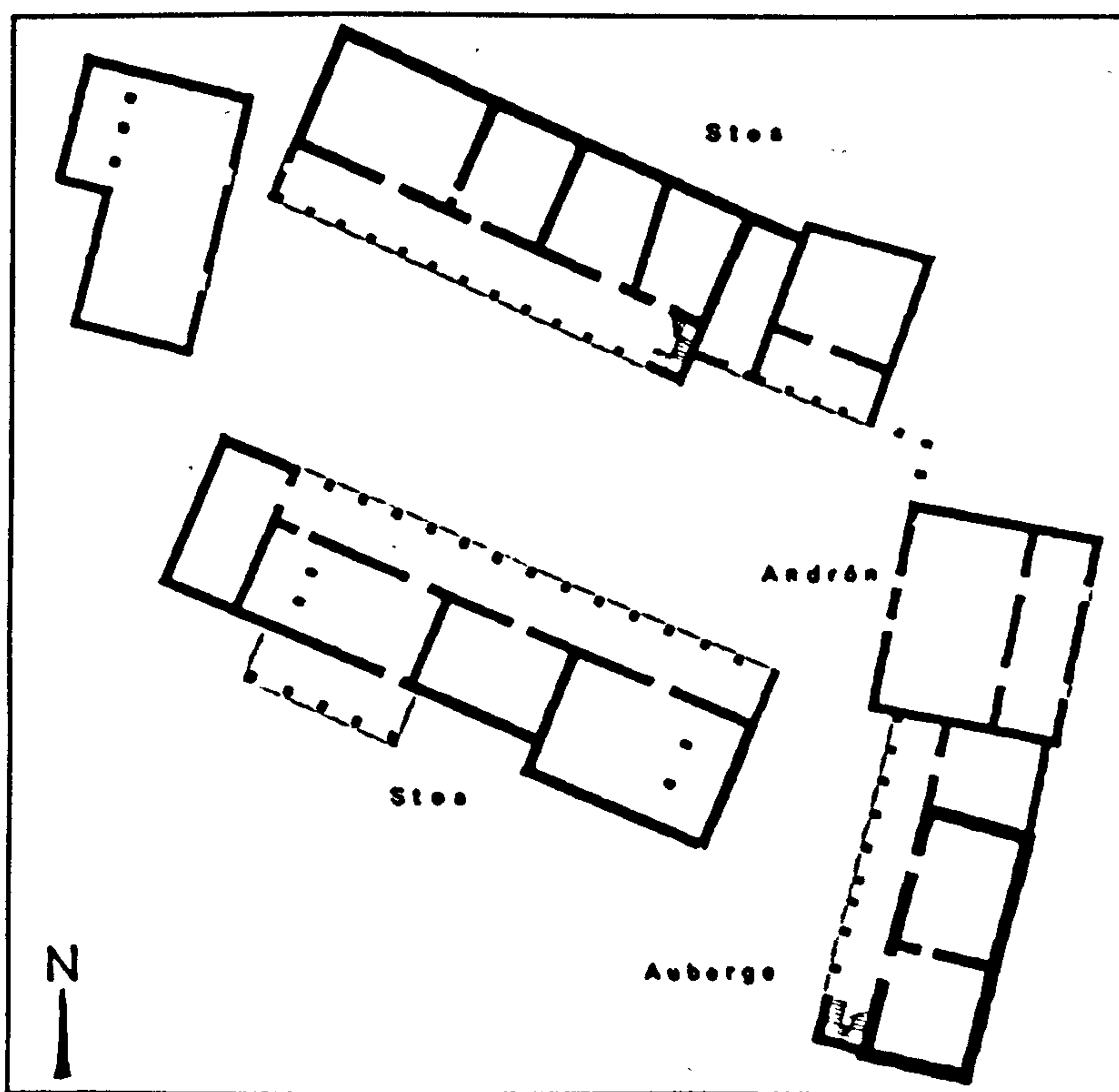


Figure 13: Tchalenko's plan of Debes (after Tate 1992, 216)



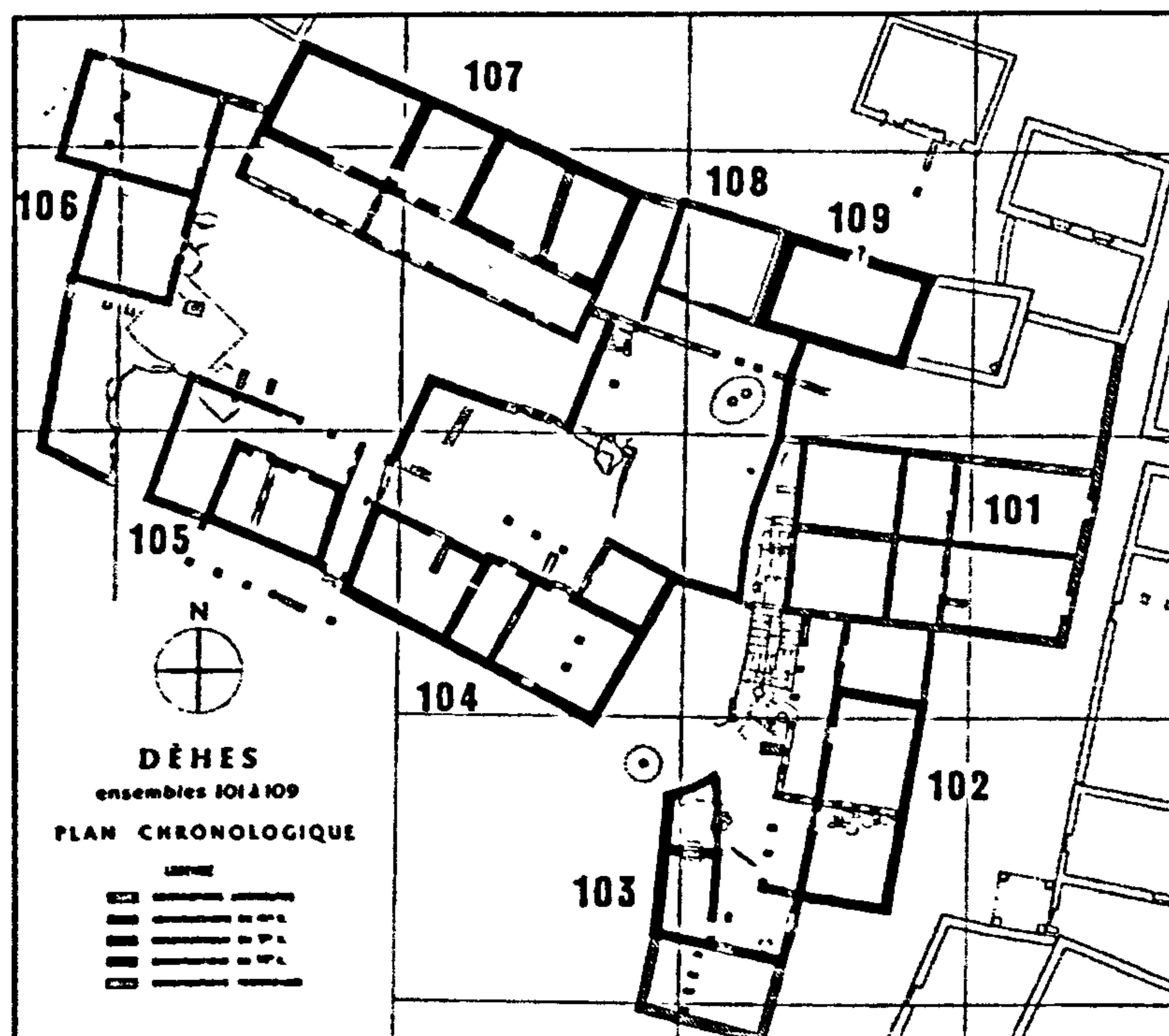


Figure 13a: Tate's refined version of the Dehes plan, completed following excavation there (after Tate 1992, 7)

Tate complemented the intensive study of the Dehes excavation with extensive survey work, culminating in his *Les Campagnes de la Syrie du Nord* (Tate 1992). This confirmed many of the conclusions reached as a result of the excavation, and found statistical support for what had otherwise been largely anecdotal impressions. Most of the buildings of the limestone massif are indeed almost exactly the same in use, with 95% acting as simple, domestic structures (Tate 1992, 64). This somewhat contradicts Tchalenko's conclusion that a large degree of socio-economic differentiation is reflected in the settlement pattern. Furthermore, although olive oil contributed a great deal to the economy of the region, as reflected in the 245 presses found in Tate's survey of 45 villages in Jebel Sim'an, Halaqa, Barisha and al-'Ala, they are not the monoculture which Tchalenko had suggested they were. This is also partly evidenced by the fact that oil presses do not seem to be standardised either in form or in location (Callot 1984). Within Dehes, for example, many private houses contained a press, yet there were also at least 20 situated in other locations throughout the village (Sodini et al 1980, 292). Decker explores the possibility that many of these 'olive' presses could either be reinterpreted as grape presses (Decker 2001, 78), or considered as dual purpose installations (2001, 80). Butcher complicates the issue further by suggesting that many presses are in fact just simple crushing mechanisms which could be used for a wide range of fruits (Butcher 2003, 149).





*Figure 14: A press at Ksajba. This may have been used to process multiple crops*

Even if the majority are indeed olive presses, inter-cultivation of olives with other crops is likely, since olives in general only produce a full crop every two years (White 1970). Certainly, ploughing of the soil for the inter-planting of other crops is a common practice in the region today.



*Figure 15: An olive grove at Bara, showing the ploughed ground ready for inter-planting of a cereal crop*



Foss reviewed Tate's overall analysis of the economy of the limestone massif as 'a model of its kind which will surely be the foundation for all future research', and as 'definitive' (Foss 1995, 213). In many ways it certainly altered the way in which the Roman economy of rural Syria has been looked at, at least as much as Tchalenko's own work had done half a century earlier. Yet more recently, Tate's views have undergone a degree of reassessment, though none of these reassessments has sought to entirely undermine his model. Decker, for example, disagrees with Tate's assessment that the olive oil industry in the north-west grew largely as a result of local demographic wealth (Tate 1992, 332). Instead, Decker suggests that it was cultivated within a market economy for export and overseas consumption. He points out that there are a total of 3,800 presses within the *territorium* of Antioch (Decker 2001, 81). This is much higher, for example, than Lepcis Magna in North Africa (Mattingly 1988, 35). Although the Syrian examples are generally much smaller and more varied in form, Decker argues that they would have been sufficient to produce a significant surplus. Taking the example of Qirqbize, which has a total of 8 presses, Decker concludes that, 'one press alone potentially sufficed to supply the needs of the entire settlement for a year. While the other presses in Qirqbize are smaller in scale, their mere existence is a clear indication of surplus production' (Decker 2001, 73). This surplus was at its highest in the late fourth to the sixth century, precisely the time, he argues, when exports from North Africa were being disrupted by Vandal invasions, and when Constantinople was undergoing development. There are potential problems with Decker's analysis here, which does not seem to take into account the fact that actually, the people of Carthage continued to erect large churches throughout the fourth and early fifth centuries. The city, and perhaps therefore its hinterland also, did not decline at the moment the Vandals arrived, and underwent more of a gradual decline which was not complete until the seventh century (Ward-Perkins 2000b, 367).

Of course, it is important to recognise nuances within this overall picture. Roskams has characterised the trajectory of fifth and sixth century towns in North Africa as a series of 'different, and contradictory, trends', which suggest some degree of continued occupation in Carthage until c.600 (1996). Furthermore, there is the 'Nador paradox' to consider, whereby a survey of the hinterland of Cherchel seemed to indicate decline in the countryside during the fourth and fifth centuries (Leveau 1984), but excavation of a 'fortified' farmhouse within this area in fact suggested that it was remodelled in the fifth century and that investment in olive presses actually increased (Mattingly & Hayes



1992). This would suggest that the Roman economic system was fragmenting and changing during the fifth century in this region, with local, rural economies now acting largely independently of the cities. But although there is certainly variation in the material record, and we should be careful to recognise a changing relationship between city and hinterland in North Africa from the fifth to the seventh centuries, the overall impression is by no means one of rapid decline into abject poverty for all.

Moreover, while 'the overall volume of African exports in the fifth century declined from the late Roman peak, the African share of the export market remained as high, if not higher, than previously' (Mattingly & Hitchner 1995, 211). Notions of a 'crisp' decline following the Vandal invasion may derive more from problems of neat periodisation than a genuine interpretation of the evidence. Nevertheless, Decker argues that a general decline in the production of olive oil by North Africa contributed to Syria's position as 'an economic focal point for the late Roman and early Byzantine period' (Decker 2001, 82).

In this sense, opinion regarding the economy of late Roman and Byzantine Syria has palpitated from the expansive overseas markets of Tchalenko, to the local supply of Tate, and the re-expansion of Decker back into the Mediterranean. An important issue with regard to such trade which has yet to be discussed here is that of amphorae. That subject will be returned to in the final section of this chapter.

A crucial issue here is who controlled such surplus, and how the nature and origin of that control may have changed through time. Sodini et al are notably cautious about their interpretation of issues of power and control in the countryside of Syria following the excavation at Dehes. 'A défaut de données quantitatives', they write, it is difficult to be sure about how social relations were organised (Sodini et al 1980, 299). However, they do note that two of the buildings represented in their excavation are consistently larger and more finely decorated than the others. Clearly some kind of social differentiation was in place therefore, but whether this is symptomatic simply of differential agricultural yields per family unit, or whether this reflects landowner/tenant relationships, is uncertain. Such differences must be interpreted as either deriving from, or at the very least symptomatic of, greater social and political factors at work. The following section will now expand the discussion into these areas.



### 3.5 Power and control - a useful model?

Central to this thesis is the notion that institutional monasteries, once they emerged, may have been responsible for a high degree of social control within the Syrian countryside. Some archaeological economists have seen social control as inextricably entwined with the economy (for example, Sheridan & Bailey 1981). A major factor in that control was probably the collection of wealth as tax (either in coin or in kind) or rent (again, either in coin or in kind). What follows therefore is an attempt to form a model to account for the ways in which these forms of payment are likely to have changed in the Syrian countryside from the fourth to the sixth centuries. Although the evidence base for this thesis is primarily the material record, the following section, by necessity, must make some use of the historical record also.

This chapter proposes the articulation of two models. The first is that of Chris Wickham's notion of the transformation of the Roman economy, introduced in Chapter 2. This proposes a transition from a tax-based system to a feudal one in the late empire. The central theme of Wickham's model is that although an 'array of modes of production' could be in existence in any one location, the 'ancient mode' (driven by state taxation) was dominant throughout the high Roman empire (Wickham 1984). However, in the last decades of the fourth century, tax evasion grew significantly, and a system of rent and rural patronage developed in its stead. Of course, the crucial question here is 'how?', and this is discussed further below. However it happened, this development, in Wickham's view, was highly significant:

'Tax evasion spread; the imperial machine began to be starved of funds. Large-scale landed property increased too, partly indeed through the extension of patronage, thus increasing the possibilities of tax evasion. A vicious circle ensued, a fatal involution of the state.' (Wickham 1984, 18)

This involution ultimately led to a predominantly feudal mode of production, as the rural population failed to meet increasing rents, but had their payments remitted by labour. The continuation, and indeed increase, of the olive oil economy throughout the fifth and sixth centuries may therefore have as much to do with increases in surplus driven by the organisation of production by rural elites, as it does the 'pull' of external markets.



There are some problems with Wickham's model, some of which are discussed further below. One major difficulty, and indeed one which pervades much of Wickham's theoretical work, is that he does not articulate in any detail the nature of the ideological shift which presumably accompanied economic transformation. In a recent study, he discusses the role played by Christianity only very rarely, and does not satisfactorily explain how it developed as a belief system and became consolidated within late antique society (Wickham 2005). Yet for a full understanding to be reached of the transition from one predominant mode of production to another, the ways in which Christianity was used by elites to persuade groups of the legitimacy of a particular socio-economic situation must be described.

In order to do this, a second approach could be employed, that of Peter Brown's notion of the holy man as patron. This proposes, largely through an analysis of saints' lives and other hagiographical literature, that as the role of urban administrators in the affairs of rural villages declined, a network of holy men emerged in the fourth century and eventually took over the role of patron (Brown 1971, 1982a). They did this through their 'constant symbiosis with the life of the surrounding villages', hovering on the margins of rural units, acting as 'arbitrators in times of dispute, negotiating with the urban landlords, and in a spiritual role, an allayer of anxiety' (Brown 1971, 82). In short, he (or she, and there were plenty of holy women, for which see Brock & Harvey 1987, Elm 2003) constituted the new authority, the 'professional in a world of amateurs' (Brown 1971, 97). They commanded authority through their seemingly other-worldly status and apparent access to a greater understanding of spiritual matters. Such a role did not merely entail conducting miracles, though this surely added to their perceived ethereal qualities. It also had genuine, practical ramifications. Their status allowed them to act as the arbiter in disputes and to give advice in times of trouble, taking over from landowners and civic councillors who had previously acted as patrons (Liebeschuetz 1972, 259). To put it crudely, such advice could guide villagers to pay or not pay their tax (or in some cases, rent), in a time of considerable economic uncertainty.

Just as with Wickham, Brown's approach is not flawless. His notion of holy figures as patrons in eastern Mediterranean society has received some criticism in part self-administered (Brown 1995), some general (Howard-Johnston & Hayward 1999) and some more incisive and specific (Rousseau 1999). It is true that Brown tends to make generalisations of two kinds of which we must be wary. The first is to generalise eastern Mediterranean rural society where in fact important contrasts may have operated



(though Brown *is* more specific in his choice of Syria in a later version [1982a]). The second problem, and with potentially greater implications for this thesis, is a tendency to generalise the structure of society. As Rousseau points out, phrases like ‘the nature of the average man’s expectations’ (1971, 106) and ‘average Christian believers’ (1995, 91; Rousseau 1999) are unhelpful in that they may obfuscate the complexity of late antique social structure. For this reason, evidence for that structure is treated carefully later in this chapter.

A further caution which we must bring to any reading of Brown’s model is the extent to which hagiographical literature, rather than acting as the open and unproblematic witness of society’s desires and expectations, in fact expresses more the desires of the particular discourse which they are intended to champion. It would be dangerous, therefore, to assume that society was as universally holy, or as universally trusting of the other-worldliness of holy figures, as such literature seems keen to imply. As Rapp has pointed out, hagiography was specifically constructed in order ‘to glorify a particular individual by claiming his status as saint’ (1999, 65).

However, Brown’s model is taken here as a general theoretical concept, rather than as a water-tight explanation in its own right. The persuasiveness which derived from the socially ‘external’ nature of a holy figure’s existence remains convincing, as does the fact that such persuasiveness would place them in a powerful position within rural society. Notwithstanding the drawbacks which exist then, I propose that as a general exposition it can be linked usefully to Wickham’s notion of a change in modes of production. The model suggested here makes use of both Brown and Wickham in the following way: as tax evasion spreads in the late fourth century, a large number of holy men appear on the margins of rural settlement, skilfully exploiting the growing sense of non-conformity. The following 50-100 years witness the solidification of economic change, at the same time as the ephemeral residences of holy men become institutionalised. By this time, the monastic ideal is already in a strong position to act as an ideological driver in enacting control in the Syrian countryside. *Institutional* monasteries, once they emerge in the fifth and sixth centuries, become landlords who control significant portions of the Syrian countryside, and therefore are an active force behind new forms of social organisation which may loosely be described as ‘feudal’.

Before embarking on an examination of the context for this notion, three refinements should be introduced to Wickham’s thesis in order to develop the model somewhat. The



first is that Wickham contrasts the eventual outcomes of the changes of the late fourth and fifth centuries in east and west. Yet in some ways, his analysis of the 'east' falls into the kind of Orientalist trap which Chapter 1 of this thesis seeks to caution against. Variation within and across western Asia in different areas is probably a more helpful theme to pursue than simply 'two histories' (1984, 33) or a monolithic 'eastern pattern' or 'eastern systems' (35).

Secondly, Wickham's analysis draws most of its evidence from the northern Mediterranean, especially France and Italy, and only rarely discusses Syria. Of course, we must be cautious about drawing broad and direct comparisons between different regions with contrasting socio-economic contexts. More recently Wickham has sought to temper his original views somewhat by asserting that in the eastern empire, and especially in Syria and Egypt, taxation was not significantly threatened in the fifth to seventh centuries (2005, 527). Indeed, this is a view which has become prevalent in other broad syntheses of the late empire (for example, Williams & Friel 1999, Ward-Perkins 2005a). It is claimed, for instance, that taxation simply 'persisted in the east' (Wickham 2005, 826), and even that 'by far the largest part of the eastern empire's tax base (probably well over two-thirds) was safe, and, indeed, during the fifth century enjoyed unprecedented prosperity' (Ward-Perkins 2005a, 61). The view adopted here is that such assumptions run the risk of simplifying complex regional variation. Later in this section, it will be seen that documentary evidence on the whole supports the view that taxation *was* becoming increasingly difficult to collect in certain regions of Syria. We must, of course, be cautious of taking historical models evident in the western Roman empire and applying them unthinkingly elsewhere. But similarly, it would be foolish to assume that the eastern empire was wholly 'successful' in its tax collection strategies, and that it was entirely immune from a 'crisis of ideological hegemony' (Wickham 1984, 18). The reasons why such assumptions cannot be made are explored more fully in section 3.7, below.

A third problem might be that, as Roskams has argued, Wickham's notion of a taxing state as a mode of production in itself is problematic, since such a state in fact operates in a variety of ways throughout the empire, on the basis of a range of appropriation techniques (Roskams *forthcoming*). Wickham's definition of the workings of state can seem ambiguous therefore. I would argue that so long as Wickham's interpretation of an 'ancient mode' is interpreted in a fairly loose sense, and that the details of taxation are carefully defined (as far as possible) within each region under discussion, then his thesis remains useful.



Finally, in order to make the model presented here more credible, there would seem to be a need to refine Wickham's rather broad notion of change from an 'ancient' to a 'feudal' mode. A number of scholars have voiced concern about the problems of defining a 'feudal' mode. This is partly because, as Haldon puts it, 'the word 'feudal' is so overlain with variant and sometimes mutually-exclusive meaning', and so prone to 'over-generalisation' that it becomes ultimately rather vague' (Haldon 1998, 881). In using this term, I must be very careful to define what it may actually have meant for the Syrian countryside in the fourth to sixth centuries. As a general rule, the description of feudalism followed in this thesis is the same as that used recently by Wickham (Wickham 2005, 535). That is, the system whereby those in control of land use demand rent, either in coin, in goods or through labour, from those working that land. However, it is necessary to bring further refinement to this description by understanding how feudalism first came about. Samir Amin's discussion of a feudal mode of production in post-Roman western Asia is useful here. He defines the term 'feudal' as a development of what is to begin with a tributary mode. 'Tribute' can be understood as 'lump sums', either of coin, surplus, land or other substantial materials, collected from either individuals or communities, in an irregular or *ad hoc* fashion (Wickham 2005, 70). A tributary mode develops as a result of the 'contradiction between the continued existence of the community and the negation of the community by the state' (Amin 1976, 15). In other words, tension is created by over-exploitation of rural communities by urban elites. New elites then recognise the advantages to be gained by replacing existing forms of surplus extraction, and drawing tribute from villages in return for 'protecting' them against the old patrons. There is therefore 'confusion of the higher class that appropriates the surplus with the class that is dominant politically. This circumstance makes it impossible to reduce production relations to legal property relations, and compels us to see production relations in their full, original significance as social relations arising from the organisation of production' (Amin 1976, 15-16). Feudalism then emerges from a tributary mode in two ways. Firstly, the elite gain increasing quantities of land through tribute and are then able to demand rent. Either that rent cannot be paid, and it must be replaced by labour, or it can be paid in kind, which also necessitates labour.

The precise details about which of these two arrangements took place, whether rent paid as labour or rent paid in actual goods, are probably beyond the scope of the evidence (although there is some discussion of this below), and may have varied at any rate from village to village.



Either way, this general change results in the second manifestation of feudalism: that as the extraction of tribute becomes formalised, and so the elite become *directly involved* in where and how tribute is produced. They therefore demand not just tribute in the form of the 'end result' of production from the community, but actively organise and administer production directly. To put it simply, it is no longer just goods, but rent, or rent in the form of labour, that is demanded. Thus, Wickham's 'fatal involution of the state' which resulted in a shift in the 'dominant mode' can still be made to work alongside Brown's account of how holy men came to be the new authority, if the refinements just described can be drawn into the model.

The working hypothesis employed here then is that the resources required for institutional monasticism were gathered and organised through the extraction of tribute. This may have taken the form of either land itself, or sufficient rural surplus and silver plate (see section 3.8, below) to ensure the purchase of land from those made vulnerable by over-exploitation by the state in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Interestingly, the overwhelming impression given by the biographical accounts of Theodoret of Cyrrhus is that holy men were given land by poor, local villagers, and only rarely through bequest and endowment by aristocratic elites (for example, *HR XVII:4*; Vööbus 1960, 163, 174-5). As the evidence stands at present, epigraphic inscriptions and mosaics do not seem to suggest a strong degree of aristocratic endowment of monastic land or property. It is 'ordinary' village communities who seem to be giving up their land and produce therefore. In the substantial body of hagiographical literature available, such gifts are not described in terms of tributary exchange, but as oblations, symbols of gratitude in return for miracles performed, or spontaneous demonstrations of faith. The potential for dramatic awkwardness in such depictions - as a humble ascetic is depicted receiving (and accepting) substantial gifts of land and produce - could be avoided if the reasons for such gift giving were seen to be so undeniably 'spiritual' that oblations would seem only natural. In this way, 'wealth that came to the holy man's establishment was made 'clean'' (Brown 2000, 799). And villages were further persuaded of the need to secure the permanent presence of holy men through gifts of land and property, by an atmosphere of 'rivalry' between village communities. This sense of urgency, to claim a holy man before the next village did, acted as a catalyst. In return for such tribute, holy men offered protection, reassurance and spiritual guidance. An ideology was constructed on the basis of an 'other-worldliness', whereby the 'outsider', unusual nature of such characters and their antics persuaded rural communities of their ability to resolve their problems<sup>3</sup>. In a sense then, this was spiritual authority being used to legitimate surplus extraction.

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<sup>3</sup> The 'other-worldly' nature of holy figures is discussed at some length in the following chapter.



As monasteries became larger, more abundant, more cohesive and therefore more able to play a role in organising production itself, they then demanded a more formal contribution from village communities. Instead of tribute, rent or labour was required. For the large monastic institutions of Egypt, this change most certainly meant rent. We have documentary evidence from Dayr al-Abyadh, for example, showing that land around the village of Phthla was rented out in a highly organised fashion through a lay steward to a middleman, who in turn sub-leased the land for farming purposes (Keenan 2000, 620)<sup>4</sup>. For the much smaller monastic institutions of northern Syria, this may not necessarily have been the case. It may have been more piecemeal, and on the whole perhaps tended towards labour rather than rent in coin. This could have taken the form of participation in olive and other harvests, and the processing, storage and transportation of those products. John of Ephesus tells us of an ecclesiastic on the Mesopotamian-Armenian border laying out a vineyard which is soon participating in long distance exchange, in the late sixth century (*Lives* XVII:1, XVIII:4, XIX:2; Ward-Perkins 2000a, 342). Since monasteries are by this time both more securely in control of the surpluses produced, and more formally in charge of a newly constituted Monophysite church in the countryside, it is not merely alternative forms of spiritual authority that they provide ‘in return’, but an entirely established ideological product. They are no longer other-worldly outsiders. Instead, their contribution to rural communities by this time is the assurance of salvation. This salvation comes not just through Christian worship, but by the *correct form* of Christian worship, rather than the perceived errors of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy as propounded by the state. Monasteries create a sense that they are *themselves* the established orthodoxy, and the only guarantee of redemption. The spaces they form and inhabit are designed to convey and communicate this more assured ideological ‘package’.

The table 1 (overleaf) summarises the model just described. The chronology within this model is very approximate at this stage. Further discussion of the issue of dating will take place in Chapters 4 and 6.

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<sup>4</sup> This can be seen to be a more formalised arrangement than, say, the recent history of monasteries in Ethiopia, where, from at least the thirteenth century until the 1970s, tribute in the form of land, livestock or whole villages was given as part of the ‘gult’ system (Finneran & Tribe 2004, 68).



DATE	FORM OF EXCHANGE	MONASTICS PROVIDE:	RURAL COMMUNITIES PROVIDE:
late C4th/ early C5th	Tributary	Protection from tax collectors; spiritual guidance and the performance of miracles.	Tribute - endowment, construction & resources to enable continuation & survival of holy men, especially in <i>their</i> village.
<i>The mid-C5th theological disputes embolden the new monastic institutions here, giving them a special ideological focus. From here on, ecclesiastical and economic authority for the countryside is almost entirely rural-based.</i>			
Late C5th/C6th	Feudal	Use of land, organisation of production, management of surplus. Salvation through prayer.	Either rent, or rent in kind in the form of labour, which in turn increases surplus production.

*Table 1: Schematic representation of the model proposed in this chapter*

This transition, from tax paid to urban landlords, to tribute paid to local patrons, and finally full-scale organisation of rural production, may not have been a clearly defined process, carried out simultaneously throughout all areas. There may have been considerable overlap, with tribute still paid to a 'holy man' in one village, while at the same time labour was organised and surplus produced by a much larger institution not far away. The overlapping nature of this process is well illustrated by Theodoret of Cyrhus' description of two separate holy men, both of whom lived in northern Syria or Lebanon. It is worth presenting some extracts from these accounts since they were both written down in the 440s, and demonstrate in vivid terms two aspects of the model which this section has sought to lay out. In the first account, he describes the activities of Abraham:

'Hiding his monastic character under the mask of a trader, he with his companions brought along sacks as if coming to buy nuts - for this was the main produce of the village. Renting a house, for which he paid the owners a small sum in advance, he kept quiet for three or four days. Then, little by little, he began in a soft voice to perform the divine liturgy. When they heard the singing of psalms, the public crier called out to summon everyone together. Men, children and women assembled; they walled up the doors from outside, and heaping up a great pile of earth poured it down from the roof above... At this moment, however, collectors arrived to compel them to pay their taxes; some they bound, others they maltreated. But the man of God, oblivious of what had happened to them, and imitating the Master who then nailed to the cross showed concern for those who had done it, begged these collectors to carry out their work leniently. When they demanded guarantors, he voluntarily accepted the call, and promised to pay them a hundred gold pieces in a few days.



Those who had performed so terrible a deed were overwhelmed with admiration at the man's benevolence; begging forgiveness for their outrage, they invited him to become their patron - for the village did not have a master. He went to the city (it was Emesa), and finding some of his friends negotiated a loan for the hundred gold pieces; then returning to the village he fulfilled his promise on the appointed day.

On observing his zeal, they addressed their invitation to him still more zealously. When he promised his consent if they undertook to build a church, they begged him to start operations at once, and conducted the blessed man round, showing him the more appropriate sites, one recommending this one, another that. Having chosen the best one and laid the foundations, in a short time he put the roof on, and now that the building was ready bade them appoint a priest. When they said they would not choose anyone else and begged to take him as their father and shepherd, he received the grace of the priesthood.' (*HR XVII:2-4*)

Here, Abraham is appointed patron on account of his willingness and ability to protect the village from tax collectors. In return, he is given sufficient land and a church is built for him. There are a number of accounts told by Theodoret of holy men being given land or property in return for their intercession either with the urban authorities, or the Almighty. Indeed, a very similar tale comes to us from the hagiography of Theodore of Sykeon, though on this later (late sixth century) occasion, the gift is not land to build on, but developed agricultural fields, awarded to the saint because of intervention not in financial matters, but in a situation equally beyond the control of the villagers. This time, a heavy hailstorm threatens the grape crop just as harvest is about to occur. Theodore prays and erects a cross and miraculously the storm clouds pass overhead. Out of sheer gratitude, we are told, the villagers spontaneously present a vineyard to the monastery. We are left guessing as to whether the monastery subsequently went on to organise production in the vineyard (*Theodore CXXI*).

In a second account from the *Historia Religiosa*, Theodoret describes the activities of another holy man, Theodosius. The situation is one stage more advanced here, as production is more specifically alluded to, and thus the demands made on the community by the holy man appear more sophisticated and standardised.



‘Always adding toil to toil, he also practised manual labour, now weaving what are called creels and mats, now ploughing small fields in the dale, sowing seed and gathering therefrom sufficient food.

When with the passing of time his fame circulated everywhere, many hastened from all sides, wishing to share his dwelling, labours, and way of life; these he welcomed and guided in his life. One could observe some weaving sails, others hair coats, some plaiting mats or creels, others assigned agriculture. And since the place was on the sea, he later built a landing-place which he used for the needs of merchandise, exporting the products of the brethren and importing what was needed. He remembered the apostolic utterance which runs, ‘Working night and day, that we might not burden any of you’, and, ‘These hands assisted both myself and those with me’. And so he both laboured himself and urged his companions to add to the labours of the soul exertion of the body: ‘While those engaged in life toil and labour to support children and wives, and in addition pay taxes and are dunned for tribute, and also offer the first-fruits to God and supply the needs of beggars as far as they are able, it would be absurd for us not to supply our essential needs from labour - especially since we use scanty and simple food and simple dress -, but to sit indoors with our arms crossed, reaping the handiwork of others.’ By this and similar remarks he stimulated them to work, performing at the proper times the divine liturgies that are customary everywhere and allotting the time in between to work.’ (HR X:2-3).

Here, it is stated that those carrying out the labour are ‘sharing’ Theodosius’ way of life. This would seem to hint that they actually join him in monastic practice. However, this need not necessarily be the case, and it may be that they work but are in fact part of the broader village community rather than being monks themselves.

These examples, drawn from the documentary rather than the archaeological record, show two aspects of the broader changes which Wickham (with some qualification) and Brown account for (further documentary sources for tax evasion and the role of patrons are provided in Patlagean 1977, 287-96). So having established the bare bones of the model to be employed in this thesis, what follows is an attempt to analyse the economic context for this model, mostly on the basis of archaeological evidence. It will begin by investigating the relationship between peasants and landowners in the Syrian countryside, primarily of the north-west. The next section will then go on to examine in



particular the ways in which tax was collected, and how that collection may have changed through time.

### 3.6 Land ownership in rural communities

Classifying the relationship between peasant and landowner for the fourth to sixth centuries is not a straightforward task. It should be stated, to begin with, that the issue of slavery can be largely ruled out, since there is very little evidence for it (Liebeschuetz 1972, 64-5). This seems to have been largely the case throughout the southern and eastern Mediterranean agricultural communities of the late empire. Indeed, the general opinion seems to be that rural slave labour was relatively rare in late Roman Asia Minor also (Broughton 1975, 690; Blanton 2000, 72). Wickham has reflected on the reasons for this, and suggested that slaves were too much of a financial burden for their masters (Wickham 1988, 189). Whether the rural population of Syria largely consisted of peasant landholders, who then paid tax on their produce, or whether they paid rent either by coin or through labour to landlords, is not entirely clear. Indeed, it can seem that 'often we are left guessing whether or not a small farmstead or a whole village, known only from archaeology, was part of a larger estate, and whether its inhabitants were free or tied to the land' (Ward-Perkins 2000a, 336). But this would seem a pessimistic conclusion to draw for north-west Syria, for the following reasons.

The documentary evidence provided by the speeches and letters of Libanius, though at times sensationalist in their use of language and imagery, are informative here (especially Liebeschuetz 1972, but also Festugière 1959, Libanius (trans. Norman) 1969). Libanius describes two kinds of village: those with village proprietors, and those that are part of larger estates (*Oration XLVII:4,11*; Liebeschuetz 1972, 67-8). We can imagine that those working on larger estates did not pay tax, and that any tax owing was paid by their landlords, or incorporated into their rent. However, in spite of the general opinion regarding the existence of large, late Roman estates in the western empire (the classic description of which is Jones 1964, 773-775), this may not necessarily have been the situation in Syria (Butcher 2003, 138). It has been suggested that generally speaking in the eastern Mediterranean large residences of the wealthy tended to be in urban or suburban spaces, rather than in the countryside (Sodini 2003, 38). It had always been Tchalenko's view, formed on the basis of inscriptional evidence, that the limestone massif of the north-west of Syria underwent concerted settlement in *de novo* fashion by Roman army veterans, with considerable state support, in the first century AD (Tchalenko 1953 I, 141). These veterans established villas in which they lived, with supporting settlement provision for tenants who worked in olive production.



However, certain details of Tchalenko's account of this early settlement seem less convincing in the light of more recent evidence. Tate argues that in fact there are comparatively few such inscriptions, and that Roman veteran settlement actually took place on the surrounding, lower-lying plains, where our evidence is sparser due to subsequent over-building and disturbance. This may be the case, for example, with estates such as that of Euagrius, in the lower 'Afrin Valley around the modern city of Reyhanlı (ancient Imma) (Liebeschuetz 1972, 70; Tchalenko 1953 I, 152). On the limestone massif itself, where our evidence base is much richer, the archaeological remains derive from 'landless peasants' forced out of the surrounding plains and who were forced to settle 'spontaneously in the harsh lands, which had to be cleared of the rocks that covered them into irregular fields of unequal sizes cut into the barren rock' (Tate 1997, 60). There may have been certain legislative catalysts for this, such as the *Lex Manciana* and the *Lex Hadriana*, which allowed peasants to own land once they had developed it to a cultivable state (Tate 1997, 60).

So were estate centres entirely absent from the settlement pattern? The picture may be more complex than this. Large estates are certainly known, as evidenced by boundary markers bearing inscriptions, which imply the co-existence of both free villages (κωμῆαι) and estates (ἐποικίαι) (Liebeschuetz 1972, 68; Tchalenko 1953 III, 6-11). Indeed, large villas, such as the fifth century example at Yaktō near Antioch (Elderkin 1934), or Bāzīher (Tate 1992, 295), and smaller, isolated homesteads such as Al-Manzūl (Pena et al 1987, 174) are also known. However, such estates may not have been the norm as they seem to be rare. Although it is difficult to identify a 'classic' Roman villa estate (see, for example, the discussions in Percival 1988, Mattingly 1988), it seems that none of the organisational aspects which could be expected of a centralised settlement are present. Most house types are comparatively uniform in scale and internal space (Tate 1992, 64), and there is no great differentiation which might suggest a landlord versus tenant divide<sup>5</sup>. Neither do the villages of north-west Syria appear to be planned out, as might be expected of a deliberately constructed production estate. There are very few examples of colonnaded streets or roads, and any semblance of an orthogonal layout may have more to do with villages working round the impositions of a cadastral system, than evidence of village planning on a large scale (Tate 1992, 224-5).

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<sup>5</sup> There are exceptions, such as the existence of some, comparatively large houses at Al-Bara and Hass (Sodini 2003, 39). Tchalenko thought he could identify a differentiation between the houses of the free, landowning peasantry, the tenant farmer and the poorest labourer at Al-Bahyo (1953 I, 13, 356), but Sodini has pointed out that differences of chronology complicate these definitions, thus implying that Tchalenko was not comparing 'like with like' at any one particular time (2003, 47).





*Figure 16: The village of Dayr 'Aman. The lack of an orthogonal layout is common to settlements in the limestone massif*

This leaves an obvious alternative then, which is that the majority of settlements were peopled with free peasants, who paid tax to the Roman authorities in Antioch. Theodoret of Cyrrhus describes the hardship felt by one peasant 'who had but a single farm from which to support himself, wife, children, and household, and in addition pay the imperial taxes' (*HR VIII:14*). Liebeschuetz speculates that such peasants were not *coloni*, but freeholders who paid tax direct to the state via collectors, rather than through rent or labour (1972, 67-9)<sup>6</sup>. This may not have been the case in every single village in the north-west, since Liebeschuetz discussed at least one example of rent in kind being paid in the mid-fourth century. However, the working hypothesis for this thesis is that though the situation may have been fairly complex, in most cases in the countryside of the Syrian north-west, a free peasantry was the norm for the fourth and early fifth centuries (as argued also by Wickham 2005, 447-8, 454).

### **3.7 Taxation**

As Hopkins points out, taxation in the Syrian countryside was not necessarily a Roman invention (Hopkins 1980, 102). It seems likely that the populations of Syria were subject to taxation regimes prior to its annexation by Pompey in 64 BC, when most of the

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<sup>6</sup> Wickham comments on the use of the term 'geōrgos' in documentary sources which use Greek (2005, 523). This is a rather vaguer term than 'coloni', and could loosely be understood as 'any peasant or agricultural worker, including wage labourers and both small and medium landowners'.



region was under Seleucid control. It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the pre-Roman period in detail, but it is clear that coinage systems were in place in Syria, and being used in the countryside, by the fourth century BC (Butcher 2003, 25). Although it cannot be argued *a priori* that the existence of a coinage system necessarily indicates taxation, the former certainly contributes to the facilitation of the latter. Certainly, an assessment of the countryside of north-west Syria suggests a pre-Roman human presence, in the form of surface coins and sherds. The Dehes excavation produced ceramic and numismatic evidence suggesting a 'Hellenistic' (ie third century BC+) horizon. Very little architectural evidence for such early occupation is visible, although Sodini et al suggested that elements of the six (largely fourth to sixth century AD) buildings which they excavated at Dehes may originally have been constructed at this time (Sodini et al 1980, 294-5). This concurs with Seyrig's analysis of the early development of the city of Antioch, that it was established in the third century BC (Seyrig 1970, cited in Sodini et al 1980, 295).

Thus, the arrival of Roman rule did not necessarily mean the first imposition of taxation. However, it is significant that several scholars have cited evidence from before Roman annexation, and for the first three centuries afterwards, as indicating radical changes to the nature of rural settlement patterns in Syria (for example, Bowersock 1989, 65-6; Butcher 2003, 140-5; Millar 1993, 296-8; Tate 1997, 57-8). The appearance of more than 700 settlements in the limestone massif from the second century AD suggests that such changes certainly took place in the north-west also<sup>7</sup>. Of course, the dating of the different elements of this network of settlements varies. Tate's analysis of dating based on a combination of inscriptions and then architectural style and decoration (themselves dated by inscriptions, then extrapolated through comparison) suggests that in general, the limestone massif underwent a rapid expansion in the years AD 110 to 250, with a continuation of new settlement through to around 330, but then a peak of building activity between 330 and 550 (1992, 167-171). The above discussion has brought us to the cautious conclusion that up until the late fourth century at least, these villages were probably populated – for the most part - by free peasants (though there may have been, of course, variation through time). The tax arrangements of these peasants is difficult to ascertain. A possible clue may derive from field systems. Systems of *cadasters*, or regular land divisions, are evidenced in aerial photographs over most of the *jibāl* of the limestone massif (though, mysteriously, not all). These consist of large, rectangular and regularly spaced field systems, and have been explained as an attempt by the state to

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<sup>7</sup> Although many of these villages underwent extensive development in later centuries.



control this widespread settlement of the uplands by peasants (Dodinet et al 1994; Tate 1994 & 1997, 60-1).



Figure 17: Aerial photo showing cadastration on the south-eastern edge of Jebel Sim'an (from Tate 1992, 234)

In this way, taxation could be apportioned and collected from the landholders according to the cadaster in which their land happened to lie. The dating of these is ambiguous, but they seem to be generally early in the settlement pattern given their stratigraphic relationship with later buildings, dated through architectural styling.

As section 3.1 has already outlined, Jones (1964) took a conspicuously dim view of the exploitative tendencies of the Roman city (which acted as a consumer of taxes), at the expense of the countryside (which acted as tax payer). He provides a broad series of tax figures from around the empire. These figures usually enumerate quantities paid, but give little impression of the mechanisms of collection and payment, and the institutions involved. We know, to an extent, what was being taxed in certain areas (summarised in Jones 1964, 463-466). There is a primary division here which is important, and that is between *annona*, or land tax, and *capitatio-tingatio*, or those working on the land. With regard to land tax, Valentinian III, for example, in 451 describes a set number of *siliquae* per *centuria* (Jones 1964, 464). Land tax may have been intended to exploit agricultural land in particular. Although we must exercise caution when drawing parallels between distant sub-regions of the eastern Mediterranean, in sixth century Egypt administrative records suggest that the rate of land tax was set according to what was farmed, whether it be wheat, vineyards or gardens. It is difficult to ascertain precisely who collected this tax and how. For the early empire at least, this may have been carried out by



intermediaries, who bought the rights to collect taxes and imposed an additional fee as a result. Those who could afford such an investment were likely to have been richer landowners and town councillors, or *decuriones* (Hopkins 1980, 121). If the tax collectors were likely to have been city-based, they probably went to the countryside (or employed administrators to do so) and collected taxes either directly from the landowners, or from convenient administrative groups, such as villages. Libanius discusses the Jewish peasants who work on his land in terms of a group (*Oration XLVII: 13*; Liebeschuetz 1972, 70). Such groups of peasants may have operated in a similar way to the early modern form of collective land-ownership in Syria known as *masha*, whereby villagers formed collectives in order to farm and redistribute multiple, small units of land (British Military, Naval Intelligence Division 1943, 265-6). Certainly, Libanius assumes that villages act collectively, with a headman (*meizōn*) taking the lead when confronting outsiders (*Oration XI: 230, XLVII: 4,7*; Wickham 2005, 447).

If such communities were taxed in kind, then there may be archaeological implications for this. Large amounts of produce have to be collected, stored, weighed and checked. The precise location of tax collection, which we may imagine was a lengthy administrative task involving large numbers of people, coinage, produce and 'paperwork', is not clear. The villages of north-west Syria do not appear to contain a consistently recognisable 'communal' or municipal structure, such as an *andron* (Sodini et al 1980, 65-84, Foss 1995, 218). There are occasional examples, such as those at Mi'az, Dayr Sim'an, Ba'uda and perhaps Serjilla (Tate 1992; Butcher 2003, 149-150), but in general they are difficult to identify. It may be that open spaces between buildings (of which there are commonly many in the generally irregular layout of buildings in such villages) served either as temporary tax offices, or as seasonal fairgrounds where debts could be settled (Liebeschuetz 1972, 68).





*Figure 18: The village of Dayr 'Aman, showing the kind of wide, open area (foreground) which may have been used for the gathering of goods, for exchange and also the collection of taxation*

Tax collection may have been an annual event, if Jones' assessment is correct (Jones 1964, 467). Though we must be cautious about drawing automatic parallels between Egyptian and Syrian contexts, it is interesting to note that the mid-fourth century Abinnaeus archive from Egypt suggests that military detachments could be used to collect the taxes, and that such collection was undertaken and listed on a village-by-village basis (*Ab* III:5-10; LXVI:5-25).

The reason for the above description of imperial taxation of the Syrian countryside is to provide a background for an investigation of how useful Wickham's original account of radical late fourth and fifth century changes might be (1984). Descriptions of such changes often seem to begin with a discussion of the third century economic crisis, followed by an account of the reforms of Diocletian. What such reforms actually 'meant' for those paying taxes in rural Syria is difficult to get at directly. However, a significant change may have been the general switch from taxation in coin to taxation in kind. Following a decline in trade, a debasement of imperial silver coinage and a collapse of taxation in money in the middle of the third century AD, Diocletian introduced a system whereby the requirements of the Roman army could be provisioned directly – rather than indirectly – through taxation in kind (Jones 1964, 61-8). New forms of taxation also brought tax increases (Wickham 1984, 14), fuelled in particular by the demands of the military who fought against the Persian



armies for a significant part of the fourth century. Such changes are likely to have had a direct effect on the landscape of north-west Syria, as indicated by a series of inscribed boundary stones erected in connection with the Diocletianic census, on Jebel Sim'an (Tchalenko 1953 III, 6-11).

The potentially clumsy logistics of tax in kind from these upland areas seem to have been smoothed by the compulsory provision of transportation for such goods by landowners, which must have placed even greater demands on their resources (Liebeschuetz 1961, 245). Wickham argued, from evidence provided by another Libanius *Oration*, that this situation resulted in peasants refusing to pay their taxes (*Oration XLVII*: 4-17; Wickham 1984, 17). Furthermore, they began to look for more powerful patrons in order to help them achieve this. This led to a 'crisis of ideological hegemony', in which systemic failure of imperial taxation occurred (Wickham 1984, 18). This situation was by no means confined to Syria, but an empire-wide phenomenon, fuelled still further in the west by the disruptions of Germanic unrest.

Conversely, recent syntheses of the Roman economy in the late empire have sought to argue that in fact, a major distinction existed whereby the tax base in the eastern empire remained largely intact (Ward-Perkins 2005a, Wickham 2005). It was argued above that this view, while conceivably holding some truth, may be a simplistic conclusion to draw without careful qualification. Ward-Perkins asserts, for example, that the Roman empire relied heavily on taxation to fund a professional army (2005a, 41), and that since this army was in action throughout much of the sixth century fighting wars with Persia, it is implied that we must therefore have evidence for a sound tax base in the east. This logic makes a number of assumptions, however. Firstly, military activity throughout the fifth and sixth centuries was intermittent, with long periods (like the period up to 527, most of the 560s and the 590s) when the army was not in action. Secondly, as some have argued, the eastern empire was in many ways inherently weak throughout the latter part of the fifth century, offering no substantial contribution to the defence of the empire in the west (Sarris 2002). Some military expenditure was certainly made throughout the sixth century, especially under Justinian, but there is also some evidence that these efforts were insufficient. Justinian's efforts at legal and fiscal reforms during the 530s, for instance, demonstrate a need to improve tax provision. Though victories were gradually won in North Africa and Italy from the 530s to the 550s, the military were clearly not well enough supplied to prevent the sack of Antioch in 540, nor the gradual loss of territory in the Balkans and Italy in the 560s, and comprehensive defeat by the Persians in the first quarter of the seventh century. Thirdly, as Ward-Perkins himself



points out, the complex fiscal mechanisms of the Roman state meant that tax could be raised in one region and spent in another (2005a, 158; also Wickham 2005, 778). Thus, we cannot assume that the economy of the eastern empire necessarily behaved in a monolithic fashion. Western Asia, or the Levant, is a large, socially and geographically diverse region, in which the population of different regions may have resisted or complied with taxation to differing extents. Wickham himself cautions that we should recognise 'variegated patterns of social development' (2005, 831) and that throughout Syro-Palestine 'the crises it faced were all local' (2005, 459), while at the same time drawing evidence from Egypt and applying it to the whole region (2005: 259, 266, 527, 819, 827). Some areas of the eastern empire, such as northern Syria, lie as far as 600 miles away from the Egyptian Mediterranean coast. This conflation of evidence may derive, albeit not consciously on the part of the authors, from Orientalist traditions of scholarship (as described in Chapter 1; Said 1978). These often regard evidence from the 'East' as somewhat monolithic, with internal differences, subtleties and distinctions less important than an overall depiction of the region as mysteriously unchanged and timeless in comparison to the 'West', with its ability to change and renew itself. Such a view can be traced back to Jones' expansive conclusions comparing the eastern and western empires in a highly generalised fashion (Jones 1964 II, 1066-8). In contrast to this, this thesis argues that although some areas of the eastern empire may well have continued to raise taxes successfully, others *did* encounter significant levels of tax evasion which, in time, gradually brought about a change in social organisation. As Chapter 2 argued, archaeology has the ability to demonstrate regional variation. Furthermore, tax evasion may only have been practised to an extent which allowed holy figures to assume the role of patron and then develop this to become landlords in an institutional fashion. This model does not preclude the possibility that tax continued to be paid to some extent, as it may have been paid instead through monastic institutions rather than direct from villages or even households. The following paragraphs outline some of the documentary evidence which, in addition to that presented in section 3.5 (above), make a case for tax evasion in northern Syria.

Evidence provided by Libanius suggests that the burden of taxation, and thus the difficulties of collecting it, began to be particularly acute in the late 350s and 360s (Liebeschuetz 1972, 162). Julian remitted arrears of taxation to Antioch at this time. 'Year after year, councillors had been sent to the Tigris and incurred huge expenses there which they could only meet by selling their ancestral estates' (Liebeschuetz 1972, 163). By 381, Libanius mentions the desertion of villages. Tax collectors were beaten because they could not collect enough, and in 387 the Riot of the Statues in Antioch began with a demonstration against taxes. The



failure by the council of Antioch to collect taxes led to changes and tension *within* the city administration (Liebeschuetz 2000, 220; Roueché 1979). The old role of *curator*, responsible for local finance, appears to have been replaced by a *pater*, though tax collection was also at certain times in the hands of *vindices*. The Justinianic and other laws of the fifth and sixth centuries give an impression of considerable variation with regard to the roles for which urban officials were responsible. Jones outlines a complex web of legislation put in place to try to enforce membership of the *curia* (or town council), and especially the responsibilities of the *decurion* (or council leader) (Jones 1964, 741-749). This would seem to imply a fractious local government system. It appears that local officials did not want to do their job, possibly because of the financial risks of doing so, where taxes were becoming difficult to collect (Jones 1964, 751). Within this difficult situation, urban church officials – and especially bishops – may have played an increasingly important role, and carried out an increasing range of tasks (Liebeschuetz 2000, 219; Gaudemet 1958). This is not the place to investigate the workings of the urban fiscal system in detail. However, this general situation provides corroborative evidence for the view that the urban, secular official structures of power underwent significant change over the course of the late fourth to sixth centuries. This restructuring may have had important ramifications for the villages of rural Syria, and the monasteries therein.

### 3.8 The imperial economy

Thus far, the discussion has centred on the ways in which rural production was organised, and how this organisation may have changed. The following two sections will try to broaden this discussion in two ways. The first is how local economies relate to the overall imperial economy. What role did the villages of northern Syria play in the economy at its broadest scale? The second is whether this relationship changed through time and what role monasteries in particular may have played in such changes.

The first question is a crucial one, and follows on from the emphasis on regional diversity in the previous section. The ways in which specific regions of Syria (for example, the north-west) link to broader trade and taxation networks may well indicate how such regions are linked in social and political ways also. However, it is not entirely clear whether there is a tangible ‘Roman economy’ at all, as opposed to a series of sub-economies linked only in ideological terms. Hopkins attempted to address this question (Hopkins 1980). He used money supply to analyse the extent to which the local economies of southern Germany, northern Italy, Britain/Gaul, the Balkans and Syria



fluctuated in similar ways from the first to the third centuries. His analysis indicates that until around AD 180, fluctuation was indeed similar in all of these regions (1980, 113).

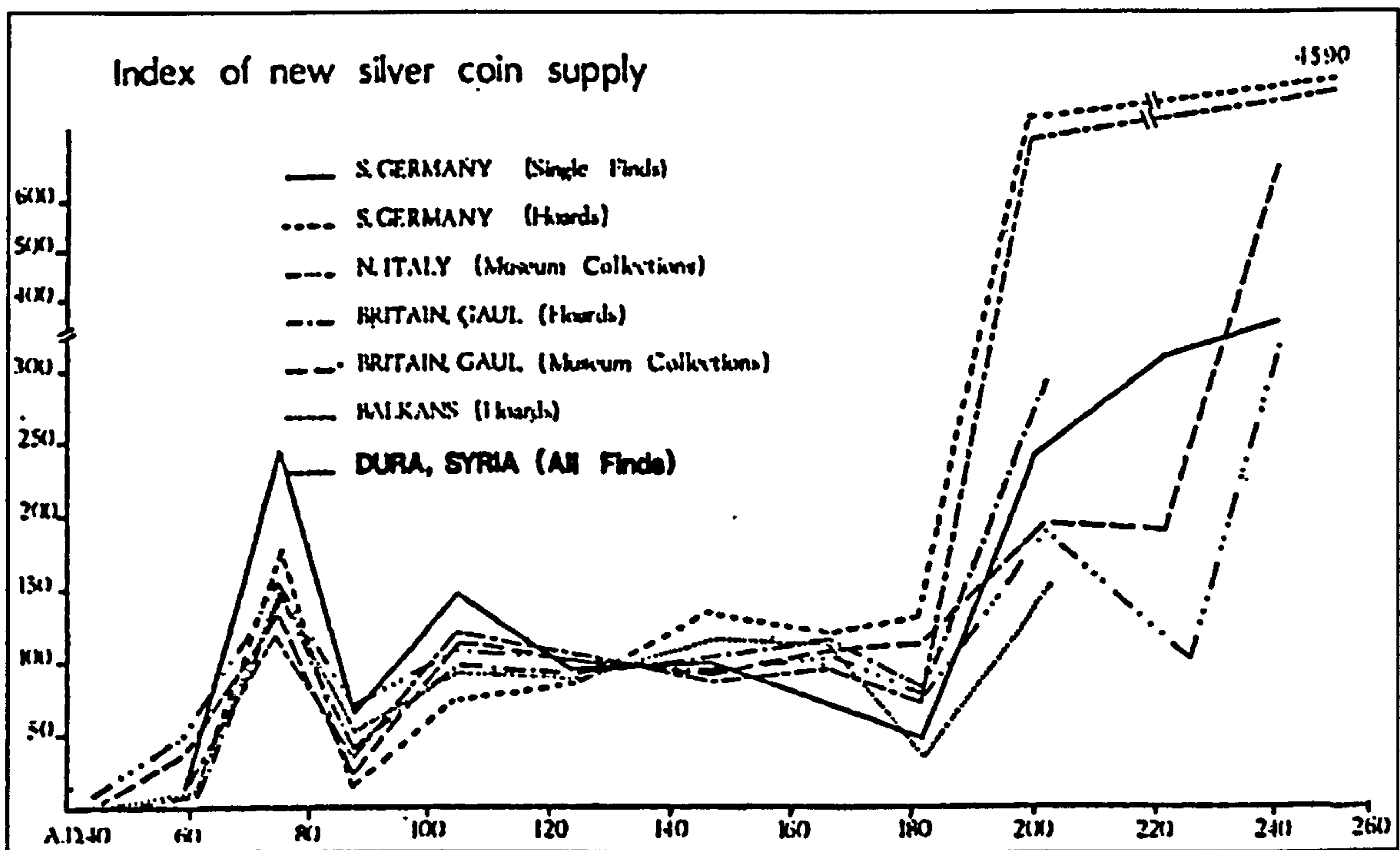


Figure 19: A graph showing fluctuations in the supply of local coinage in various regions of the Roman empire from the first to the third centuries AD (after Hopkins 1980, 113)

As can be seen, the early third century is marked by diversification in the trends for each region, before some similarity is again resumed towards the end. Unfortunately, data for the fourth century and beyond is not presented. Instead, Hopkins makes some use of shipwreck evidence from the Mediterranean to infer long distance trade. This is, of course, a different kind of indicator, since trade may not necessarily be state-related. Furthermore, it does not relate to all regions at all times, and may say more about the locations of marine archaeological prospection than any form of reality in the Roman period. Nevertheless, as an indicator of general inter-regional activity, and the overall vibrancy of the economy, it may be of some use. The period 200 BC – AD 200 sees the highest levels of shipwrecks. AD 200 – 400 sees a general decline. Most interesting of all, however, is that the period AD 400 – 650 indicates the lowest levels of Mediterranean trade since before 400 BC. This evidence may be used to conclude a general disintegration of economic links, and thus increasing localisation from c.AD 400. The dating categories employed here are, of course, crude, and more recent commentators have sought to qualify such broad conclusions somewhat, pointing out that decline was gradual and highly localised (see, for example, Mattingly & Hitchner 1995, 211-213).



Nevertheless, the overall impression is of a slow and gradual decline, especially in the north and west of the Mediterranean, throughout the fifth and sixth centuries. To what extent, then, is this true of north-west Syria? Does economic interaction become more localised from the late fourth/early fifth centuries, or can we assume that the eastern empire acted as a whole in a similar fashion?

An obvious indicator here is the region's predominant product, olive oil. Section 3.3 has already urged a note of caution, based on the work of Sodini, Tate and others, about over-emphasizing the importance of this product. Nonetheless, its potential as a surplus product cannot be ignored, especially in the light of the fact that eastern Mediterranean olive oil is assumed to have taken over as the predominant supplier following the interruption to North African supplies with the Vandal conquests of the fifth and early sixth centuries, stimulated in part by the rapid development of Constantinople (Bintliff & Snodgrass 1988, 179; Decker 2001, 82; Jameson et al 1994, Reynolds 1995). One would assume that if large quantities of olive oil were indeed being transported from north-west Syria out into the eastern Mediterranean and beyond, that amphorae would be required to do so. Thus, if amphora production sites could be identified within supply distance of the press-dense region of the north-west, it could be convincingly suggested that a portion of production was intended for export by sea. Surprisingly, the most comprehensive analysis of the olive economy of the region, by Olivier Callot, makes very little comment on the *transportation* of the product (Callot 1984). Nevertheless, we might speculate on one such amphora type, which for some time has been suggested as a likely contender. This is the so-called 'Late Roman Amphora (LRA) 1' (otherwise known as *Augst* class 58, *Keay* fabric 18, *Peacock and Williams* class 44; Reynolds 1995, 71-83; or in western Europe as B ware [Biv], Mytum 1992). In fact, although it has been speculated that north-west Syria is a production zone for this ware, there is as yet no evidence at all to support this.



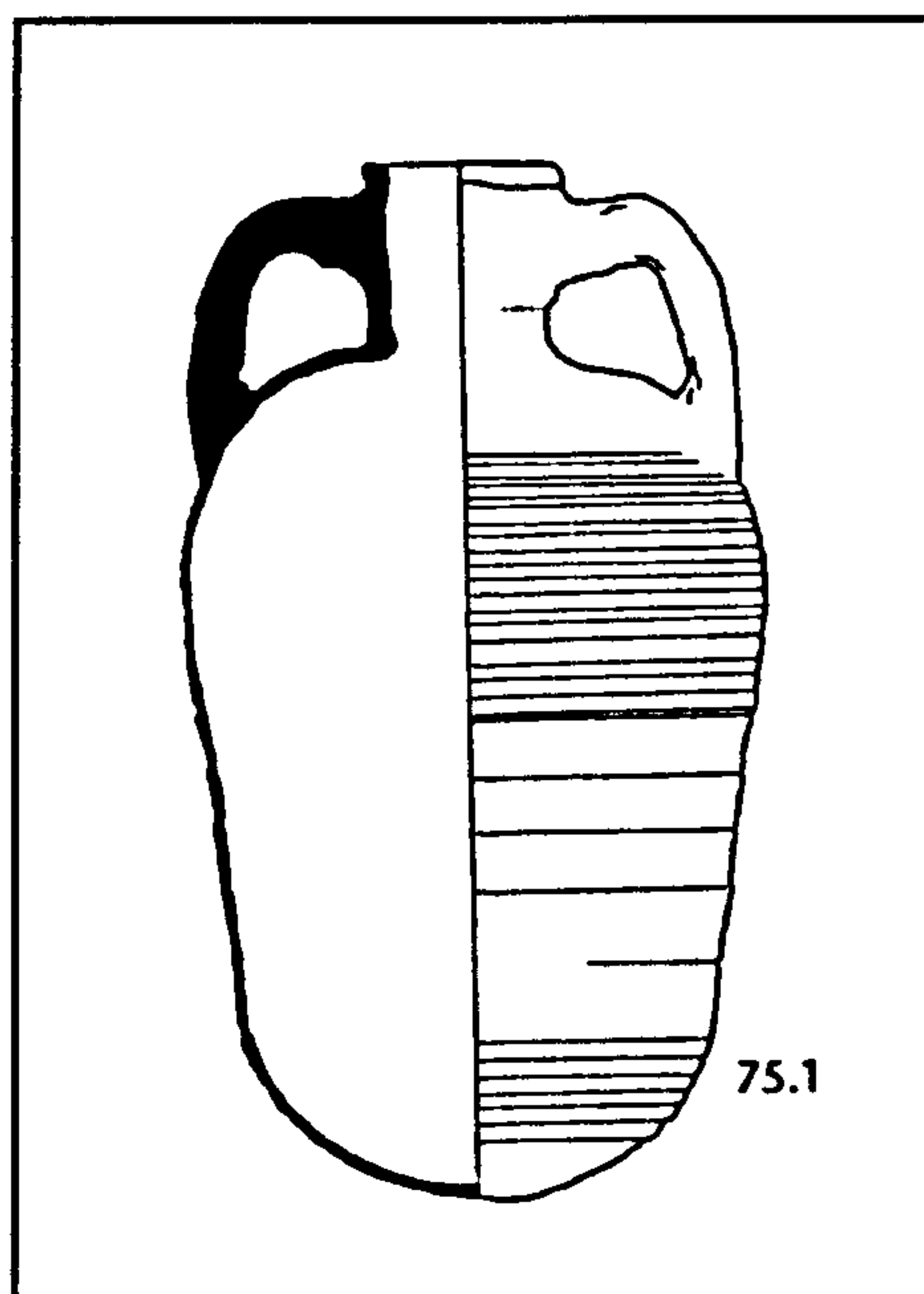


Figure 20: Late Roman Amphora 1 (after Butcher 2004, 198)

LRA 1 sherds have been found at Dehes and Anderin, but there has been as yet no evidence of wasters (Decker 2001, 76; Sodini et al 1980, 237-241). At sites where *both* olive oil and the associated amphorae were produced (such as at Chhim in Lebanon), amphora sherds are visible in abundance (Reynolds *forthcoming*). Admittedly, concerted fieldwalking and collection strategies have yet to take place, but none of the aforementioned excavations have produced any evidence for wasters, and a century and a half of survey work has yet to produce any speculation about kiln sites. Conversely, kiln sites have been located on Cyprus and in Cilicia (on the southern Anatolian coast) (Empereur & Picon 1989).

Another possibility exists, that olive oil could have been carried out of the area in animal skins, in order to be transferred at sites where amphora manufacture was taking place. One such entrepot site may have been Seleucia, suggested by Empereur and Picon (1989) as also being the location for LRA1 amphora kilns. However, recent observations by Reynolds suggest that wasters found in Seleucia and thought to have been LRA1 may in fact not be wasters, but sherds deposited in the form of a *testaccio*, or a warehouse dump, associated with imports from the Black Sea port of Sinop (Reynolds *forthcoming*).

If oil was taken down from the limestone massif in skins to be bottled at Seleucia, such a route would mean substantial specialist animal skin production which, as yet, remains without evidence. There is also the fact that such methods would be unusual because, as Peacock & Williams point out, the majority of studies of production sites seem to indicate that amphorae were made in the same area as the foodstuffs to be transported, either by itinerant potters, by neighbouring specialist estates who supplied the region, or



by each production centre themselves (Peacock & Williams 1986, 39-41). This may not exclusively have been the case, since fish oil production sites on the Moroccan coast do not seem to have been provisioned with amphorae to carry the *garum* that was presumably transported elsewhere (Ponsich & Tarradell 1965, 109). Mattingly, in noting the distribution of kiln sites in the Guadalquivir in Spain, suggests that oil may have been carried by donkey or floated by animal skin down minor rivers to the kilns which were spread along the banks of the major river (1988). The containers were then inspected, weighed and stamped ready for shipment out into the Mediterranean.

An equally intriguing possibility, however, is that from the fifth century onwards, the economic surplus of north-west Syria was in fact not being exchanged via the Mediterranean, but towards other sites within the same region, and towards the cities and villages of the interior. Reynolds has observed amphora sherds in a pale fabric 'typical of Aleppo and sites in north, central Syria', such as found by Hans Curvers' survey of the Jabbul Plain, around 50km east of the limestone massif (Reynolds *forthcoming*). Such a movement of oil would probably not necessitate the manufacture of amphorae, which are not suitable over land, and could thus be very difficult to detect archaeologically. Unfortunately, published accounts of excavation within Beroea (modern Aleppo) do not seem to provide sufficient indication of whether this was the case. But if an internalisation of the economy of north-west Syria was indeed occurring at this time, this would concur with the situation in Seleucia, the main Mediterranean port for the north-west, the population of which was falling *before* the Arab conquest (Dagron 1985, cited in Kennedy & Liebeschuetz 1988, 71). This argument runs contra to Wickham, who asserts categorically that olive oil was exported in large quantities from the Syrian limestone massif to the Mediterranean in LRA1 amphorae. The evidence will not be conclusive until more is understood about the production locations of LRA1. For now, it would seem reasonable to be cautious about suggesting that very much oil from the limestone massif ended up in amphorae on ships in the Mediterranean. As much, if not the majority of oil could have been traded internally or provided as *annona* to the troops on the eastern frontier (as suggested by Reynolds, *forthcoming*).

Marlia Mango has made the point that non-ceramic evidence can also be a very helpful indicator of the state of the Byzantine economy (Mango 2001, 87). Her analysis of the distribution of copper-alloy vessels through the fifth to seventh centuries brings a contrasting point of view to the argument. She suggests that the late Roman and



Byzantine economy is far from significantly disrupted by the changes described in sections 3.4 and 3.5. Both state-run and privately owned metal-workshops appear to continue right through this period in Constantinople and Sardis, for example. Libanius refers to the presence of workshops outside the city gates of Antioch (Festugière 1959, cited in Mango 2001, 95). Indeed, Mango comments that 'one is struck by uniformity and continuity' of output from these sites, even for as long a period as from Late Antiquity until the eleventh century (Mango 2001, 93). The distribution of these vessels is also impressive, as Byzantine-period metal vessels have been found in as widely dispersed locations as China, Zanzibar and Sutton Hoo. Of course, the dating of these finds is often difficult, as they may have arrived via one or several intermediaries, and as high-status objects are likely to have been cherished for a long time. Quantification of this evidence is also difficult, since it is difficult to pinpoint periods of economic success or decline on the basis of what were probably comparatively rare objects. Nevertheless, it *could* be argued that the overall picture of the late Roman and Byzantine economy is one of approximate, overall continuation rather than decline, in spite of the economic changes described above. Perhaps we can indeed speak of booming trade coinciding with settlement expansion 'throughout almost the whole of the eastern empire' then (Ward-Perkins 2005a, 124)?

However, like all broad pictures, this impression is likely to mask underlying complexity. All of the metalworking locations which Mango mentions, for example, are urban workshops, as far as we know. Though it is clear that the cities of late Roman Syria underwent some spatial transformation in the fourth century and onwards, it seems that urban economic activity was not severely diminished until well into the sixth century (for Antioch, Downey 1961, Liebeschuetz 1972; for Beirut, Perring 1998; for Damascus, Will 1994; general commentaries, Kennedy 1985, Bowersock 1989, Butcher 2003). Marlia Mango's analysis of the morphology and stamps of fifth to seventh century silver vessels suggests that some were made in state workshops in Antioch, but that the majority indicate sufficient variation that they 'could have been produced in any number of workshops' (Mango 1986, 15).

Indeed, the recent publication of metal objects from the 'hôtellerie' at Qal'at Sim'an demonstrates the diversity of types and styles present (Kazanski et al 2003). However, this particular assemblage is unlikely to be indicative of metalworking in nearby villages, since most of the objects probably belonged to visiting pilgrims. In the case of the assemblage of ecclesiastical silver plate studied by Mango, it *may* sometimes have been



made in the villages of north-west Syria. But we cannot be sure. It may be deceptive therefore to regard the overall Byzantine economy as indicative of rural Syria, when in fact the urban and rural spheres may have been acting increasingly differently.

In order to investigate this issue, of whether the rural margins on the north-eastern edge of the empire were indeed becoming less linked in economic terms with the urban polities, let us look briefly at some other regions besides the limestone massif. It has been tacitly implied throughout this thesis thus far, that the limestone massif is somehow a distinct region on its own. This is partly as a result of the way that region has been treated by academic inquiry thus far (as discussed in Chapter 1). However, it should be pointed out that such distinctiveness may have at least as much to do with taphonomy as genuine evidence. Because of the robustness of the building materials of the limestone massif, the lack of alluvial and other masking processes, and the relatively low degree of settlement since the eighth century, archaeological survival is indeed striking. In the lower lying Amuq Valley to the west of the limestone massif early surveys have tended to overlook late Roman settlement. This is because of the use of more degradable building materials such as mud brick and timber. Surveys have tended therefore to look instead to the more highly visible *tell* sites (see, for example, Braidwood 1937). However, recent work by the Amuq Valley Regional Project (AVRP) has shown, through the use of fieldwalking guided by high resolution Corona satellite imagery, that 'beginning in the Hellenistic period and peaking in the late Roman period, there was an increasing emphasis on settlement in small, dispersed villages that were spread across all parts of the plain and into the surrounding highlands (Casana 2004, 104; Wilkinson et al 2004). This work has not thus far revealed a density of rural settlement to match the limestone massif to the east. Nor has the clarity of dating provided by inscriptional evidence on the massif been matched by the AVRP. However, this work is beginning to show the need to contextualise the limestone massif with greater care and caution, and that we must no longer 'focus attention myopically on the Dead Cities of the *massif calcaire*, treating these settlements as though they were historically unique and geographically isolated' (Casana 2004, 102). Similar taphonomic comparisons are being made by Philip et al in the Homs region, between the high preservation of the basalt uplands, and the more problematic marl lowlands (2005).

With regard to a region clearly distinct from the north-west of Syria. Wilkinson's survey of the Karababa Basin in south-east Anatolia produced an interesting trend for the late fourth to sixth centuries AD. Artefact collection surveys produced evidence that



'settlement apparently attained a peak, both in the number of sites and aggregate area' (1990, 117). Furthermore, the range of site types, which are ordered into 5 categories from 'nodal settlements' to 'very small sites comprising merely a scatter of limestone foundation stones', as well as the extent of landscape coverage, seems significant. A range of field systems which, although difficult to date, appear to coincide with areas of night soiling, seem to date to this period also. Wilkinson concludes that 'between the fourth and sixth centuries AD settlement must have extended to such a degree that all available settlement niches were occupied. The high terrace was settled wherever springs would provide sufficient water to sustain permanent habitation. Furthermore, cultivation systems were intensified sufficiently, probably to allow annual cropping' (1990, 126). His analysis of the potential carrying capacity of the exploited land leads him to conclude that 'the system of settlement and land use appears to have come close to a state of equilibrium with no evidence for surplus production' (1990, 123). This apparent lack of surplus production is in spite of the area's immediate proximity to the Euphrates river, as well as the presence of high status structures indicated by 'scatters of plain, square limestone tesserae' recorded at two sites (1990, 119). The evidence is limited, broad conclusions are risky here, and to suggest an entirely isolated, self-sufficient regional economy would seem an unrealistic scenario. Nevertheless, it could be argued that such a burgeoning of settlement, yet apparent lack of potential for long distance exchange, may imply a largely localised and locally-run economy, with minimal contact with broader economic systems.

Other regions on the eastern margins of the Roman empire also seem to be changing during the late empire, yet in contrasting ways. Wilkinson and Tucker's artefact collection survey of the north Jazira region of modern Iraq indicates increased settlement activity from the first century BC onwards, and especially from the expansion of Roman interests towards the Parthian frontier in the early second century AD. From the late third century onwards, however, this settlement recedes quite suddenly. By the fourth century, fortified enclosures and walled settlements begin to appear, coinciding with the 'development of open space and 'waste' (which) may have been associated with the appearance of nomads and pastoralists' (Wilkinson & Tucker 1995, 70).

In short, then, the period from the fourth century onwards appears to have been a period of significant change in the nature of settlement and economy on the north-eastern fringes of the empire. This chapter is of insufficient length to discuss this issue fully, but the general impression is one of expansion into, and thereafter consolidation



of, marginal upland regions. There is some evidence to suggest that the economies of these regions were not necessarily closely linked to the urban and marine arenas of trade further west, especially from the late fourth century onwards. In fact, contact between distant regions and the major exchange markets and taxation system of the state, both represented by urban centres, appears to be declining. This breakdown is manifested in different ways; in the Karababa Basin it meant an internalised economy apparently without the imperative to produce large amounts of surplus. For the north Jezira, it meant instead abandonment of widespread settlement patterns which could not be sustained without state support, whether Roman or Sasanian. This may be related to increasing use of tax in kind which, as Hopkins points out, does not require trade in order to turn it from coin to usable goods. It may also, though this point is admittedly more difficult to prove, have related to a decline in the ability of urban polities to tax the countryside, especially its more distant margins. In order to make proper conclusions of such margins, however, a much lengthier discussion would have to take place. So, for reasons of brevity, this chapter will instead draw to a close by examining the role played by monasteries in the economic changes dealt with in this chapter.

### **3.9 Monasteries and the economy**

This chapter has tried to examine the late Roman economy of the Syrian countryside, in order to begin an analysis of what role monasteries may have played in this. Section 3.1 introduced the various ways in which interaction between the rural and urban spheres has been approached. The predominant theme here, in spite of some reassessment, has been one of exploitation of the countryside by the city-based authorities. Section 3.2 investigated the likely resources of the countryside, and sought to emphasise their diversity. Our main focus here, the north-west of Syria, is a marginal region, and thus has been especially susceptible to environmental change. That change has not been thoroughly examined before for the fourth to sixth centuries AD. A preliminary look at this issue implies that a rise in precipitation and humidity occurred around the first century BC. A sudden drop in moisture levels then occurred between the late third and early fourth centuries AD. Precipitation may have increased again by the sixth century, or possibly as late as the early eighth. This significant dip in moisture levels, and thus the onset of more difficult agricultural conditions, thus coincides approximately with the period under discussion here, and may have acted as a significant catalyst for change.

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 examined the ways in which the extensive archaeological record of the north-west has been interpreted for this period, especially in economic terms.



Tchalenko saw the predominant role of the olive economy and long distance trade, whereas Sodini, Tate and others have instead emphasised a mixed, more localised, household-based economy. 3.6 and 3.7 examined who controlled the land and its surplus. The evidence base for this is problematic, but a preliminary conclusion could be that most of the villages of the north-west were in fact controlled by a free peasantry, under a heavy tax burden, with some form of patron. This then changed throughout the late fourth and fifth centuries, as tax went unpaid and the role of patron was taken over instead by holy figures. Whether, and if so quite how, the unpaid taxes were redirected is not clear. Some surplus may have been invested in church plate and other ecclesiastical materials. Section 3.7 then went on to examine how these changes may relate to the late Roman economy as a whole. The picture here is ambiguous, as on the one hand there is some evidence for continuation in urban areas, with no significant decline in economic activity, and continued expansion into rural areas, which then altered the degree and direction of surplus production. However, the general impression is one of broad continuation, especially in urban areas, contrasting with increasing localisation of rural economies, especially in areas further away from the Mediterranean.

The precise role which monasteries may have played in this economy is difficult to ascertain. The first, and most obvious, reason for this is that monastic institutions – in most cases – seem to post-date the *initial* establishment of oil and other agricultural installations. Most installations are difficult to date since they do not bear the inscriptions present on some high status structures, but the general assumption has traditionally been that structures which we do have (such as the first major phase of the domestic-agrarian buildings excavated at Dehes) were constructed in the first half of the fourth century, whereas most monastic complexes seem to date from the late fifth and sixth centuries<sup>8</sup>. This does not mean that monastic institutions did not *become* involved in production after their creation. Indeed, some such institutions do indeed display evidence for presses within the confines of their domains.

The excavation of the monastic complex at Deir Dehes produced evidence of two oil installations, each consisting of a crusher, a press and a tank (though Decker speculates that these may have in fact been for wine, 2001, 85). The excavators speculate that the eastern press probably dates from the fifth century, while the western one is later, probably sixth century (Biscop 1997, 21-6). The combined olive capacity of these for each pressing is likely to have been 400 kg. Pliny the Elder's account suggests that 5kg

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<sup>8</sup> Although problems with the dating framework for monasteries are discussed in the next chapter.

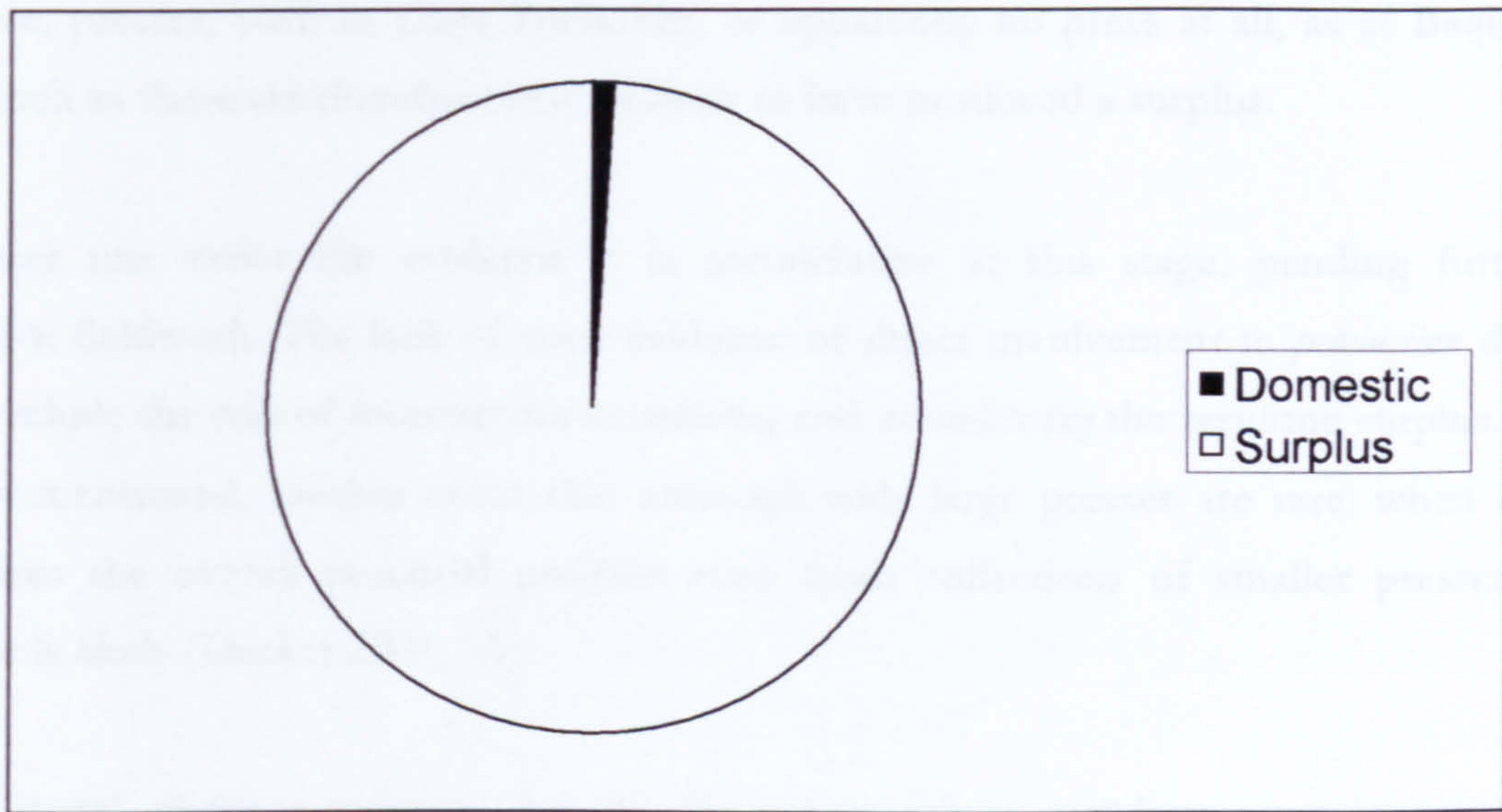


of olives is required to produce 1 litre of oil. Thus, each pressing could produce as much as 80 litres of oil. Biscop argues that 3 pressing episodes in one day is possible, potentially yielding 240 litres. If the olive season is assumed to be from the beginning of December to the end of January, around 20,000 litres of oil could be produced. This figure is much higher than Mattingly's estimate for producers in Libya of 5-10,000 litres per year, especially since presses in North Africa seem generally larger than those in Syria (Mattingly 1988). Indeed, Biscop's figure does rather seem like an over-estimate, as it does not take into account rest days or periods of maintenance, and assumes maximum capacity and production at all times. We have no idea what the quantity of olives produced from the surrounding fields is likely to have been. Nonetheless, as a basic indication this estimation serves to illustrate that the two presses, by the time they were both operating (and indeed, they appear to have been in simultaneous use at least for some of the sixth century) were producing very large quantities of oil. Forbes and Foxhall estimate that 20 litres of oil per person per year, though very approximate, may be a reasonable estimate for lighting and cooking needs (1978)<sup>9</sup>. We may imagine, given Biscop's assumption that the monks would have lived not in a dispersed, *laurite*, fashion, but 'sleeping together side by side like the peasant families of today', that between 5 and 10 monks lived in Deir Dehes at its height. Thus, the monastery would require no more than 100 to 200 litres of oil per year. This does not account for the other 99% of oil, which was, by this reasoning, surplus. Even if an olive harvest was produced bi-annually, this is still a large surplus. Nor do we know how the required 100,000 kilograms of olives were acquired, and from whom. Patlagean discusses the possibility that monasteries may have drawn in labour from outside their immediate communities, though she has little specific evidence of this for the limestone massif (1977, 323).

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<sup>9</sup> However, this figure may be rather low given that data for olive oil use in Greece during the 1970s, which presumably included very little or none for lighting, were 20 litres per person per year (Pagnol 1975, cited in Mattingly 1988).





*Figure 21: Likely proportions of olive oil produced at Dayr Dehes (according to the calculations made in Biscop 1997)*

There are other examples of monastic sites in the north-west which possess olive presses of comparable scale, such as Dayr Sim'an (SW), Qasr al-Brad, Brayj and Burj Jalahah.



*Figure 22: An example of a press at the monastic site of Brayj in the limestone massif*

Others, which have been less thoroughly investigated, may well also contain such facilities, such as Kharab Shams. There seems to have been a high degree of variation, however, with many monastic sites possessing either much smaller, probably multi-



purpose, presses, such as Dayr Turmanin, or apparently no press at all, as at Baqirha. Sites such as these are therefore very unlikely to have produced a surplus.

However one views the evidence it is inconclusive at this stage, pending further intensive fieldwork. The lack of such evidence of direct involvement in *production* does not preclude the role of monasteries in *collecting* and *administering* the resulting surplus. As already mentioned, Decker notes that although truly large presses are rare, when one calculates the overall potential product even from collections of smaller presses, a surplus is likely (Decker 2001, 73).

Inscriptional evidence suggests that church and monastery buildings were invested in throughout the fifth and sixth centuries. Indeed, churches and monastic buildings in the region continue to be constructed until the early seventh century, over fifty years after the widespread construction of other monumental architecture ceases, and throughout the general economic downturn of the late sixth century (Kennedy & Liebeschuetz 1988, 69). Kennedy & Liebeschuetz have almost suggested as much as the model proposed earlier in this chapter, in stating that 'the economic organisation which had previously been in the hands of urban magnates had partly passed into the hands of men living in villages, and especially to monasteries' (1988, 87). However, they go on to conclude that 'it is very difficult to trace structural changes in the countryside'. For Kennedy, though the economy of the rural north-west became more resolutely agricultural and ultimately less connected with Mediterranean markets, monasteries were not gleaning a now redundant surplus, but becoming self-sufficient estates, a suggestion not born out by Biscop's calculation for Dayr Dehes (see above; Kennedy 1989, 161).



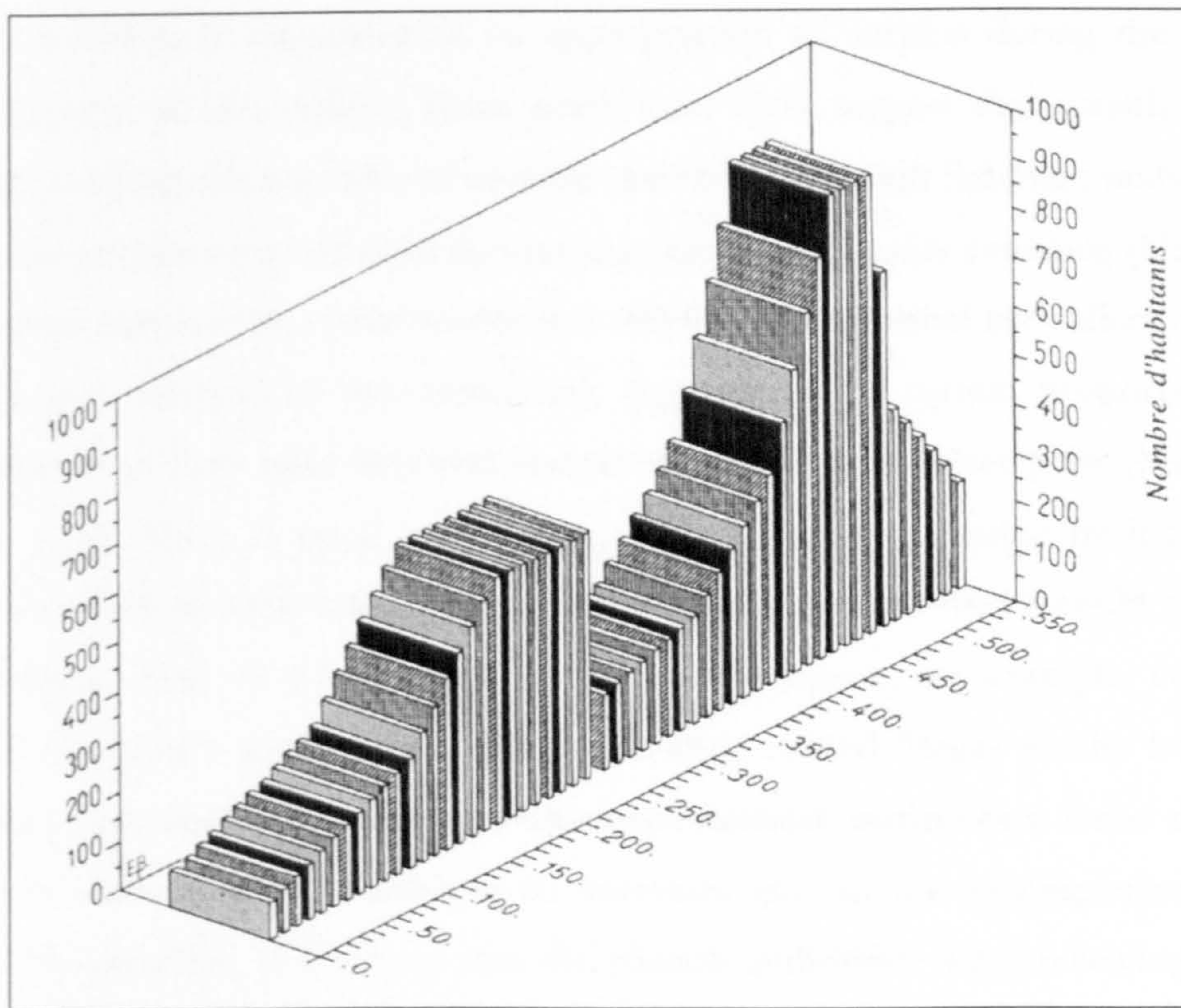


Figure 23: Graph showing trends in construction throughout the limestone massif, based on inscriptional and stylistic data (after Tate 1992, 140)

Tate has taken this argument, of there being a reorganisation of the rural economy by local estates, some of which may have been monastic, one step further. He suggests the possibility that a reason for the lack of domestic inscriptions after c.550, but a continuation in the ecclesiastical sphere is that monasteries could have been appropriating the surplus previously used to fund building projects. However, after a brief discussion of the fact that smaller monasteries are unlikely to have been parasitic but larger, more separate complexes may have acted as surplus-collecting institutions, Tate concludes that the latter are just far too few to suggest large-scale appropriation:

‘...as far as can be known, the weight of monasteries does not suggest, in economic terms, parasitism capable of compromising the arrest in development of the villages in terms of an annulment of the surpluses of the peasantry...’  
(Tate 1992, 340).

Instead, Tate prefers to cite a ‘Malthusian crisis’, which posits a clash between a growing population whose resources for which cannot keep up, and whose technological basis does not change. As the population becomes malnourished and weak, susceptibility to plague and invasions rises, and the situation is exacerbated. In this model then, monasteries were incidental bystanders throughout a disastrous sixth century which saw the rural population become victims of their own economic success and demographic fertility.



Yet other evidence *is* suggestive of an appropriation of surplus during the later sixth century. Metalwork assemblages from north-west Syria suggest that wealth was being accumulated during the late fifth to seventh centuries, although Sasanian raids and other depositional and post-depositional factors may have skewed this evidence (Mango 1986, 11). It is clear that not all of this wealth was reaching the imperial tax collectors. Indeed, Marlia Mango's analysis of this metalwork suggests that a certain proportion of this wealth appears to have been invested instead in ecclesiastical silver plate (Mango 1986, 3-4; Foss 1996, 52-3). A good proportion of this plate was donated by local villagers from the late fifth to sixth centuries, and it has been suggested that it could have served as a communal store of value. The Kaper Koraon treasure, for example, consisted of two silver jugs and a paten given by an individual named Megas to the local church during the 570s and 580s. Whether the ecclesiastical institutions were the *primary* receivers of such surplus is difficult to ascertain due to the incompleteness of the evidence. Nonetheless, if it seems that the church authorities were receiving at least a certain proportion of surplus during the fifth and sixth centuries, this situation rather begs the question of how the mechanisms for the giving and receiving of such surplus operated. Did monastic institutions involve themselves in local exchange systems, or did they simply receive surplus?

With regard to the probable olive oil press at Deir Dehes, mentioned above, the monastery appears to have acted as a processing point only, since it seems unlikely that the small monastic population could have produced the very large weight of olives required. They were perhaps receiving this surplus from the nearby villages of either Dehes or Barisha therefore.

Monastic sites do not themselves appear to have been producers of a wide range of goods. Unlike the slightly later monasteries of northern Europe (for example, in Ireland, Edwards 1990, Mytum 1992; for England, Cramp 1984 & 1994, Webster 1991 & 1991a; also in Scotland, Carver 2004, Carver & Spall 2004; and in many other locations), monastic sites in Syria do not display much evidence of craft working activities. Although very few monastic sites have been excavated in Syria, the evidence thus far appears to suggest nothing definite in terms of metal working. This cannot be ruled out. Mango's analysis of metalwork stamps implies that some of the silver plate of this period may have been produced somewhere other than the state-run urban workshops. However, whether this manufacture was carried out in monasteries or otherwise is entirely unknown. This is in spite of the fact that metallurgical resources in the Amanus



mountains are known to have been exploited in the late Roman period, such as the copper mine at Kisicik (Casana 2004, 112). There are certain examples of manuscripts which are known to have been produced at Syrian monasteries (such as the Rabbula gospels mentioned in Chapter 2, and further codices examined in Vööbus 1960, 389-393), but these are comparatively rare. It certainly could not be argued at present that monasteries were engaging in the sort of long distance exchange in luxury items argued for early medieval European examples in the ninth century (Hodges 1993).

### 3.10 Conclusion

At this stage, it is difficult to conclude with any certainty how monastic sites engaged with the socio-economy of rural Syria, and with the empire as a whole. However, we may speculate that as compliance with the taxation system of the state, administered from Antioch, declined, institutional monasteries were well placed to act as the new authority, both spiritual and practical, in the countryside of the north-west. Furthermore, monasteries appear to have received surplus, in the form of olives, as investment in silver plate and in architecture, and perhaps other ways that are no longer visible to us archaeologically. There is no direct evidence that they were involved in craft production which was exchanged for these forms of surplus. As far as we can make out, they simply received it, perhaps in return for prayer. So how did the mechanisms of this giving of surplus operate? For what purpose were they receiving it? Wickham has suggested a broad change to a system of rent in the late fourth and fifth centuries. We have very little evidence for this, but as monasteries began to act as patrons, they may have begun to acquire land in return for their role as the new authority, either in terms of land which could then be rented back to those who had owned it previously, or simply as a return in their services. Although section 3.6 noted that large, centrally managed estates do not appear to have been the norm in the north-west of Syria, the estates which did exist and which were owned by landowners who acted as councillors in Antioch, were probably more available to be sold off as tax debts failed to be collected, and councillors struggled to pay the arrears (Liebeschuetz 1972, 163). Of course, this does not account for the whole situation. The precise ways in which monastic institutions interacted with village societies, and were able to hold their new position of authority, is ambiguous. Chapter 2 has already explored the ways in which monastic institutions have been seen to have acted in ideological terms. Discussion of the various ways in which secular settlements may have been brought into the sphere of the newly-created sacred landscapes is what concerns us now. It is the complex



interaction involved in such landscapes, and quite how spiritual authority was articulated through careful selection of landscape setting, which the next 3 chapters will examine.



## Chapter 4

### Defining Monasticism: Historical Context & Archaeological Evidence



*This thesis so far has sought to deconstruct the ways in which scholars in the past have viewed monasticism in Syria, how contemporary archaeological theory may further such views, and how current information regarding the late Roman economy may inform our understanding of monastic sites. However, in seeking to investigate the role of early monasticism in Syria through the late Roman period, this thesis has thus far taken the notion of a monastery, its definition, theological basis and social context, somewhat for granted. This chapter seeks to address this by analysing our information for the origins and spread of early Christian monasteries in Syria, and especially in the north-west. The definition and dating of the sites traditionally taken to be late fifth and sixth century monasteries is questioned. It can be proposed that there is a broader variety of forms of monastic site, and that these are evident over a longer date range than previously supposed.*

#### 4.1 The spread of Christian belief

Before we can understand the ways in which monasticism first developed in rural Syria, it is necessary to assess the social and political context into which monastic practice emerged. Christianity is often portrayed as an inevitable and fairly uniform backdrop to such an emergence, and monasticism an automatic consequence which followed soon afterwards. Antioch is known to have had a thriving Christian community from the first century AD, and indeed is the first place where the term 'Christian' is attested (*Acts XI:25*). However, it is difficult to pinpoint quite when and how Christianity began to penetrate the countryside, and when the conversion of the population of the limestone massif was accepted in earnest. Several authors have commented that the growth and development of Christianity was, in the first three centuries, 'closely entangled with the nature of the Greek speaking cities' (Meeks 1993, 37; Sandwell 2004). Indeed, it is interesting to note that the first century missions of Stephen, Paul and others in the eastern Mediterranean concentrated on the Mediterranean littoral, and especially the Greek speaking cities. Price notes that 'relations between Greek speaking Antioch and the Syriac speaking countryside were not sufficiently close or friendly to make evangelization by the city itself likely to have been attempted or likely to have been successful' (Price 1985, xix). No New Testament figures are mentioned as having preached the Gospel to the north or east of Antioch, though there is one reference to 'Parthians' and 'Arabians' 'speaking the word of God' in *Acts 2:9*. Had these early missions gone east, rather than west, from Antioch, the early history of Christianity may have been somewhat different. McCullough has used documentary sources such as *Abercius Marcellus*, the *Story of Addai*, the *Book of the Laws of Countries*, the *Chronicle of Edessa* and other accounts to propose 'the conclusion that Christianity had reached Edessa and probably other centres in Osrhoene in the latter half of the second century' (McCullough 1982, 21, 33). However, accounting for the presence of Christianity within rural



communities, the documentary record for which is inevitably somewhat patchy and less forthcoming, is more difficult.

The earliest reference to the presence of Christianity in any structured sense in the countryside is rather vague, and describes 'bishops of the cities and rural districts bordering them', in connection with the synodal letter of the Council of Antioch in 268 (cited in Trombley 2004, 59; initially noted by Harnack 1924, 672; Eusebius *HE*, 7.5). Until recently, scholarly opinion has regarded the real era of change from pagan cults to widespread Christianity to have been in the early fourth century (Sandwell 2004a, 6), and indeed the earliest documentary evidence for Christians within the *territorium* of Antioch also begins to emerge in the early fourth century (Trombley 2004, 66). In terms of archaeological remains, we know of a house-church, or *domus ecclesia*, at Qirqbiza in the Jebel al-'Ala region with an inscription dating it to 313, and there are inscriptions referring explicitly to 'Jesus Christ' from 336/7 onwards (Jalalbert & Mouterde 1939, 325). Christian worship within the home, possibly of a covert nature, was probably the norm for the early fourth century, and indeed dedicated churches may not have become the standard until broader ecclesiastical organisation had been formalised in a diocesan sense (Loosley 2001, 3). It is sometimes supposed that the political developments of the early fifth century, especially in terms of the Edict of Milan (313), the Peace of Constantine (324) and the first Council of Nicaea (325) somehow opened the way for a massive expansion of Christian belief (see, for example, Loosley 2001, 3).

It has been commented of Christian conversion in northern Europe, that it should not be viewed as a straightforward narrative of a somehow 'irresistible' and unified faith, but in fact a process which was diverse in its reception, and varied in the pace and scale of adoption to new ideas (for example, Carver 2003a, 3-4). The evidence for northern Syria also seems to suggest a slower and somewhat more piecemeal spread than has previously been supposed. The earliest evidence we have for large-scale investment in Christianity, in the form of a purpose-built church, is the basilica at Fafartin, dated by inscription to 372. And recent work on the epigraphy of the limestone massif by Trombley would suggest that in fact, Christianity was not widely accepted and practised until the very late fourth and early fifth century. This is almost a century *after* the previously assumed period of mass conversion (Trombley 2004). Such complexity is supported by textual evidence, which documents battles fought by early Christian saints against paganism – still – in the fifth century. Libanius recounts the closure of pagan temples against the wishes of the locals by monastics during the last decades of the fourth century (*Oration XXX*). Theodoret tells us of



Thalelaeus' battle with demons (*HR XXVIII:1*), and indeed this is a recurring theme also in his *Cure of Hellenic Maladies* in the mid-fifth century.

Understanding the pantheon of local gods that made up 'pagan' practice within the region, and quite how they came to be abandoned in favour of Christianity is a complex task. McCullough refers to 'a very considerable variety of religions and cults' throughout Syria, and discusses the difficulties imposed by regional variation (McCullough 1982, 11). It would seem that in the north-west, local belief prior to conversion was made up of a Semitic pantheon, with 'partially Hellenised' ancestral deities worshipped in temples. Twenty-one such temples have been recorded, many of them, in common with many Semitic cults throughout western Asia, located in high places (Trombley 2004, 60, Tchalenko 1953, 13-16). The most striking example of this would be the great temple of Zeus Madbachos atop the dominant peak of Jebel Sheikh Barakhat (known as Mount Koryphé in antiquity; Jarry 1967). Archaeological evidence for such temples usually suggests a rectangular 'cella' with a colonnaded porch at the front, like the example at Burj Baqirha in Jebel Barisha. In AD 391, Theodosius I made it illegal to visit and sacrifice at temples. Though it is unclear whether this ruling had any affect in the remote countryside, Trombley has looked at the evidence for when such temples went out of use, and concluded, on the basis of epigraphic evidence close to Zeus Madbachos (the main temple for the region), that 'Christian monotheism became the dominant cultural force in the district in consequence of the final closure of the great temenos, with a *terminus ante quem* of 406/7' (Trombley 2004, 61). From this point onwards, large numbers of dedications to 'One God' begin to appear in inscriptions throughout the region. It is clear that a major factor in the landscape and practice of conversion to Christianity was the construction of a series of baptisteries, the first in 390 and the last in 566/7. It is plausible that these baptisteries 'were an important institutional expression of Christian belief, especially as they were the focal point of the liturgical expression of the abandonment of pre-Christian belief and practice' (Trombley 2004, 77). Epigraphic evidence – largely of the fifth century – supports this, with references to newly baptised adults with terms like 'newly created' and 'newly illuminated' often being used (see table 2, overleaf).



Factor	Details	Date
Earliest documentary evidence	Synodal letter	268
Earliest church	Domus ecclesia at Qirqbiza	313
Earliest clearly Christian inscription	Mentions 'Jesus Christ', at Ma'arrat Shelf	336/7
Earliest clearly Christian burial	Use of an 'alpha-omega' at Kuwaru	359
Earliest purpose-built church	Fafartin	372
Pagan temples fall out of use	Closure of Zeus Madbachos (Jebel Sheikh Barakhat)	c.407
Inscriptional evidence for Christianity increases	Use of 'One God inscriptions become numerous	c.407+
Construction of baptisteries	Earliest at Babisqa, latest at Dar Qita	390 – 566/7

*Table 2: Summary of the documentary and epigraphic record for the adoption of Christianity in the hinterland of Antioch (information taken from Trombley 2004)*

It is difficult to characterise Christian practice during this early period, in spite of a large number of churches across the region, and some documentary descriptions of liturgical practice (examined by Loosley 2001, using, among others, Garsoïan 1989, Khouri-Sarkis 1957, Renhart 1995, Taft 1968 & 1986, Wilkinson 1999). Trombley suggests that such services were administered by a group of rural presbyters, *chorepiskopoi* or *periodontai*, who made tours of the villages in order to conduct the Eucharist (2004, 59). Such presbyters may have resided in a series of communal centres across the region, such as the extended complex at Baqirha, or at Dar Qita, which contain notably large churches, a baptistery, accommodation and other features, but are within the confines of a village. Tchalenko suggested that the size of the congregations attending services in each village church would have varied throughout the year, and would have been substantially larger during the harvest season due to the presence of migrant labour (1953, 413-15). Purpose-built churches were built across the region from 372 onwards, and inscriptional evidence suggests that they continued to be constructed throughout the fifth century. Some were founded in the sixth century, and the last we know of was constructed in the first decade of the seventh. The epigraphic evidence suggests that one of the early architects for such structures was a man named Markianos Kyris, who was responsible for the building of churches at Babisqa, Ksajba, Dar Qita, Qasr al-Banat and perhaps also Ba'uda and Sarfud (Tchalenko 1953, 51-2). Certainly, given the extremely high quality of finish and decoration, as well as the use of similar decorative motifs and – in certain cases – ground plans across the region, it would seem unlikely that churches were each built simply by their own communities. Instead, travelling masons working throughout the region, perhaps using patterns or plans which could be repeated, seem likely. Loosley has suggested that use of the *bema* across the region indicates the implementation of a strict and established liturgical formula, which may have superseded the 'considerable diversity in modes of worship' which had existed previously (2001, 137; 1999). This new sense of conformity may have been guided in liturgical terms by



a central authority, but been organised locally in groups, as distinct 'clusters' of bema churches are identifiable, such as those around Brad, Kalota or Sinkhar, for example.

So it would seem in general that Christian worship probably began in the limestone massif in the early fourth century, but that there was considerable overlap with the last years of pagan worship. Wide scale organisation and implementation of Christian practice seems not to have begun until the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Baptisteries and epigraphy suggest that the fifth century witnessed widespread conversion. During this period, administration of the Eucharist was becoming standardised by a network of rural presbyters, who resided in a number of centres throughout the region.

However, this picture is complicated somewhat by the theological controversies of the late fourth and fifth centuries, and the fact that they led eventually to permanent division within the ecclesiastical organisation of the Church. Such controversies are not to be underestimated since their effects were undoubtedly widely felt, and (thus) deeply political in nature. In characterising the early development of Christianity throughout rural north-west Syria, it is important to explore this division.

#### **4.2 The Council of Chalcedon and the creation of a Monophysite Church**

While the debates in Europe concerned free will and original sin, the main concern throughout the eastern Mediterranean for this period was Christological: what, in essence, was Christ? The first of these disputes was Arianism, which asserted that Christ was subordinate to God. Though condemned at the Council of Nicaea in 325, this view continued to trouble the church authorities until it was finally condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Daniel-Rops comments that from this point on, theological dispute was like a pendulum, with each position swinging away from and in reaction to the last (2001, 140-9). During the 360s, the theologians of Antioch reacted against the Arian view by emphasising the divine in Christ, but asserting that the human and the divine were distinct. This Diphysite view became the Orthodox position. However, in the 360s, the Bishop of Laodicea, Apollinarius, stated that such a view compromised the unity of the divine and the human in Christ. He reacted by considering how these two elements could be united. The product was that 'Christ is thus not a complete man, but one half of a man, but one half of a man on to which is welded the divinity of the Word' (Daniel-Rops 2001, 143). These are the origins of what was to become, half a century later, a Monophysite position. Meanwhile, in 428, Nestorius reacted against Apollinarius by emphasising a complete divide between the divine and the human in Christ, even questioning that the Virgin Mary should be referred to



as the mother of God, or *theotokos*. Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria, began a fervent opposition to Nestorius, which resulted in Nestorius' deposition at the Council of Rome in 430, then again at the Council of Ephesus a year later. It is at this point that what we now refer to as the Monophysite position emerges in earnest, asserting that the divine and human in Christ cannot possibly be separated, and that the only true understanding is of one nature. In a sense, this was a return to the views of Apollinarius, though its effects were more far reaching and permanent. In 451, the Monophysite position was condemned at the Council of Chalcedon, and a major division within the church emerged. The Orthodox remained Diphysite, but the churches later to be known as the Syrian Orthodox (or Jacobite), the Armenian Orthodox and the Coptic Orthodox of Egypt and Ethiopia, declared themselves Monophysite (Atiya 1991, Daniel-Rops 2001).

It is difficult to gauge exactly how these disputes affected the largely low status Syriac speaking communities of the Syrian countryside. However, it is clear that *some* effects would have been felt, particularly in terms of the views held by those in power within the church. Both the bishop and the patriarch of Antioch changed in view between Diphysite and Monophysite several times throughout the fifth century. Such changes coincided with violence and rioting. In 479, Bishop Stephen was murdered and his successor had difficulty even entering the city. Monks are implicated in at least some of this violence, and probably initiated and controlled popular uprisings in some cases. It is difficult to imagine that the rural *territorium* of Antioch was not affected in some way by what was happening in the city, since the views of the clergy would have had a direct affect on the views of their congregation. During the 440s, the influential Diphysite bishop, Theodoret of Cyrhus, wrote his *Historia Religiosa*, or *History of the Monks of Syria*, based on many visits he had made to holy men throughout the countryside (HR, Price 1985). William Frend has suggested that the relationship between such figures of authority and the populace was crucial in deciding the success or otherwise of figures like Theodoret, as well as the more ordinary village clergy (1971, 420-3). Congregations could refuse to take the Eucharist from those thought to hold heretical views, since personal salvation depended on it. As an illustration of the power held by the populace, at Edessa in 449 a mass demonstration in favour of Monophysitism took place, resulting in the Metropolitan of the see, Ibas, being dismissed.

What is certainly clear is that such differences of opinion cannot have enhanced any sense of unity within the Christian world, nor strengthened the power and authority of the Christian elite in Antioch. And not only was there division between those of Diphysite and Monophysite views, but also more broadly between the Patriarchates of the East:



Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and, later (after its creation in 449), Jerusalem. Furthermore, such divisions may have increased a sense of division between the largely Diphysite urban entity of Antioch, and the Monophysite countryside to the east.

Were the communities of the limestone massif Monophysite, and if so, from what date? There is very little evidence of an archaeological nature which could be deemed diagnostic either way. Certainly, the presence of a *bema* within a church does not signify Monophysitism or otherwise (Loosley 2001, 148). Nor does the wording of dedications in epigraphic evidence suggest clear-cut Christological opinion (Trombley 2004, 76). It seems unlikely that the layout or plan of ecclesiastical sites can be used to suggest whether individual complexes were used by Monophysites or not. The best guide we have are the broader historical circumstances of the time, which suggest that the limestone massif is likely to have been Monophysite from at least the 450s, and to have remained as such, in spite of the changing views of the church authorities within Antioch itself. The views of those within Syria Prima (of which the limestone massif is a part) stand in contrast to Syria Secunda (with Apamea as its capital), which remained loyal to Chalcedon and the Diphysite view. The Monophysite stance of Syria Prima is likely to have been accentuated by the leadership of the patriarch Severus from 512 onwards. Severus was deposed in 518, but continued to organise covertly from Alexandria a distinct Monophysite hierarchy (the origins of the modern Syrian Orthodox Church) until his death in 518. During the 530s, John of Tella ordained large numbers of rank and file Monophysite clergy in north-east Syria and Persia. This work was continued from 542 by the bishop of Edessa, Jacob Baradaeus, who made the decisive break with the Orthodox church hierarchy, by consecrating the monk Eugenius as Monophysite metropolitan of Tarsus, and Canon of Seleucia (Frend 1973). Baradaeus travelled throughout rural Syria consecrating bishops and consolidating the new Monophysite church hierarchy.

The role of holy men and women in both conversion and the theological disputes which followed is evident but far from clear. Frend described their role as 'standing channels' of opinion between imperial Orthodoxy and the population of the provinces (1971, 28). The next section will therefore examine their emergence, and begin to assess their role.

### 4.3 Asceticism and the origins of monasticism

The origins of Christian monasticism are usually placed in Egypt with St. Anthony in the third century. Some scholars have viewed such origins as the foundations for *all* monastic practice, with the tradition gradually diffusing from its Egyptian centre towards Palestine, southern Syria (especially the Hauran) and from there to the limestone massif (Vööbus 1960,



66; Meinardus 1999, 35; McNally 2001, 4; Finneran 2002a, 63). The assumption of such a route derives from a number of Syriac sources, but ultimately (according to Jargy 1952) only from one. According to this source, disciples of Pachomius, especially Mar Awgen, are said to have travelled with the idea of monastic life from Egypt to Syria and Mesopotamia. Yet the simple, diffusionist model of monastic origins in Syria which this has prompted can be dismissed on three counts. The first is that none of the Syriac or Greek versions of the Pachomius narrative can be dated earlier than the ninth century (Brock 1984). By this time, given the high profile of Egyptian monasticism, it may have been desirable for Syrian institutions to claim some kind of a heritage from Egypt. The second point is that the later development of monasticism into large, archaeologically visible complexes, betrays a very different layout and use of space. Dayr al-Abyadh in Upper Egypt, for example, is a large, heavily nucleated complex with a semi-fortified appearance. As will be seen in subsequent chapters of this thesis, none of the forms of monastery in northern Syria are like this at all. Finally, and of most relevance to this section, is the fact that the early development of monasticism in its ascetic form was quite different from that taking place in Egypt, and was thoroughly local in character. Schiwietz lists the many differences in methods of prayer and fasting, as well as the fact that the nature of Syrian asceticism (with its frequent practice of open air living, and intense self-abuse through artificial means such as chains or self-imprisonment) were rare in Egyptian monasticism (1938 III, 413-8, cited in Price 1985). Brock makes the comment that:

'In point of fact, the fourth and fifth century ascetics of Syria, who are so well described by Theodoret in his *Historia Religiosa*, were heirs to a remarkable native ascetic tradition that went back to the very beginnings of Christianity.' (1984, 3)

This claim, that asceticism in northern Syria can be traced to the very origins of Christianity, certainly has some credence given the character of the Gospel according to Luke. This gospel, reputedly written in Antioch, has some very particular components not present in the other three conventionally cited gospels. It is worth presenting something of the character of this text, since it indicates an interpretation of Christianity which embraces poverty and encourages a separation from affluent, urban life. The first quotation emphasises the outcast nature of ascetic practice:

'Jesus looked at his disciples and said,  
"Happy are the poor;  
the Kingdom of God is yours!



Happy are you who are hungry now;

you will be filled!

Happy are you who weep now;

you will laugh!

Happy are you when people hate you,

reject you, insult you, and say that you are evil,

All because of the Son of Man.

be glad when that happens, and dance for joy,

Because a great reward is kept for you in heaven.' (*Luke* V:20-23)

The second emphasises poverty, as Jesus instructs his disciples to go out into the villages:

'Then he sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick, after saying to them, 'Take nothing with you for the journey: no stick, no beggar's bag, no food, no money, not even an extra shirt.'" (*Luke* IX:2-4)

Thirdly, a quotation from later in the text carries the issue of poverty into a justification for the lack of possessions:

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom. Sell all your belongings and give them to the poor. Provide for yourselves purses that don't wear out, and save your riches in heaven, where they will never decrease, because no thief can get to them, and no moth destroy them.' (*Luke* 12:33)

Finally, there is the ultimate demand made:

'... none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up everything he has.' (*Luke* 14:33)

To this is added, in the Syriac version, the statement, 'you do not belong to the world' (Brock 1984, 1).

These first century references can be attested also in the second century, through the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, and especially the *Acts of Judas Thomas*. This narrative describes the behaviour of Thomas as he travels around villages, healing the sick and driving out



demons whilst eating only bread and salt and wearing the same clothes all year round (James 1924). Even though this text derives from a period at least three centuries before our best source of ascetic practice, Theodoret's *Historia Religiosa*, the behaviour and intentions of Thomas are exactly the same, and probably therefore form part of a long tradition of such practices.

It seems likely, given the complexity of different traditions of Christian practice existing in western Asia up to the fifth century AD that ascetic theology and behaviour could have been influenced by a diversity of other movements, some perceived to have been on the fringes of Christian belief, others in fact pre-Christian in origin. A strong contender here would be the various sects often referred to collectively as Gnosticism. The emphasis placed by Gnosticism on a division between those who are in possession of knowledge and those who are not concords well with the separation of holy men from society. In this regard, the tradition may derive from pre-Christian, Babylonian beliefs (as first suggested by Anz 1897). Similarities could also be posited between the ascetic tradition and Zoroastrian magi, particularly with regard to their separation as a distinct, priestly caste within Zoroastrian society. Crossovers between Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism have been suggested both on theological grounds (and especially the dualism of good and evil), and because the prophets Bar Kabbas and Bar Coph are known to have had Zoroastrian origins (Lake 1965).

Brock, on the other hand, sees ascetic practice as not only deriving specifically from the Antioch region, but also that it had a solely Christian heritage in being the logical successor to martyrdom. He makes the point that 'if one sees the ascetics of the fourth century onwards as heirs to the martyrs, it helps one realise why they regarded their way of life as simply carrying on the norm of Christian life in pre-Constantinian times' (Brock 1973, 2). The terms used in early Christian literature on the subject of ascetics, he argues, such as 'athletes', engaging in a 'contest' are referring directly to the tradition of martyrdom within the Church. The holy man Macedonius, for example, is described by Theodoret of Cyrillus as occupying mountain tops which became 'his wrestling ground and stadium' (HR XIII:2). Eusebius of Asikha is described as both an 'athlete' and a 'gymnast of virtue' (HR XVIII:126). But for Price, ascetic practice and martyrdom are in fact two quite different ambitions for an individual to hold, and one could, like Origen (the early third century figure) hold a desire for martyrdom yet see this as no substitute for asceticism in everyday life (1985, xxiv).



All of the preceding discussion has focused on the specific theological facets and origins of ascetic practice, and indeed there is much more which could be said on this subject. However, since this thesis is concerned with the *practical* consequences of such practice, and in particular the ways in which it led to the construction and deposition of monastic material culture, I will now turn to the subject of how early holy figures impacted on rural society in Syria.

#### 4.4 Ascetic practice in context

The early development of ascetic practice, and its specific origins in the region of Antioch, have been described. But its peak in terms of sheer numbers of participants extended around 100-125 years from the early fourth to the mid-fifth century. In the *Historia Religiosa*, the 30 portraits which Theodoret presents are of holy men and women in northern Syria, Lebanon, Osrhoene and Mesopotamia. The most common theme among these holy figures is that of living in the open, usually some distance from settled society, wearing few and rudimentary clothes. Usual practice was to eat very little, often just bread, water and salt, to fast frequently, and to spend time in prayer. These rigours are portrayed by Theodoret as part of a contest or a struggle, during which the holy figure attempts to overcome his or her hardship in order to acquire non-human, angelic properties. Often, additional hardship is self-imposed, such as the common trait of wearing irons around the neck and waist. Some acts are more unique, such as Thalelaeus living in a wooden cylinder elevated ten feet above the ground in which he could neither sit nor stand comfortably, or Baradatus living in a wooden chest until dissuaded from doing so. Perhaps the most famous trait is that of perpetual standing, often on top of a pillar (or *stylos*). These practitioners, or *stylites*, include Symeon Stylites the Elder and the Younger, and Daniel the Stylite. Others elevated themselves above the ground in trees (*dendrites*), or high up rock faces within caves (*troglydytes*). Such techniques are discussed by Price, and the inherent contradictions pointed out (1985, 174). Symeon is depicted as ascending a pillar in order to avoid the crowds, even though such histrionics were surely the reason for the crowds in the first place.

Such figures were deliberately setting themselves at some distance from society in not just physical terms, but also conceptually. Writers such as Theodoret, and also the unknown biographers of Daniel the Stylite and Theodore of Sykeon, portray their subjects as having an open resentment towards the decadence of conventional society. They displayed this through their actions as well as by their reluctance to converse with others. Theodoret seems to have used his Episcopal powers to gain access to many of these figures and speak with them, but many, such as Salamanes of Euphratensis, rarely spoke at all. Appearance, in



terms of rudimentary clothing, long hair and no shoes, was used to confront the norms and standards of Hellenistic, or even partially Hellenistic rural, society, and thus to set themselves aside from the majority in sometimes shocking ways.

Yet interaction between these individuals and the settled population is frequent and revealing. Although great efforts were made by these Early Christian writers to emphasise an impression of great distance between the holy men and women and settled society, the physical distances are in fact revealed as being not very far at all. Salamanes lived on the East bank of the Euphrates, sufficiently close to the village of Capersana for the villagers to feel that they owned him. When the village on the opposite bank broke down the holy man's cell and carried him across the water to their own village, the locals of Capersana crept across in the night and 'led him back to themselves' (Theodoret *HR* XVIII:4). This sense of ownership worked once the holy man had gained credence, but prior to this, their deliberate and histrionic otherworldliness, their status as 'the unattached stranger on the edge of the village' as Brown puts it, often resulted in suspicion by the villagers on whose margins they lived (1971, 84). Palladius, for example, was accused of a murder, until he ordered the corpse to rise up and point out the true perpetrator in the crowd (Theodoret *HR* VII:3). Conveniently enough, such suspicion is often overcome by miraculous events such as these, often of a practical nature like healing or the recovery of a lost agricultural yield. And once suspicion is allayed and acceptance gained, these holy figures interacted frequently in the day-to-day events of village life. Brown's thesis (1971, 1982a), that this interaction eventually led to holy figures being used as village patrons, has already been outlined in the previous chapter and there is no need to repeat it here, other than to explore the issue of quite *how* these figures came to enjoy such a position.

First and foremost, there is the idea that holy figures were so hauntingly strange in their appearance and behaviour that they could remain separate from the intricacies of village life, and therefore be trusted as an outsider. Secondly, in order to gain this trust, they offered to play the role of go-between, between The Almighty and themselves. Even though the message of the Gospel was that everyone could receive divine Grace, this role as intercessor meant that they could be 'a professional in a world of amateurs', giving expert guidance through the special channels to God earned by their ascetic behaviour. Brown suggests that in this sense, the holy figure was the inheritor of the classical tradition of the oracle, in which signs were expertly interpreted (1971, 93). Is it then that figures like St. Symeon performed a purely practical role in gaining guidance and performing miracles? In fact, this is not the case, because it is possible to perceive from the hagiographical sources a deep sense of



reverence which facilitated this practical relationship in the first place. Price points out that this derived not just from demonstrations of divine Grace, but the very act of asceticism itself, for they demonstrated that it was possible for a human to transcend the human condition with all of its bodily urges and become angelic on earth. The argument runs then that holy men earned through their strangeness a position of trust which enabled them to act as intercessor. This intercessionary role and all of the dramatic behaviour with which it was associated was a demonstration of the angel in the holy man or woman which instilled not just trust but wonder in the communities on the margins of whom they came to live. The binding relationship which ensued created a sense of social cohesion as communities united first in admiration, then out of necessity and reliance, on *their* holy figure. This enabled that figure to perform various economic, political and legal roles, of which Brown provides ample evidence without the need for repetition here (notable among his examples are acts of exorcism, curses, the suppression of violence and arbitration of disputes and, of course, money lender and financial negotiator with the authorities; 1971, 87-91).

A parallel could be drawn here with Ernest Gellner's account of the holy men of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco during the 1960s (1969). These living saints, referred to either as *Igurramen* or *Ibansalen*, are descendants of Sidi Said Ahansal, a local saint believed to have been descended from the Prophet Mohammad through King Idris in around 800 AH (1397-8 AD). These figures live within villages and play a strong role in the everyday politics of intra- and inter-tribal mediation. Gellner describes this role as 'indulgent, socially acclimatised, illiterate, arbitration-oriented', in deep contrast to religious organisation within the towns, which is formalised, literate and avoids involvement in disputes (1969, 9). The holy men of Zawiye Ahansal, for example, supervise local elections, tend the shrine used for collective oaths and arbitrate in major disputes which cannot be solved by the local mosque. This arbitration, in common with the situation in early Christian Syria, is not portrayed as a random process deriving from the judgement and personality of the holy man. Instead, it is conducted on Qu'ranic grounds, with the holy man interpreting *Sbar'ia* law on behalf of the disputing parties (Gellner 1969, 129). He is therefore portrayed as 'merely' an intermediary, using and developing God's words rather than explicitly employing his own judgement.

Price cautions that Brown tends to overstate the extent to which holy men became involved in the everyday work of the villages in the fourth and fifth centuries (1985, xxviii-xxx). Hagiographies do not lend themselves easily to statistical analysis, so it is difficult to 'test' Brown's thesis. Nevertheless, it is a fact of the literary style of late antique Greek and Syriac hagiographies that the worth of a holy figure is always proven through their interaction with



an ordinary figure or a whole community. There is almost always a miracle which appears to result in 'benefit' for someone else but the holy man, and in this sense Brown's model of interaction must be seen as broadly correct.

#### 4.5 Transitions from holy man to monastery

The process, by which this population of individual ascetics, apparently reluctant to form human relationships and engage in company, collected themselves into communities where interaction was a necessity, is far from clear. The commentary thus far, both in the primary and the secondary literature, has tended to make this process seem somehow irresistible, even inevitable. Tchalenko implies that the impetus for this move came from individual figures. Around the Plain of Dana, for example, it was apparently the ascetics Eusebius and Ammanius who founded first the monastery of Dayr Tell 'Ada, then 'did not delay' in founding several more scattered around the Plain of Dana. He then goes on to develop this model, suggesting that as monks from some of these early foundations themselves sought solitude, then attracted disciples as a result, so more monasteries were established (Tchalenko 1953, 146-8). And indeed, this echoes the writings of Theodoret in many ways, who describes Saint Symeon's early career in a monastery (probably Burj al-Sab), which was built by Eusebonas and Abibion, two pupils of Eusebius (*HR XXVI:4*). Yet, the change from individual to group monasticism is a fundamental one for it involves, to put it simply, a change from monasticism 'as a way of life for the world and not against it' (Stewart 1998, vii). And indeed to be fair, Theodoret does take the time to describe some of the tensions inherent in the process of making the lonely hermits of the hillside gather into institutions of cohabitation.

He describes, for example, a debate between Ammianus and Eusebius, where the former makes the argument that to be solitary is to restrict oneself to self-love, and not to love one's neighbour. Sharing one's wealth, he goes on to say, is evidence of charity (Theodoret *HR IV:4*). The implication is again therefore that the decision to become institutional is personal and theological. No discussion takes place of the broader social and economic incentives to collect rather than to remain remote. This does not disqualify the model proposed in Chapter 3, since hagiographical style dictated that the 'life' of each holy man described should carry evidence for remarkable, courageous personal decisions and deeds. In this sense, broader social pressures would not be suggested as they did not fall within the remit of the writer. And for Theodoret writing in the 440s, it is revealing that the personal choice - as to whether to be solitary, or whether to live in a communal institution - is still a choice



that can be made, implying that both options still existed at this time (Theodoret *HR* XXX:5). The institutional did not rapidly supplant the solitary therefore.

It is unclear quite when this process began, and when the trickle became a flood and institutional became the norm. There is the danger of deceptive references in the primary sources which may lead us astray. Theodoret, for example, describes Abraham as being 'of the same company' as Palladius. However, as Price points out, this may simply mean that the two were part of the same network of holy men in the Antiochene region (1985, 71). That such figures were known to each other and were part of a broader community across the hillsides of northern Syria, of the same established and understood 'way of life' (as Theodoret describes it in *HR* VII), is still at least one step away from them engaging in the establishment and management of a single complex. Many of the descriptions which we have of the ascetic life depicts holy men as shunning any kind of human contact, such as Eusebius of Asikha, who walled himself up within an unroofed enclosure so that his day-to-day devotion would not be interrupted by others (*HR* XVIII:1). At times, this divide is more difficult to delineate. Publius, for example, attracted many followers but made them live in cells separate to his own, though he maintained contact with them (*HR* V:3-4). He is later persuaded that he could oversee monastic discipline more easily if a communal institution is built, so 'he demolished those small cells, and for those brought together he built a single one'. Peter the Galatian was likewise allowed to be a 'companion' of Daniel the Stylite (IX:4), while Theodosius of Mount Amanus was more explicitly welcoming to followers. He not only appears to have made the transition from solitary life to communal living willingly and openly, but displays – at some stage in the second half of the fourth century - early evidence of standardised monastic law, 'checking to see if each detail was carried out in accordance with the rules laid down' (X:4). So it can be seen that transition to full-blown, communal monasticism was by no means a straightforward task, and was beset with theological and philosophical dilemmas. However, it seems clear that by the beginning of the fifth century, this transition was underway.

#### 4.6 Archaeological evidence for the earliest monastic activity

The archaeological evidence for all of this early activity is difficult to find and to interpret. The style of life and activities described in early hagiographies is, by definition, without material culture. Snively comments somewhat pessimistically that 'hermits living in extreme poverty in huts or caves normally leave little trace of themselves: crosses carved on the walls of the cave or a scatter of potsherds, but nothing more' (2001, 58). Tchalenko complains that even during the latter stages of monasticism, we are ignorant as to the accommodation



used by monks (1953 I, 19). Ascetics, it would be easy to conclude, shunned possessions or permanence of dwelling on theological grounds, thus rendering archaeology *almost* redundant. Yet 'almost' is an important qualification to bear in mind, because some hints *are* given in the literature which provide some hope that ascetic practice had a tangible and distinctive material culture. We are told, for example, that Eusebius of Asikha built 'a mere enclosure whose stones he did not even join together with clay' (HR XVIII:1). Also, Limnaeus, 'fenced round by a bare wall built of stones and not joined with clay' (HR XXII:151). These accounts would seem to suggest, firstly, that dwellings (where they *do* exist) are of a poor quality, flimsy construction. But secondly, they also suggest a distinct building style which may help us to interpret structures on the ground. Of course, it may be that Theodoret was simply employing a literary technique in seeking to emphasise the self-chosen poverty of holy figures, without having any genuine knowledge of construction techniques.

Yet we do know that Theodoret visited a number of holy figures *in situ*, and describes the disassembling of structures in order to gain access to those within (for example, Marana and Cyra, HR XXIX:5). Peña, Castellana and Fernandez have sought to interpret various kinds of flimsy structure on the ground as evidence for ascetic practice. They list six distinct kinds of structure, identified on the basis of documentary evidence (1980, 43-6). These include small houses ('maisonettes'), huts or cabins, caves, reoccupation of tombs, reuse of pagan temples and towers. Evidence for some of these categories can be reasonably identified. Cave dwellings are evidenced at Zayarat Shaykh 'Alam al-Din in the Jebel Barisha, for example, with five apertures in the rock in association with a cistern and a rock-cut platform (perhaps for sleeping on) (Peña et al 1987, 108-9). At Burj Baqirha there is some evidence of reuse of the pagan temple. Dayr Sakhur consists of a small structure, poorly built, but in association with a small tower, a cistern and a press (1987, 98). Towers are evidenced both as free standing, individual structures, such as Burj Nasr, and associated with larger complexes, as at Qasr al-Brad. Reoccupation of tombs is more difficult to identify, since so many have subsequently been disturbed. However, a number of monastic complexes, such as Dayruna and Dayr Ayzarara, have rock-cut tombs within them. Determining whether these succeeded or preceded the foundation of the monastery is difficult to ascertain.

In addition, we could include within this category of early ascetic practice stylites' columns. Peña et al consider these a different category altogether, since, for them, division of evidence along behavioural (rather than archaeological) grounds is reasonable. Thus *Les Reclus Syriens* (1980) is a different volume to *Les Stylites Syriens* (1975). Yet, if examined from the point of



view of early evidence for monastic practice in general, these two 'categories' are surely not separate at all. And indeed stylites' columns have been identified in the limestone massif at Qal'at al-Brad, Qal'at Sim'an, Kafr Daryan and elsewhere (Callot 1989). In some cases, these identifications seem credible, as at Kafr Daryan, where a very large, free-standing column lies close to its base but with no other structural remains apart from a small chapel or meeting place to the north-east.



*Figure 24: Example of a stylite's column at Kafr Daryan*

Yet in other cases, as at Sarjibla, the claim made by Tchalenko and Baccache that a stylite's column lies to the east of the central church is more difficult to substantiate, as the circular aperture in the limestone bedrock suggests an ambiguous function (Baccache & Tchalenko 1980, 149). In addition, it is often difficult to tell whether stylites' columns as we observe them today are in the same position and of the same construction as during their period of use, or whether later veneration has led to these structures being renewed, rebuilt or moved. Such deliberate 'monumentalising' may well have occurred at Qal'at Sim'an, for example, where it seems unlikely that Saint Symeon's column would have remained untouched during the construction of a massive new complex after his death in 459.

Price highlights a further problem when looking for archaeological evidence for the earliest, ascetic-oriented monastic practice. This is that it often occurred in locations which later would have become collective institutions, and thus later structures would have superseded



and obscured evidence for earlier activity (Price 1985, xix). For Tchalenko, the early sixth century saw the complete disappearance of earlier monastic constructions, and their replacement with much larger residences (1953, 149). This point of view highlights an important problem in the recording and analysis of monastic sites in Syria, which is that they have generally not been examined with a sense of chronological development in mind. Rather than observing critically the standing fabric in stratigraphic terms, previous scholars have tended to regard these structures as straightforward, single-phase complexes. Tchalenko and Baccache, for example, take the church at the south monastery of Sarjibla to be all one phase (1980, 149). However, it is clear from the standing fabric that the south-east corner was remodelled to facilitate a *martyrion* (complete with grave slab), with its own door, suggesting a later pilgrimage element to the site. If stratigraphic observation such as this – even of a fairly simple nature – is employed, the development of monastic sites from small, eremitic structures to larger, more complex institutions can be observed. The site of Dar Qita, suggested by Butler (1920, 179) and Baccache & Tchalenko (1979, 179) to be synchronous, is determined (below) as a much more complex series of phases. So too at Brayj, where Mattern (1944) made a plan, suggesting a single phase set of buildings consisting of a possible church, collective tombs and three communal buildings. Yet, as preliminary observation has shown, a clear development can be observed here from an initial tower to the east of the site, to a larger L-shaped structure with an annex added on its east side. This development may have occurred at the same time as the construction of further structures to the west, including an accommodation block, a press and a separate communal meeting hall (which Mattern regarded – probably erroneously – as a church), though this cannot be verified stratigraphically.





Figure 25: General view of the monastic site of Brayj from the north

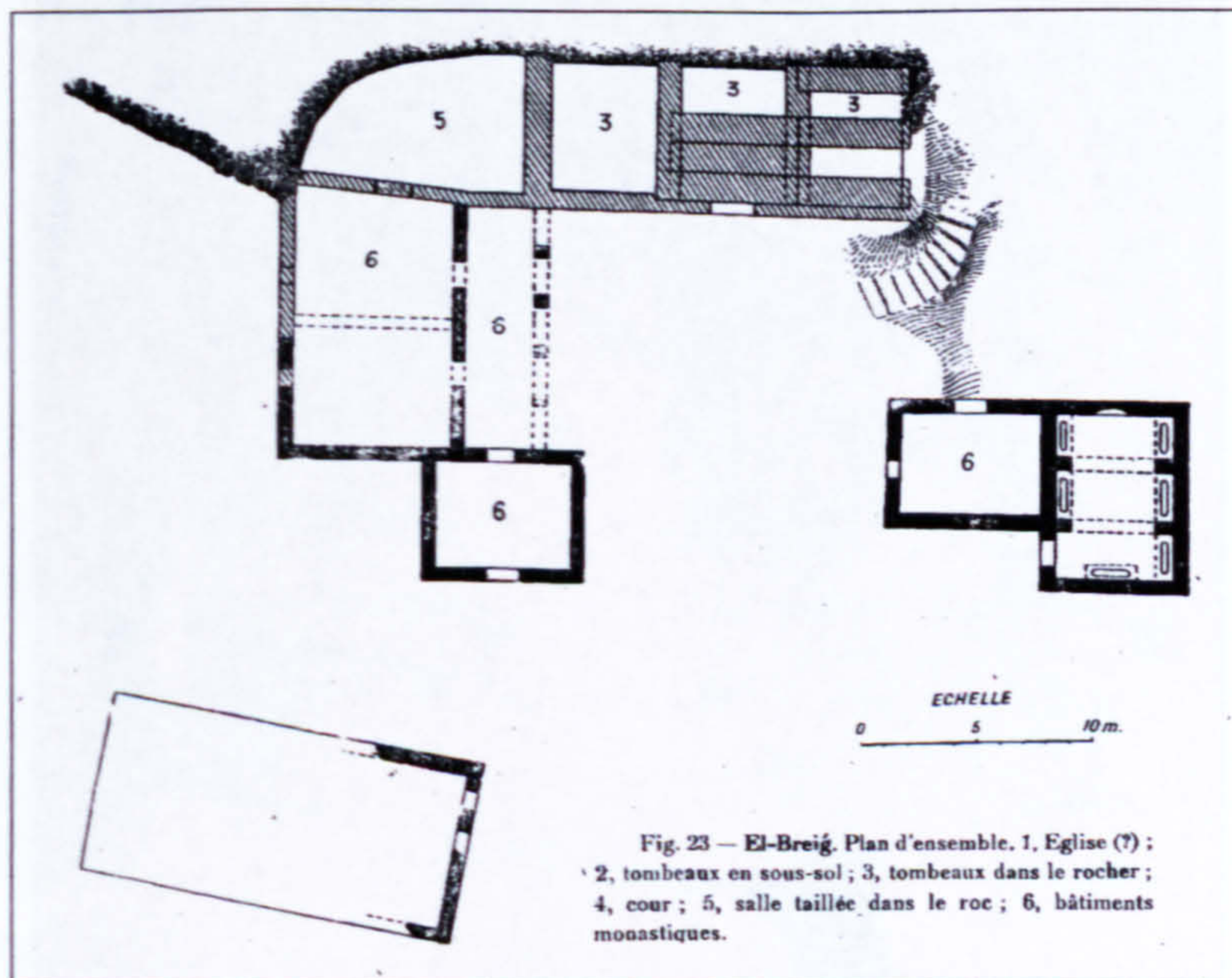


Figure 26: Mattern's single phase plan of Brayj (after Mattern 1944)



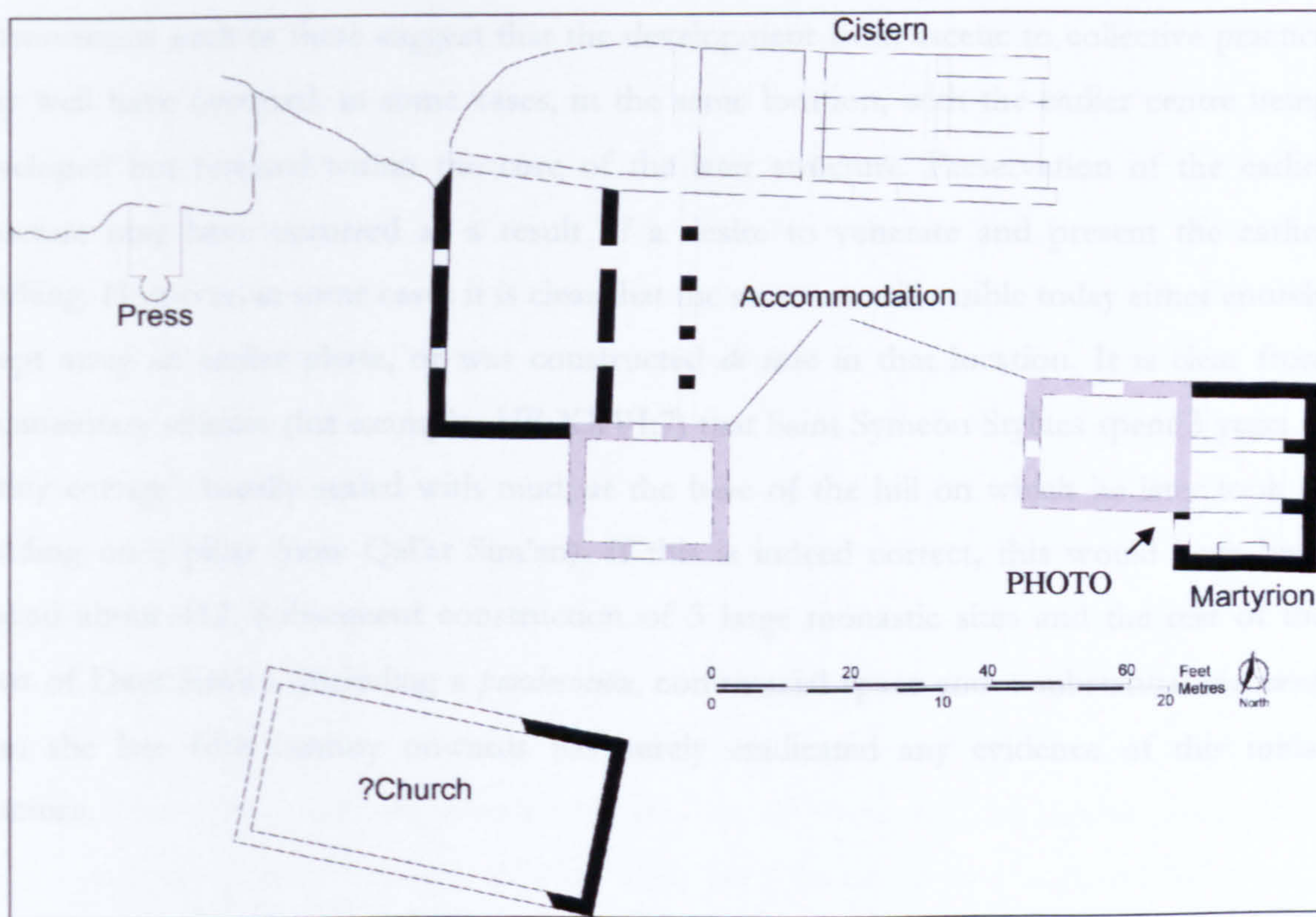


Figure 27: An updated plan of Brayj, showing the two earlier structures (in light grey)

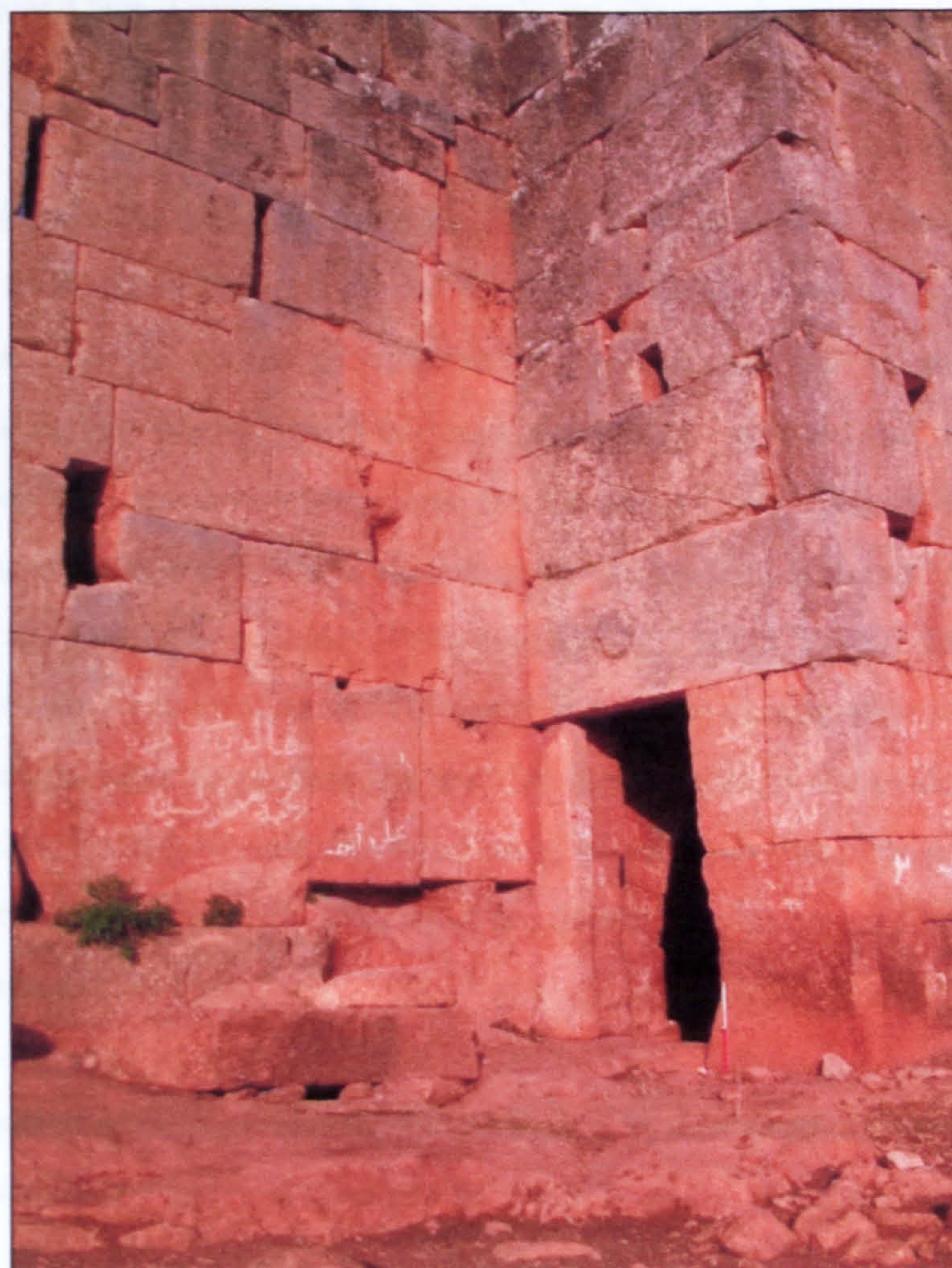


Figure 28: Detail of the east tower at Brayj, showing the stratigraphic relationship between the earlier tower (to the left) and its subsequent extension (to the right) (Scale: 1m)



Observations such as these suggest that the development from ascetic to collective practice may well have occurred, in some cases, in the same location, with the earlier centre being developed but retained within the core of the later structure. Preservation of the earlier structure may have occurred as a result of a desire to venerate and present the earlier dwelling. However, in some cases it is clear that the structure still visible today either entirely swept away an earlier phase, or was constructed *de novo* in that location. It is clear from documentary sources (for example, *HR XXVI:7*) that Saint Symeon Stylites spent 3 years in a 'tiny cottage', usually sealed with mud, at the base of the hill on which he later took to standing on a pillar (now Qal'at Sim'an). If this is indeed correct, this would have been around about 412. Subsequent construction of 3 large monastic sites and the rest of the town of Dayr Sim'an (including a *pandocheion*, commercial space and a substantial *via sacra*) from the late fifth century onwards has surely eradicated any evidence of this initial structure.

In other cases, it would seem that the monastery has been constructed *de novo*, with no surviving evidence (either documentary or archaeological) for an earlier phase. This is probably the case at Dayr Turmanin, for example on the south-eastern slopes above the Plain of Dana.

This discussion of the archaeological evidence for the early phases of monastic practice in northern Syria is further complicated by the fact that deciding on what is – and crucially what is not – a monastic site on the ground can be very difficult. This is perhaps especially the case where the earliest phases are concerned, since they are often rudimentary, diverse form and usually do not bear any inscriptions. Sites such as Dayr Mi'az A, for example, or Dayr Burj Jalahah, are claimed to be monastic sites, yet are ambiguous and could equally have been secular agricultural complexes (Peña et al 1987, 171-2, 179-180). In order to bring some clarity to this issue, it is important to be very clear about exactly what a monastery was in late antique Syria, in order to prepare the way for the analysis of the evidence in Chapter 5. In order to do this, I will now examine what range of activities were considered typical of monasticism in fifth and sixth century Syria. This definition will begin from the point of view of the documentary sources.

#### **4.7 Documents and anxieties of definition: what *is* a Syrian monastery?**

The concept of what is – and often, crucially, what is not – a Christian monastery has occupied scholars throughout western Asia and Europe for some time now. McNally, for example, discusses the ways in which such definitions may vary not only through time and



across space, but also among different but contemporary implementations of monastic life (2001, 3-11). Snively cautions that archaeologists have often been too quick to assign the monastic 'label' to a site, and indeed that archaeology may not be able to identify certain forms of monastic practice at all (2001, 58). Faced with the problem of deciding whether or not a set of settlement remains on the ground derive (whether wholly or partially, for all of its existence or periodically) from monastic practice, different approaches have been used. Chris Loveluck's discussion of the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Flixborough has led him to consider the different ways in which justifications of a monastic identification have been made. He highlights site morphology, architectural components, the presence of a church, evidence for craftworking and literacy, burials of a single gender, as well as evidence for particular kinds of faunal procurement as all being used as evidence for a monastic 'signature' on the ground. Yet, he argues, all of these categories suffer from 'the assumption of single labels, often coinciding with textually-derived terms, such as minster, monastery, manor, *caput* or vill centre' (Loveluck 2001, 120). He goes on to say that '(t)extual evidence may provide 'snap-shots' around which models of settlement evolution can be constructed, but such models may overlook settlement changes during historically less 'visible' periods' (2001, 121). It is therefore entirely possible that by levering archaeological evidence into historically defined models, we are missing the opportunity provided by material evidence to inform us about hitherto unidentified forms of settlement.

In a sense, this debate returns to the one highlighted in Chapter 2 regarding the role of material culture in relation to historical sources. There, it was argued that use of both historical and archaeological material is essential in informing debate and conclusions as fully as possible. In this thesis, archaeology forms the lead and has a legitimate role to play in doing so. The historical sources used thus far have tended to be those of the victorious ideologies and narratives which came to dominate and succeed, often leaving 'quieter', undocumented aspects of society unrevealed. Archaeology is well equipped to inform both the broad scale and long term changes later explored in Chapter 5, and the day-to-day moments of social interaction as discussed in Chapter 6. However, problems occur when trying to marry archaeological and documentary evidence together, since aligning the two can mask much broader differences in the kinds of information which each represents. When trying to use both forms of evidence to identify what a monastic site actually is, Ó Carragáin points out that among the pre-Romanesque ecclesiastical complexes of Ireland, not all sites identified as monastic contain all of the prescribed 'monastic' elements, such as round towers, concentric enclosures or other features (2002, 357). Furthermore, some non-monastic, secular church sites take on a 'monastic' character. These difficulties - of aligning



definition with evidence on the ground - are similar to Loveluck's anxiety that the elements to be seen at Flixborough do not necessarily, exclusively belong to monasteries. Ó Carragáin even goes so far as to state that the whole idea of a clearly definable material culture which characterises early Irish monasticism is questionable. The essential difference here is that for Ó Carragáin the problem lies in an actual overlap between institutions of differing natures in antiquity, whereas for Loveluck it is that archaeologists are being led astray by terms of reference imposed today by the historical sources.

So, because of these obvious difficulties, the task which lies ahead is to review very cautiously the evidence offered by documentary sources, in order to examine *if* it can be useful and informative for the primarily archaeological study carried out here. Thus, three issues will be examined in particular. These are: do we have conclusive evidence for distinct settlements which we can call monasteries, what is the nature of the activity within these settlements, and is there at least some evidence for a material correlate to such activity?

What follows is, by necessity, somewhat brief, and does not make exhaustive use of the documentary sources available, but it is hoped that because those used are some of the most suitable and thorough sources available, they give a reasonable impression of how we may define a monastery in documentary terms.

The first question is whether there existed in the fifth and sixth centuries a type of settlement which was defined as a monastery by those who lived in and around it. For this, we must examine the origins of the terms used. The term 'monastery' used in the English language derives from the Greek *monos* (alone). The word *monasterion* derives from this, and was used in Greek to denote a monastic settlement. A similar term, *monachos*, was used in fourth century Egypt - certainly as early as 324 - to denote a particular kind of Christian, probably the ascetics who were originally known as *apotaktikoi* (McNally 2001, 3; Judge 1977). It has been suggested that the term was used as early as 305 to apply specifically to Anthony and his kind, figures who secluded themselves from society without possessions in celibacy, as implied by the *Life of Anthony* written by Athanasius somewhat later in the 350s (Judge 1977, 77). Theodoret, however, uses the terms *monasterion* or *monachos* very rarely, preferring instead to use a consciously classical form of Greek which would not contain such relatively modern terms (Price 1985, 93). He prefers instead to use terms such as 'philosophical retreat' (IV:2), a 'company of athletes' (IX:12) and (most commonly of all) 'wrestling school' (for example, II:9). There is one passage during which Theodoret uses *monasterion* explicitly, referring to the miraculous water supply used by a monastery in Cilicia



(X:7). However, it has been suggested that this passage is anomalous and was in fact inserted later (Canivet 1977). Nevertheless, the very fact that Theodoret refers to particular kinds of settlement inhabited by collections of holy men and women for the purposes of Christian spiritual contemplation, strongly implies that he knew what he meant by 'wrestling schools', and that that meaning is very close to our understanding of *monasterion*.

Others are more clear in their use of the term *monasterion*. The anonymous hagiographer of St.Theodore of Sykeon used the term frequently throughout their account, referring to St.Theodore's life during the late sixth century in Anatolia (for example, in *Theodore* LII, LIV & LXIX).

Other forms of evidence suggest the existence of a clear monastic terminology to designate particular forms of settlement. Inscriptions, for example, have yielded uses of the terms *monasterion* and *dayr*. Examples in the limestone massif are not known (at least according to the evidence provided by Jalalbert & Mouterde 1939, Tchalenko 1953 II & Trombley 2004), but in the Hauran of southern Syria, the site of Dayr al-Nasrani clearly displays the term *monasterion* in a lintel inscription which asks, 'O God of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, bless the monastery...' (Littmann et al 1921, 334).

Having resolved that there is good evidence for the existence of distinct settlements which were clearly defined as monasteries, the second issue for discussion here is what activities were carried out in such settlements which may have made them distinctive as such. Here again, Theodoret provides some helpful suggestions. Since his intention in *Historia Religiosa* seems to have been the explication of spiritual zeal among the holy men of Syria, religious contemplation features highly among the activities described. This takes two forms: individual prayer but also communal prayer. The former is evidenced in many cases, such as Zebinas doing so while perpetually standing (*HR* XXIV:1), and the stylites Symeon and Daniel doing so on top of a pillar (*HR* XXVI:10; *St.Daniel* XXVI). Evidence for communal prayer is provided by Julian's instructions to his followers to offer 'common hymnody to God' (*HR* II:5).

Another activity described by Theodoret is developed, communal worship. It is interesting to note that this is well evidenced as being carried out both within a purpose-built structure, such as Limnaeus constructing two buildings within which he instructed his followers to sing and pray (*HR* XXII:7), but in fact not always necessarily within a church, as at Tell 'Ada where Eusebius entreats his followers in this way:



‘He charged them to have intercourse with God continually and leave no opportunity free from this activity, but to perform the appointed offices in common and in the intermediate portions of the day entreat God and beg for salvation each one of his own, whether in the shade of a tree or by some rock or wherever he might enjoy solitude, either standing or lying on the ground.’ (HR IV:5)

In other cases, and perhaps especially in the earlier stages of monasticism, monks used the nearby village church in order to worship, and may also have acted also as clergy for that village (as in HR XVII:4).

Another important and defining set of activities described by Theodoret as being carried out by holy figures within monastic complexes are those loosely defined under the heading ‘domestic’ factors. This might include, for example, accommodation (the practice of sleeping regularly in one, specific and delineated place). Although this factor may seem far from surprising it marks quite a change from the often nomadic existence of earlier ascetic practice. This is evidenced as being a communal activity, with one, central accommodation block, by Marcianus’ instruction to his followers to build themselves a place to live together, or Publius building central accommodation so that he could keep a strict eye on the community (HR III:5, V:4). In other cases, central, communal complexes are suggested as being used for meetings and gatherings, as at the monastery of Theodore of Sykeon, where an annual public procession ended up there after going round all of the neighbouring villages (*Theodore* CXII). Alternatively, the practice of communities sleeping in separate, delineated structures is suggested by the early stages of Publius’ monastery (HR V:3). Loose conglomerations of ascetics living together are suggested by Vööbus as having been termed *ḥīrtā* in Syriac (Vööbus 1960, 115-6, 167). This form of monastic accommodation is similar to, though perhaps spatially a tighter unit than, the style of complex termed *λαύρα* in Greek and described by Cyril of Scythopolis in Palestine (CS 23:20 – 26:25). At a similar monastery near Chalcis, a rule of silence was imposed by Limnaeus, thereby implying that communal activity – whether for accommodation or meetings – was occurring, otherwise such a rule would not seem necessary (HR XXII:2).

The practice of producing and storing agricultural produce (whether for subsistence use or for surplus – this distinction is discussed at greater length in Chapters 3 and 6) is also well evidenced. In Cilicia, Theodosius instructed his community to engage in crop production, as well as craft activities such as the weaving of mats (HR X:2). Julian orders his followers to



build a structure in which to store preserves, then chastises them for making it immodestly large (II:4).

The last factor is not strictly an activity, but may nevertheless help to define what is and what is not a monastic site. The practice of enclosing a monastic settlement in order to form a clearly delineated space is evidenced in a number of instances. This may involve trying to keep unwanted disciples away, such as the two nuns Marana and Cyra who made an enclosure of 'clay and stones', but then had servants 'eager to share their life with them' live in separate buildings outside the enclosure (*HR XXIX:2*). Bassus instructs his flock not to go outside the gate in order to acquire food, but to live inside and receive food only 'by divine grace' (*XXVI:8*). There is no evidence provided at this stage by Theodoret, and very little in any of the other sources either, for enclosures being built through a need for defence from raiding or physical attack. This may have been different within areas closer to the desert fringe like the Hauran of southern Syria, but it seems to have been the case for the north.

The factors discussed above therefore suggest five activities which are regularly described as taking place within monastic settlements. These are: prayer and contemplation, communal worship, accommodation, production and enclosure. A range of other activities can be suggested which are not so obviously evidenced by contemporary sources, but which may also help us to define what a monastery was by what went on there. Trombley's assertion that baptisteries played a crucial role in the conversion of northern Syria to Christianity throughout the fifth and sixth centuries implies that monastic sites may have been involved in this (2004). At least one site, which had a clearly monastic function – Qal'at Sim'an – possessed a baptistery from the late fifth century. But though it is clear from this example that large-scale baptism occurred within or close to a monastery, this is perhaps not a consistent enough phenomenon to use baptismal evidence as a specifically *defining* characteristic for monastic sites. It occurred at some, but not all monastic sites.

Further evidence may be taken from much more recent, historical and travellers' accounts. While it is problematic to argue that monasteries in the nineteenth century were simply unchanged versions of monasteries from the sixth century, by use of analogy it should be possible to at least use evidence of activities from such accounts to *suggest* activities for earlier periods. In this sense, Wylie's (1985) and later Hodder's (1999) notion of what is termed 'relational' analogy may be appropriate, since this permits 'an understanding of the causal relationships between variables' (Hodder 1999, 46), so long as we can be sure that the



two societies being examined together are genuinely comparable. The approach known in North American archaeological tradition as the direct historical approach is also similar, advocating working back to a historically less well understood period from a 'documented historic horizon', so long as there is an appreciable overlap between the 'historically identified complexes' and those of an earlier period (Willey & Sabloff 1974, 114).

With these cautions in mind, what could travellers' and historians' accounts of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries suggest of monastic complexes in earlier periods? Oswald Parry's description of life in the monastery of Dayr al-Za'afaran in the Tur 'Abdin during the 1890s suggests that at that time, educational gatherings were of central importance to the daily running of the place. The schooling of young boys by monks is described, in the unmistakably idealistic yet sardonic style of Orientalist travel literature, as follows:

'There sat on the open space of the balcony, on the opposite side of the court to my room, a group of boys and deacons of the Deir around an elderly monk named Rahab Melki...There they sat in their white tunics and red caps round the dark-robed monk, each with an ancient folio, as heavy as he could carry, on his knee, spelling out the words or reciting in the loud and droning voice that soon became so familiar to my ear. After a time, would follow a lesson in chanting, far less pleasing to listen to, for all sang at once and in different keys.'  
(reprinted in Parry 2001, 121)

Festugière describes the importance of education in the everyday running of monastic life, using the evidence provided for the late fourth century by John Chrysostom (1959, 181-192). Vööbus describes the documentary evidence for wandering monks travelling in the region of Edessa and acting as itinerant teachers (1960, 404-410), and Rousseau describes the special obligation felt by ascetics to teach their disciples (1998, 231).

Parry's account also describes the absolutely central importance of agricultural production in facilitating and shaping social practice in the monastery (2001, 124-5, 127). He also suggests that the monastery was a locus for gatherings of various kinds; political, ceremonial and processional.

So, given the activities defined here, it is appropriate to suggest that a definition for a monastery during the fifth and sixth centuries would be a structure or complex of structures



used for the sustained contemplation of God under a Christian belief system. This necessitated residential accommodation, and often - but not necessarily - the generation of subsistence materials. Such a complex may have involved the use of a church, whether on- or off-site.

Such a complex was referred to in late Roman Syria as *dayro* (Syriac) or *monasterion* (Greek). This nomenclature is often implied in the place names of Syria, especially through use of the Arabicised term *dayr*, though in other terms also (which are discussed more fully in Tchalenko 1953 I, 150; 1953 II, 52). Although there are complications when trying to use this term at face value as straightforwardly signifying an ancient monastery, its continued usage can often be a useful - if not strictly defining - indicator.

#### 4.8 Material definitions of monasticism

The purpose of the previous section has been to define what a monastery was for those using and living close to them during the fifth and sixth centuries, according to the range of activities carried out within them. Since the bulk of the evidence used in the analyses presented later in this thesis is archaeological, it is necessary now to assess what the material evidence would be, if any, for each of the activities defined as being 'monastic'. Could the above definition of a monastery have an equally definable material correlate? Let us assess the likelihood of this by examining each activity in turn.

The first of the five activities highlighted is probably the most problematic. Prayer and contemplation do not, *almost* by definition, require particular forms of material culture since they are purely cerebral activities. In many religions, including Christianity, it is often emphasised that nothing is required in order to pray. In Islam, for example, it is merely the *qibla*, or direction, which is of importance (Kuban 1974, 1). However, both focuses for, and responses to, prayer may produce archaeological evidence. Since most of the evidence dealt with here is in the form of standing buildings, objects used as aids to contemplation are unlikely to be forthcoming. Consequently, the forms of material culture associated with Christian prayer in the modern world, such as crosses, beads, icons and texts cannot always be relied upon to suggest the presence of contemplative activity. Inscribed versions of these forms are often present though. At a great many sites, inscribed crosses are evident (an analysis of which has been carried out by Naccache 1992). At others, incised fish, Chi-Rho, 'One God' and other longer inscriptions in Greek or Syriac are present. These can be in script, but often are pictorial, such as the image of a stylite's column at Shaykh Sulayman (Peña et al 1975, plate 21). In some cases, inscriptions may represent an expression of



identity and ownership, and may not necessarily have represented *solely* the focus of prayer. However, they are presumably always expressions of identity and ownership by Christians, who by definition must undertake prayer to God in order to maintain hope of salvation and obtain guidance. Nor should we, as archaeologists, treat them lightly. To use and maintain such symbols within the religiously fluid and contested context of the fifth and sixth centuries surely represents a conscious and deliberate use of symbolism, meant to convey not just the Christianity of a particular space, but its newly *Christianised* nature as well. Just as monks in Egypt placed graffiti crosses on the walls of newly-claimed pagan temples (Finneran 2002, 75), the incised crosses adorning buildings in the Syrian countryside are meant to be read as loaded, provocative messages. It would be fair to conclude then that, taken collectively, inscriptions of various forms may be used to suggest at least some Christian contemplative activity on a site.



*Figure 29: Incised decoration at the monastic site of Dayr Dehes*

The next form of activity, that of developed communal worship, is fairly clearly attested in archaeological terms. In spite of debates about what constitutes a church in other areas of the early Christian world, the evidence for northern Syria seems reasonably clear, and has been summarised in section 4.1. Churches were already an established architectural entity by the time developed monasteries emerged into the settlement pattern, and although variation exists, the standard east-west basilica with an apsidal end can be reliably understood to be a church by the end of the fourth century. It has been suggested that monastic churches were



in general notably smaller and simpler than communal, village churches (Tchalenko 1953 I, 162), a distinction which may help to define which churches are monastic and which not where ambiguity exists. However, as noted in the review of documentary evidence in the previous section, it is now clear that monasteries need not necessarily have possessed a church of their own. This could either have been because a village church served for the monastic community also (which provokes interesting issues of interaction with the secular community), or because communal worship and the sacrament of the Eucharist in some monasteries simply did not take place within a church at all. In the former case, a shared monastic-secular church may have been the situation at Ksajba, for example, Al-Ruquq/Hayr Salah or Qal'at al-Brayj/Birat Kaftin. In cases where the Eucharist may never have been carried out within a church context at all, a church may never have been present at the site of Dayr Tell 'Ada (if indeed this *is* the famed monastic site widely believed to have been the same as that described by Theodoret [HR IV]).

Added to this could be objects indicative of Eucharistic activity, such as liturgical vessels. Marlia Mango has analysed assemblages of early sixth century silver plate from Kaper Koraon and elsewhere, for example (Mango 1986). However, instances of such objects are rare, and cannot be relied on to provide definitive evidence in the majority of cases.

A third factor is domestic activity. This is attested in various forms, and can be very clear. Accommodation complexes are identifiable in fairly straightforward ways, consisting of large structures, often as large as 200m<sup>2</sup>. In many cases, such as at Qal'at al-Brad and Dayr Turmanin, these are of two storeys and with very few internal subdivisions.





*Figure 30: The accommodation building at Qasr al-Brad*

In other cases, as in the concentrations of towers around Burj Jalahah, Burj Nasr and Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi, domestic accommodation is clear in the form of cupboard hollows, or aumbries, windows and other features set within the masonry walls.

These seem to suggest an essentially uniform type of tower a number of stories, typically two but sometimes of more or more. What is more difficult to be clear about is buildings which are in such poor and simple construction, or in such a poor state of preservation, that identifying 'domestic' from any other kind of use is problematic. At Khirbat Sijun, for example, a tower with a regular diameter of 3.4 m and probably only ever of one or two stories is present. One could have been a domestic structure, but could equally have been an oil-lamp tower or other agricultural building. In such cases, it is very difficult to be sure without excavation, and even then the identification of many cases is likely to be an exercise that will be difficult to undertake.

Subsequent work and production are similarly difficult to be interpreted in any way. However, the tower which present, and are clearly identified. Furthermore, it is possible to identify a number of the analysis of Keller and others (Keller 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003) and other work done was for clues or proper 'reading' and points to other work done, and would indicate that they had used to create a range of more 'qualitative' information about the tower which may have produced the original work done. For example, the tower at Qasr al-Brad, 1998, 1, 11, shows a tower which is a good example of a tower which





*Figure 31: Domestic use of towers as evidenced by aumbries at Burj Jalahah*

These seem to suggest an absolutely uniform layout repeated over a number of storeys, typically two but sometimes as many as seven. What is more difficult to be clear about is buildings which are of such poor and simple construction, or in such a poor state of preservation, that identifying 'domestic' from any other form of use is problematic. At Khirbat Saghrir, for example, a stone, rectangular structure of 3.5 x 5m and probably only ever of only one storey is present. This could have been a domestic structure, but could equally have been an animal byre or other agricultural building. In such cases, it is very difficult to be sure without excavation, and even then the stratification in many cases is likely to be so shallow that little additional information would be forthcoming.

Subsistence and production are similarly diverse in their interpretive clarity. Presses are very often present, and are clearly delineated. Furthermore, it is usually possible to tell – thanks to the analyses of Callot and others (Callot 1984; Tate 1992, Decker 2001) - whether the press was for olives or grapes. Smaller hand presses are often present also, and would probably have been used to crush a range of fruits. Querns are often evidenced also. Field systems which may have produced the crops for such presses have been suggested by Tchalenko (for example, at Qasr al-Banat, 1953 I, 174), though – in common with field systems throughout



Europe – it often unclear whether these were contemporary with the settlement in question, or are in fact much more recent. As modern settlement in northern Syria expands, as it is doing at a very rapid rate in such villages as Sarjibla, Dart ‘Azza, Dana and elsewhere, the evidence for such systems is being jeopardised. Corona and other forms of satellite/aerial imagery may be of use here.

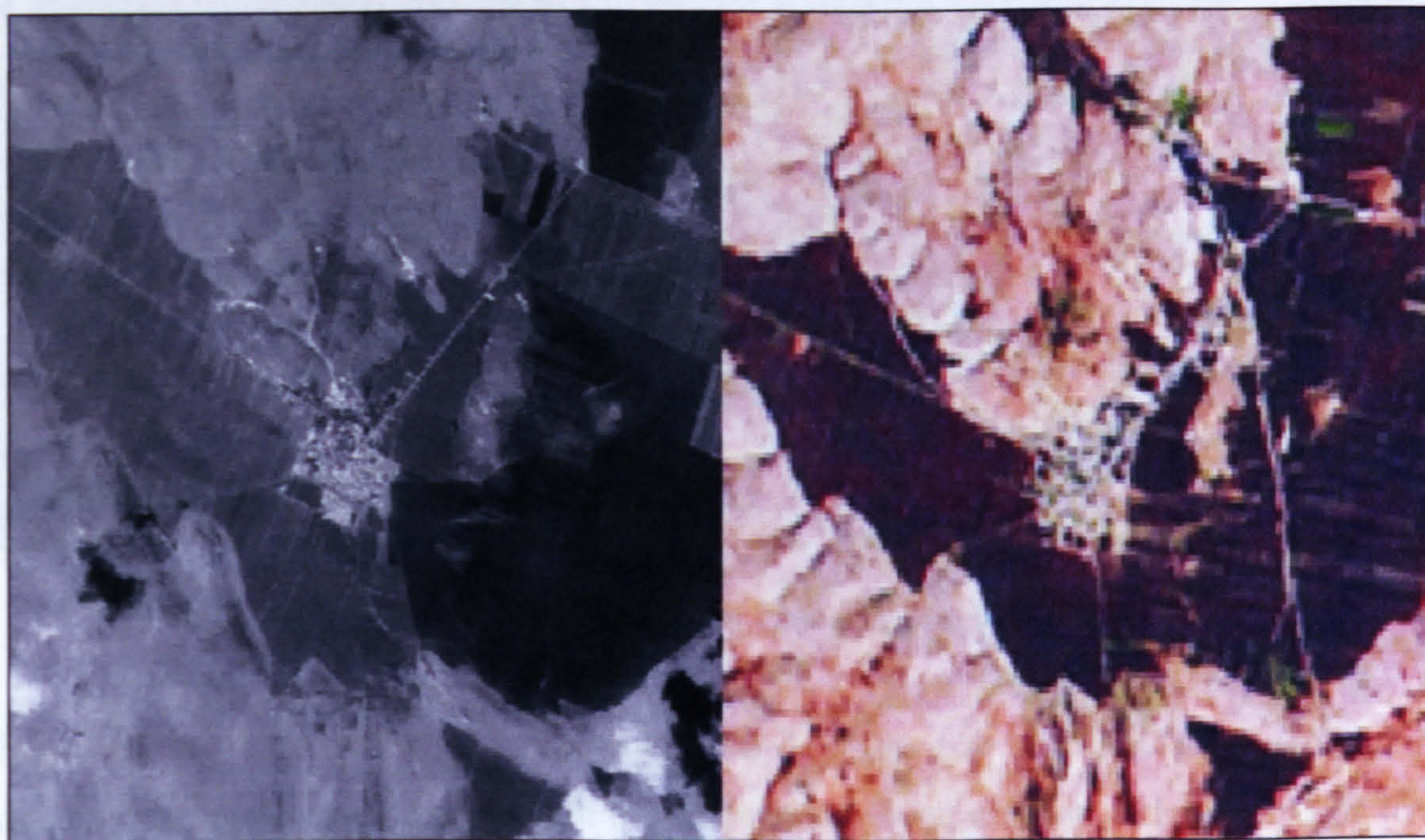


Figure 32: On the left is a Corona image of the village of Sirmada from the late 1960s. The expansion of this village is illustrated by the Landsat on the right taken in the 1990s

Returning to the ground, cisterns are very visible on archaeological sites (unless covered with debris).





*Figure 33: An example of a cistern at Dayr Turmanin*

However, other aspects of the subsistence and production activities suggested by the documentary record are more difficult to interpret. Although weaving and rope making have been extraordinarily well attested through excavation evidence at Dayr 'Ain 'Abata in Jordan (Politis 2006), such evidence is likely to be rare in northern Syria given the shallow nature of archaeological deposits. Storage structures may not suggest themselves today as anything but empty, rectangular stone buildings. Although both subterranean and built examples of storage structures could be suggested at Qasr al-Brad and elsewhere (see Chapter 6), interpretive clarity is problematic.

Evidence for forms of monastic enclosure are perhaps somewhat easier to identify, in being a clearly visible physical element on many sites. Although some scholars have been careful to point out that monasteries in the very north of the limestone massif tend to possess rather less of an enclosure wall than those further south, many sites in the north nevertheless were clearly enclosed. Kafr Daryan, Dayr Sim'an (NW), Dayruna and many others include clear delineations of space, even if the enclosure was not truly defensive in character. Potential problems exist where those enclosure walls have been robbed or moved in subsequent centuries. This is especially the case where those walls lie some distance away from the central monastic buildings. At Qasr al-Brad, for example, though an enclosure wall exists, its construction for the majority of its length appears very similar to the walls defining modern agricultural fields in the vicinity. The monastic enclosure may have been reinstated on more



or less the same lines as the late antique feature, or could have been moved to accommodate new farming priorities. Thus, although enclosure walls are often clearly and apparently reliably evidenced, the construction of that wall requires careful checking and verification.



*Figure 34: An example of an enclosure wall (in the foreground) at Dayr Dehes*

Taken together, these various material manifestations provide potentially enough information for an interpretation to be made about whether a particular site was 'monastic' or not. But it is equally clear that potential problems exist when identifying all of the apparently 'monastic' activities described above, whether because such activities are in themselves only ever ambiguously 'monastic' or because of taphonomy and preservation. It is possible to identify a monastery on the ground according to the definition given in the previous section, but every case must be assessed carefully and individually for that definition to 'work'.

#### **4.9 Variation in monastic practice and material form**

It is equally clear that variation within monastic practice, which could have been regarded as normal and inevitable in this period, would result in variation in the material evidence too. For example, Vööbus has pointed out the long period of overlap between the older, ascetic monastic tradition, and the rapidly developing coenobitic complex (1960, 140). Some monasteries progressed more rapidly towards collective settlement, others perhaps remained looser collections of individual ascetics for a longer period. The fact that it is often very



difficult to tell when monastic sites fell *out* of use, and thus were either abandoned or superseded as a settlement form, contributes to the complexity of this issue. Although it *seems* to be the case that of the three distinct forms of monastic life, a general progression from eremitic practice to *laurum* to *coenobium* can be suggested, in fact no clear and rapid chronological progression can be discerned from one to the next (as already mentioned, for example, by Vööbus, who warns of the dangers of assuming a smooth and rapid progression from one form to the next [1960, 140]). Thus, we should be wary of suggesting too assuredly that eremitic monasticism became increasingly focused on the *laura*, which in turn then developed into large, eremitic institutions. All three, it seems, may have co-existed for much of the fifth and sixth centuries, especially if we consider the mood of intense experimentation and lack of firm monastic rules discussed earlier in this chapter. We know of stylites in Syria as late as Symeon the Younger (d.596), even into the eleventh century for lesser known figures, and the 1840s in Georgia (Peña et al 1975, 80-90). However, there is some evidence to suggest that *in some cases*, such a chain of events may have occurred, while in others monasteries clearly developed in different ways. The position adopted here is that a general progression towards an increasingly institutional lifestyle for monasteries took place, but that progression took many forms. Within this general movement towards collective organisation, eremitic and ascetic practice continued, both because, no doubt, of the desire of individuals to do so and the nature of society in allowing them to do so, and because such practice continued to contribute to the ideological and theological position of monastic Christianity.

One stark and very obvious difference often discussed by scholars with relation to developed, coenobitic institutions is the difference between Antiochene monasteries, with their church on the south side of a courtyard, communal tomb, reception room and accommodation all loosely collected within an approximately enclosed space, and Apamean complexes, with their much tighter collection of buildings within a walled enclosure, and with church and collective tomb together (Tchalenko 1953 I, 163-173; Tate 1992, 65-68). Yet even within these two broad geographically defined types, marked variation exists which has not always been recognised previously. These may be in terms of the number of elements they contain, their setting, their distance from secular settlement, their productive and subsistence capabilities, their scale, materials and accessibility. Others have sought to classify these differences primarily according to size and position (Tchalenko 1953 I, 169; Tate 1992, 267, 339; Peña et al 1987), others according to the intentions of the holy figure who founded the institution and whose personal choice led to the architectural composition extant today (such as Peña et al's series of titles, *Les Stylites Syriens*, *Les Reclus Syriens* and *Les*



*Cénobites Syriens* [1975, 1980, 1983]). Yet none have attempted to understand these various different forms as different reactions to a complex social, economic *and* political milieu, within a period of great experimentation.

It is fairly clear that the period from the fourth to the seventh centuries was a period of great experiment in the formation of monastic communities. Recent considerations of this issue have tended to stress diversity. Some of this diversity may derive from genuine differences in what it was believed a Christian, and indeed a monastic, life should be. Carver encourages us to 'lift the blanket of 'Christianisation' to reveal an exciting, querulous world of independent thinking' (2003a, 4). But also, the differences occurring when belief interacts in collective ways with social organisation in the form of ideological expression, may create differences within communities and between them. These differences could be ethnic (such as between Greek and Syriac speaking communities), they could be pro- or anti-imperial, or they could be intellectual as monastic communities struggled to combine spiritual and social concerns. Differences of scale could reflect diverse intentions, or just discrepancies in the range of resources. There could be differences between monasteries which derive from pre-existing architectural norms, or from the extent of pre-existing regional rivalries or insularity.

Such differences were probably exacerbated by timing, since it is arguable that on the one hand, the circumstances which enable monasteries to become not just numerous but powerful in terms of tenorial and ideological command existed from the late fourth century (as outlined in section 3.5), but on the other hand the kinds of specific and repeated morphological configurations typical of later periods had not yet been decided on by monastic communities. So although general trajectories can be identified within the historical process, with monasticism gradually becoming more and more powerful within rural society, and general traits identified within monastic sites based on a number of examples, we must be wary of drawing direct equations between the two. Tchalenko tended to rely on the relatively small number of sites which he had studied, like Qasr al-Banat, Dayr Sim'an, Dell Tell Ada and Dayr Turmanin, and considered other kinds of monasteries to be simply minor variants of the architectural types represented and 'proved' by these few (1953 I, 169-170). Similarly, Peter Brown's summary of the impact of late antique monasticism, though making a clear distinction between developments in east and west, assigns something of a general, collective label to the activities of monasteries within each which may be deceptive (see, for example, Brown 1974, 110-111).



This deceptive impression, of there being a unified monasticism, is perhaps especially acute in the eastern Mediterranean. A number of scholars have commented on the degree to which standardised monastic rules and orders became a factor in Europe from the time of St. Benedict, but were far less the norm in western Asia. Much discussion has taken place of St. Basil, Bishop of Caesarea, who during the 360s developed a series of rules in order to guide the monks under his care in Asia Minor (*Regulae*, Rousseau 1994). But these were in fact a diverse set of writings, subject to editing and accretion, rather than closely followed and clearly set out guidelines. Likewise two further sets of rules, those written by Ephrem in the mid-fourth century, and those by Rabbula in the early fifth, were by no means regarded as clear and unequivocal manuals. Although these rules discuss spiritual matters in some detail, they are not closely prescriptive of such details as daily routine, which may have had a regularising impact on the physical layout of monasteries. Rousseau has argued that even as late as the *Lives of the Eastern Saints* written by John of Ephesus in the 560s, the rule of the local archimandrite and the long-held 'traditions' of individual monastic establishments had a much greater impact on daily life than universal rules. Indeed, Rousseau even goes on to argue that although monastic legislature existed earlier in western Asia than in Europe, it was more varied and more diversely applied in the former than the latter for some centuries (2000, 760-1). Dunn argues that the earliest written rules in the west took monasticism in Europe in a considerably different direction to that of Egypt or western Asia, and that western rules underwent their own, quite separate, development (2000, 63, 89).

It is to be expected then that variation of practice on the ground would have been widespread, but that at the same time broadly comparable changes were taking place across a wider span of time and space which perhaps transcended individual differences between monastic complexes, since the phenomenon of monasticism existed and developed within similar social, economic and political circumstances throughout Syria. We are reminded here of the dichotomy suggested by Braudel and the Annales school which was discussed in Chapter 2. There is a clear difference between our broader knowledge of the historical development and theological position of monasteries throughout Late Antiquity, and the specific practices of each monastery in each region throughout the Christian world. There are some themes which are recurrent throughout studies of the archaeology of monasticism, whether they be in late medieval England or fifth century Syria. But, as Insoll point out in his attempts to define an archaeology of Islam, 'although it is possible to define categories of material culture within the 'archaeology of Islam', their contents will vary both through time and space' (1999a, 15). In this sense, there may be broad, structuring principles common to many different forms of monastery throughout the late fourth to the seventh centuries



across the countryside of Syria, but to understand the specific significance of monasticism in particular areas, we must appreciate that a 'substructure of practices' existed which must be understood in more subtle ways (1999, 1), according to the social context within which they existed.

This difference becomes starkly apparent when deciding whether one particular assemblage of structural remains constituted, at some stage in the past, a location of monastic practice. In spite of our knowledge of the overall origins, development and partial decline of Christian monasteries in western Asia, and the broad historical narratives which often frame such discussions, such *longue durée* concerns do not helpfully suggest an answer to the question: 'was it or wasn't it a monastery?'. The palimpsest which we are left with in the case of each and every set of settlement remains must be interpreted within the context of our broader historical knowledge, but can only really be informed by an appreciation of the *histoire événementielle* of everyday practice. A more appropriate question might be then, 'Could the material remains before us have played a role in monastic practice according to our knowledge of the *range* of ways that monasticism was carried out, and if so, in what ways?' The idiosyncrasy of monastic practice was probably never more possible than during the period of invention and experimentation under discussion here.

Therefore, there can be no neat set of definitive material elements to a monastery. As Lane has pointed out,

'In their place are required more nuanced, contextual and landscape oriented approaches which link the overtly religious material elements of these societies with the quotidian, and an abandonment of the 'checklist' type of approach that has characterised so many previous attempts at the archaeological investigation of religion' (2001, 149).

Returning to O'Carraigan's point about the complexity of overlapping historical and archaeological definitions, there may be some sites which *appear* monastic in some ways, but were in fact not regarded as such, and sites which played host to monastic activity but did so in unusual ways. So although many sites which fall into the definition set out above are *likely* to have elements such as a place of prayer, communal accommodation, subsistence or production facilities and some evidence for the enclosure or delineation of their space, it would be erroneous to either expect every site with these elements to be monastic, or for every monastic site to possess all such elements. These two quite different problems can be



illustrated with reference to some ambiguous site types, illustrated by the three following examples.

The first site type has been referred to as the 'collegiate church', which, as Trombley suggests, may have acted as a centre for a group of presbyters and deacons, and which also hosted a baptistery (2004, 71-2). One such example is the west church at Baqirha, in the Jebel Barisha region. This church is attested by a lintel inscription over the south door to have been constructed in AD 357 (according to Donceel-Voûte [1988, 31], though Loosley [2001, 209] implies it is 416). It consists of a tripartite plan with a rectangular east end, and a *bema* platform towards the west of the nave. A *martyrion* is present to the south of the sanctuary, complete with three *in situ* limestone reliquaries. Around 8m south-east of the church stands a square baptistery. 12m west of the baptistery stands a rectangular structure divided by internal subdivision into four sub-units, which could best be described as an accommodation and administration building. These latter two elements are bound to the church by a wall and inner colonnade that define a central, peristyle courtyard, trapezoidal in plan. Though the complex is certainly within the confines of the village of Baqirha as a whole, its space is clearly delineated. Donceel-Voûte has suggested that the site had a monastic function (1988, 31-2). Yet there are a number of factors which would appear to disqualify any definition of this site as monastic in character. It is, to begin with, very early in date, and would be around 60 years earlier than the earliest clearly dated inscription at a monastic complex at Qasr al-Banat. Furthermore, as Loosley points out, the fact that the church has a *bema* platform would make any monastic attribution unlikely, since only the site of Sulaymaniyya in Iraq has been suggested as a monastery with a *bema* (2001, 209). Furthermore, there is no evidence for subsistence provision or production of any kind within the complex at Baqirha. This discussion would seem to prompt the conclusion that the Baqirha complex was a residential centre or college of presbyters and deacons that played a role in baptismal and pilgrimage activities, but was not a monastery.

However, this conclusion would be rather to neglect the sense of process and change suggested by a closer examination of the standing stratigraphy of the site. It is clear that the whole complex was not built in AD 357, but in fact underwent a series of changes. The most obvious change is that the east end of the church was remodelled from an apsidal to a rectangular east end (Butler 1909, 197), and a tripartite division imposed that is clearly later than the rest of the church. Though less clear, the style of the baptistery is somewhat different from the church, and could imply a later date also, especially given that most securely dated baptisteries in the region are sixth century in date (Trombley 2004, 77).



Furthermore, the wall and colonnade which encloses the site is an addition which post-dates the church, baptistery and accommodation.



Figure 35: Entrance to the ecclesiastical enclosure at Baqirba which was added to the site in AD 501



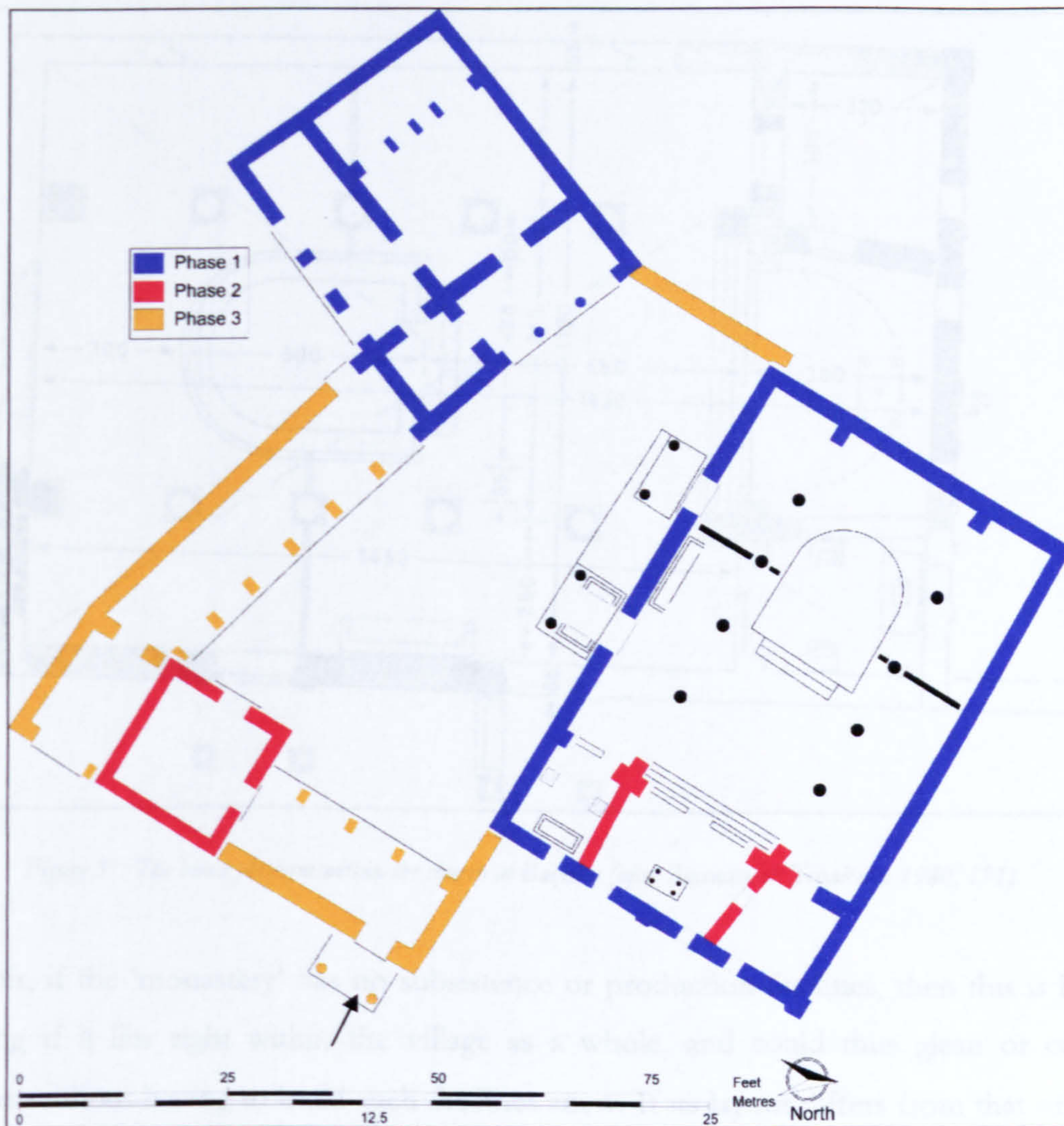


Figure 36: A plan of Baqirha, showing suggested phasing (arrow indicates above photo; original plan in colour)

And given this situation, it *could* be posited that although the site may originally have been a college or accommodation complex for ordinary village clergy, it then developed into a site with a more relic-centred agenda complete with a *martyrion* and reliquaries, and was enclosed to form a more explicitly separate and delineated complex. Such a change of agenda, it could be suggested, is compatible with more monastic activities, of the sort which we know became much more widespread in the sixth century. An inscription on a lintel over the east entrance through the later colonnade and wall is dated to AD 501. Indeed, a little later in AD 546 the village acquires a different and much larger church to the east of the settlement. The fact that the western Baqirha church has a *bema*, a feature thought to be incompatible with monastic activity, then becomes irrelevant if the management and agenda of the site changed a century to a century and a half after its foundation.



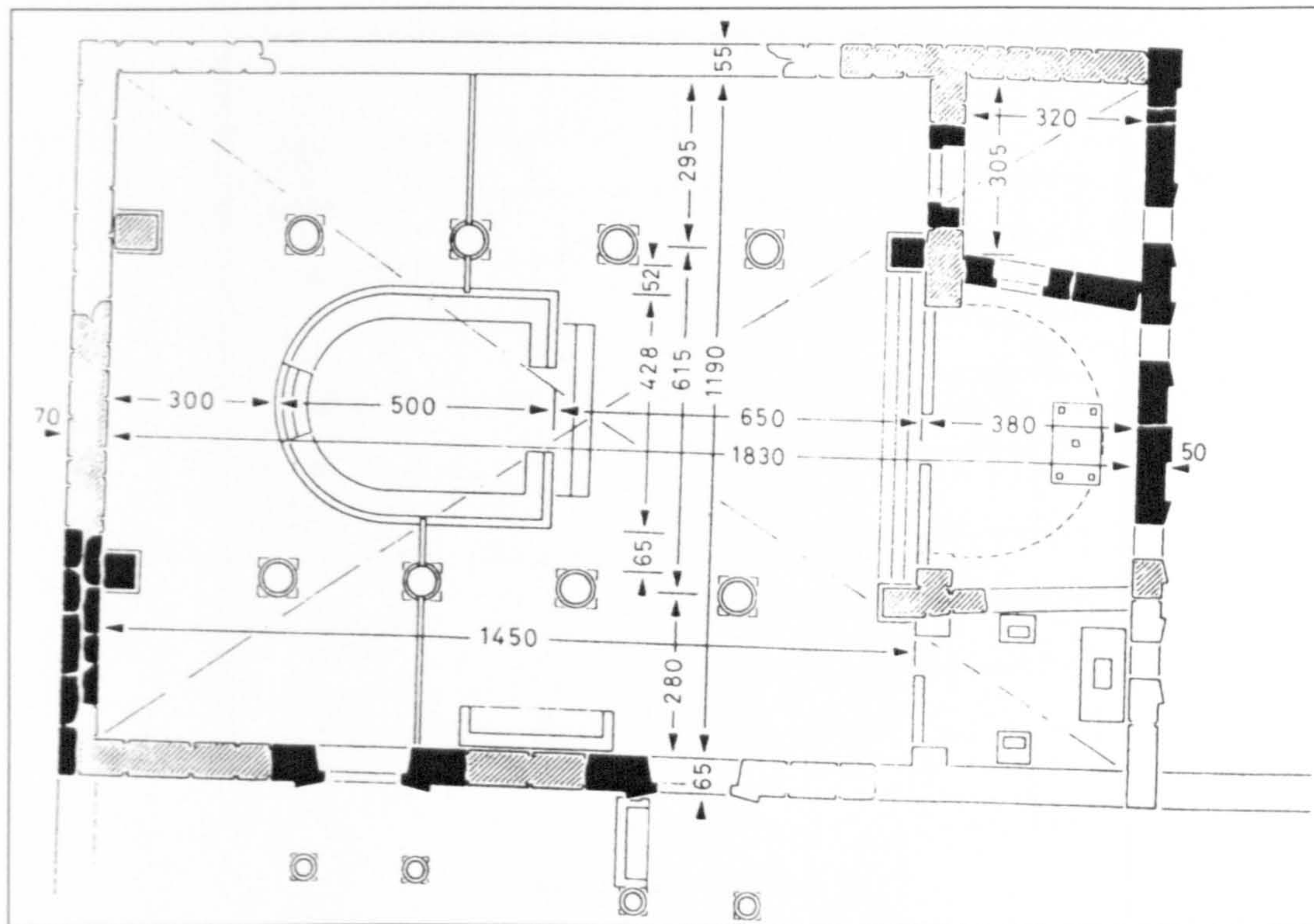
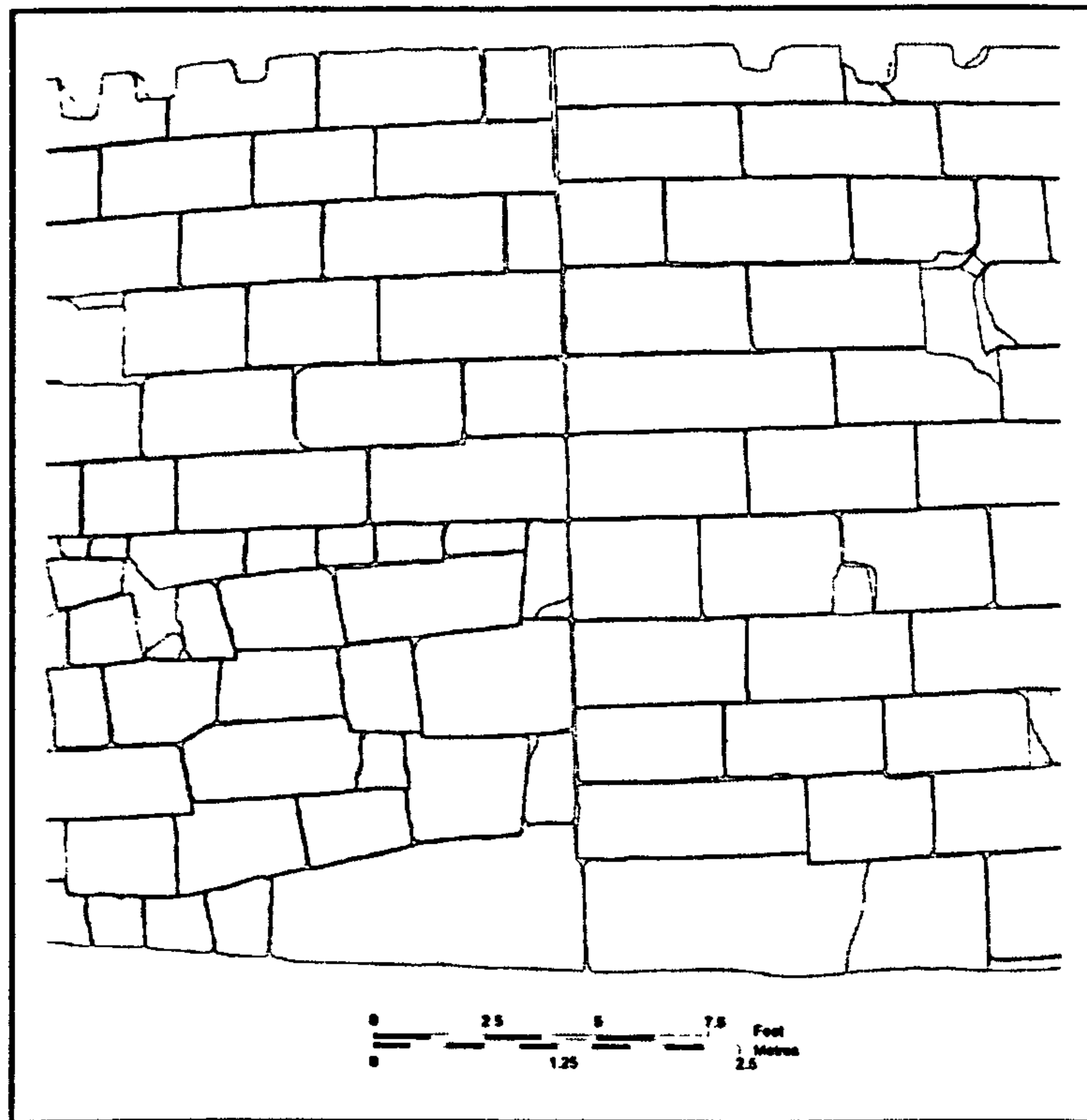


Figure 37: The bema platform within the church at Baqirha (after Baccache & Tchalenko 1980, 191)

Moreover, if the 'monastery' has no subsistence or production facilities, then this is hardly surprising if it lies right within the village as a whole, and could thus glean or control resources without having to build such facilities anew. If its layout differs from that of most other monastic complexes, this may be due to an adaptation from one use to another within a limited space, rather than necessarily 'disqualifying' the site on strictly morphological grounds. Alternatively, it may have been that the site merely sought to manage and control access to the church, as it began to take on baptismal and pilgrimage functions later in its life, but that it remained the village church and was never truly monastic. The dilemma posed here is an example of the challenging nature of monastic definitions, and the ways in which archaeology provides alternative points of view, especially with regard to changes of use through time.

A similar example might be Dar Qita (mentioned initially in section 4.6), which developed from a large church with a *bema* constructed in AD 418, to be partially enclosed in 431 (the extent of which is difficult to determine as the wall was later truncated). A large, open-plan rectangular structure stands immediately north-west of the church, the date of which is unknown. This structure was itself extended further along to the west, then by the addition of another structure in 456.





*Figure 38: North face of the north wall of the large, open plan structure at Dar Qita, showing its stratigraphic development. The wall on the right is the latest of the three phases*

This set of buildings was then enclosed by the addition of a north-west/south-east running wall on the south side at some stage after 456. The complex acquired a free-standing baptistery later in 515/6. A further large, rectangular building, termed an 'auberge' by Tchalenko, stands 10 metres to the west, and is dated to 436. The whole complex therefore composes a large church, at least one accommodation building, an ambiguous (but probable) administrative building, baptistery all arranged around two courtyards, along with a subterranean tomb to the north of the church, and a free standing tower of 551 (which Peña et al claim was built for a recluse, 1987, 88). It has been suggested from inscriptional evidence that the land on which Dar Qita stands belonged to Flavius Eusebius the imperial *singularius*, but that it later became the estate of a monastery or of the patriarchate of Antioch (Trombley 1993-4, 268-272; 2004, 76). Again, we are faced with the dilemma that the church of Saints Paul and Moses possesses a very un-monastic *bema*, and no evidence for production facilities. Furthermore, the church would seem rather large compared with other, more securely monastic complexes. Yet, at least five phases – and quite possibly more – are evident in the architectural development of the site over at least 133 years.



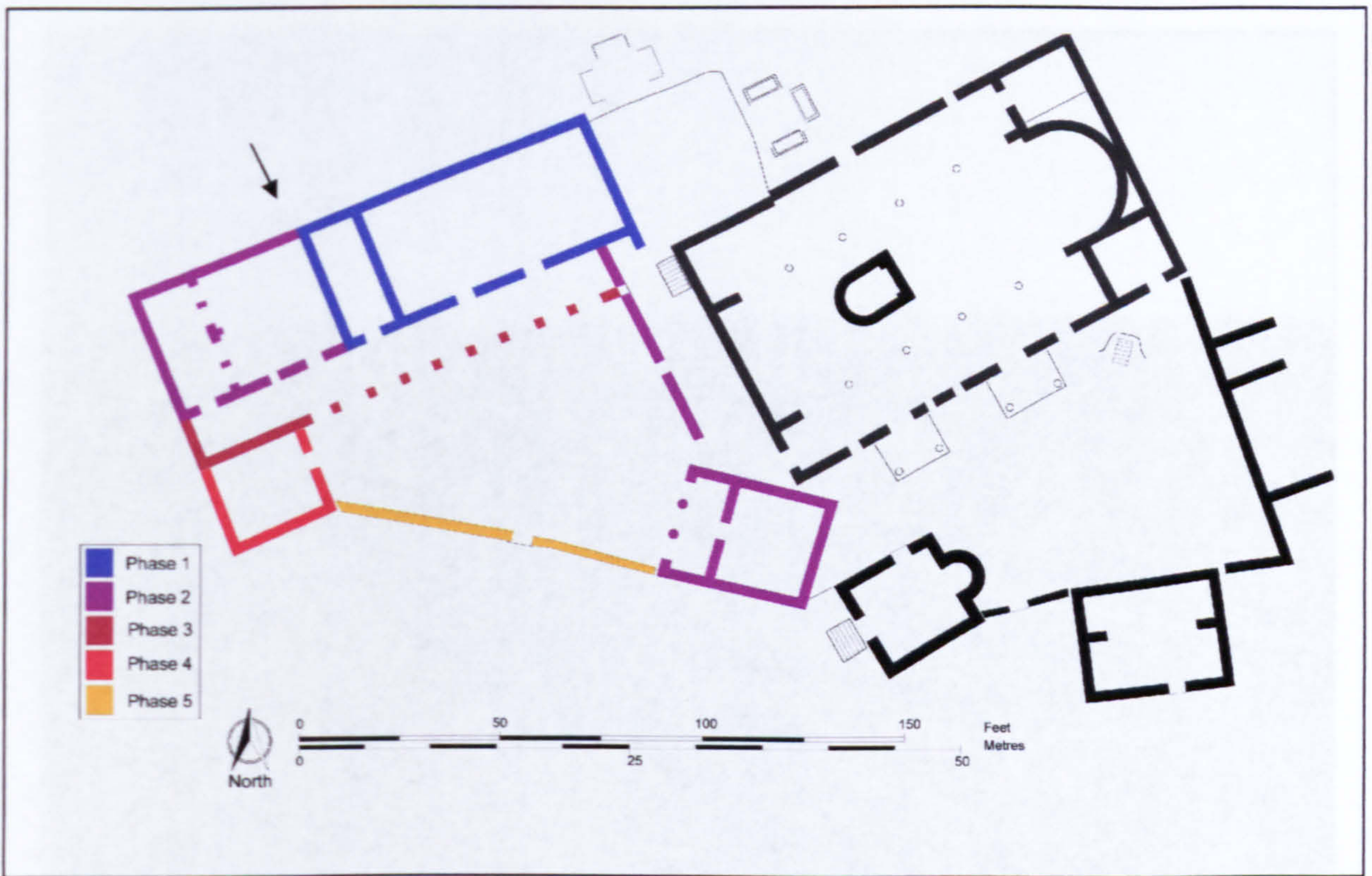


Figure 39: An overall plan of the Dar Qita ecclesiastical complex, showing a suggested phasing for the accommodation complex (original plan in colour). The arrow indicates the position of the above elevation (figure 38)

Production facilities within and outside the village are evident, and may have been controlled by the ecclesiastical estate described above, if they did indeed take over ownership of the village as a whole. The Dar Qita complex could indeed have become monastic, therefore, in spite of its almost certainly non-monastic origins. Far from disqualifying a monastic attribution, the gradually developing morphology of the site contributes to our understanding of how the use, importance and control of ecclesiastical sites changed throughout the fifth and sixth centuries.

The final example is that of the north-east complex at Dayr Sim'an. This consists of a tripartite church with a tower above the *prothesis* on the south side of the apse. Around 30m to the south-east, a long rectangular structure with three separate rooms stands at the corner of what may have been a walled enclosure. It is difficult to discern how this enclosure is structured, but the possibility exists that it may have formed a quadrangular shape with the church on its north side. Given that three monasteries exist in the village of Dayr Sim'an, all in similar positions on the immediate margins of the village, it is tempting to conclude that this also is a monastic complex. It is possible that the 'missing elements' present in the other three complexes, like cemeteries, cisterns and production facilities, are in fact only invisible in taphonomic terms, and could have been present in the sixth century.





*Figure 40: General view over the village of Dayr Sim'an from Qal'at Sim'an. The ecclesiastical site to the north-east of Dayr Sim'an can be seen in the mid-ground to the right of the picture*

However, such a conclusion would be dangerous given the broader context of Dayr Sim'an. It was a busy pilgrim centre due to the reputation of St.Simeon (Mar Sim'an) from as early as the 450s (Price 1985, 173), and throughout the later fifth century had developed a substantial infrastructure to house, nourish, enlighten, guide, baptise and exploit the large number of visitors. At the very foot of the *via sacra* leading to the pillar of St.Simeon in the centre of Qal'at Sim'an on top of the hill stands a large building which Butler describes as a *pandocheion*, or a public house for the reception of strangers (1920, 277), and Tchalenko an 'auberge', (1953 II, 68).





*Figure 41: The 'auberge' or pandocheion at Dayr Sim'an*

It seems more likely that the north-east church and rectangular building just described is more akin to this kind of complex, than to the long-term residential monasteries, with their subsistence facilities, mortuary arrangements and much closer spatial arrangement. But the fact remains that had this north-east complex been somewhere else other than Dayr Sim'an, it would have been tempting to define it as monastic.

Definition is not simply a question of understanding what is and what is not monastic on simply morphological grounds therefore. Instead, an attempt has been made in this thesis to understand sites from *both* a morphological point of view, and understanding the context and role of the site in broader terms also, across the landscape and in relation to areas of secular settlement. Only by understanding what activities occurred and the role which the potential monastic site may have played in such activities can we begin the complex task of interpreting which sites hosted specific activities carried out by monastic communities in particular at some stage during the fifth and sixth centuries. In which case, material culture is unlikely simply to be reflective of straightforwardly 'monastic' sites in the past, since it will have played a complex, changing and recursive role – both shaped by monastic activity and then shaping that activity itself. The approach adopted in the forthcoming chapters will therefore be one of careful definition, combining both an understanding of the material constituting a monastic site – its structures and internal dynamics – in Chapter 6, and a broader understanding of the monastic site in relation to the structure and dynamics of rural



settlement as a whole, in Chapter 5. This allows the possibility both for documentary and material definitions to coincide, but for the material to offer different, competing and nuanced definitions of its own. But first, the final section must introduce the difficult but crucial issue of the dating of such sites.

#### 4.10 Dating monastic sites

Tate has produced a general chronology for the limestone massif region on the basis of all building inscriptions and architectural styling across the region (1992, 87-166). This study is based, first and foremost, on a series of dated inscriptions, most of which are on churches, but some adorn domestic buildings and monastic structures.

Stylistic dating has been guided by comparison with inscriptional evidence, as well as relative dating, and been used to produce a loose dating framework based on construction style, lintel decoration and motifs. The first of these suggests that walls constructed of two parallel courses of polygonal shape with an infill (or 'double polygonal') were used from the very beginning of settlement in the limestone massif until around 380. A tighter chronology is presented by 'double irregular' walls, which were in use from 220 to around 390. Large blocks in a double row, or 'double large', were later, from 270 to 450. 'Double quadrangular' were used from 330 to around 450. 'Single orthogonal', where very large, uniform blocks were employed without the use of an infill, were used from 445 to around 550. Towards the south in Jebel Zawiya, where building styles seem to have changed more rapidly, these were used from as early as 350. Also in this region, it is possible to suggest that increased use of horizontal and curved banding in bold designs is exclusively a trait of the period 500 to 550.





Figure 42: An example of Tate's 'single orthogonal' construction technique at Burj Jalabah

Finally, the work of Naccache on the circular motifs which usually sit above lintels suggests that the earliest are those with 'pagan' motifs such as altars, animal heads and circles (Tate 1992, 102-113, 157-159; Naccache 1992; 1992a). Next are simple Christian cross, *chi rho* and alpha/omega motifs, whose geometric complexity increases over time until crosses with 12 arms, roses and (from around 445) 'propeller' designs are used. In the second half of the fifth century, designs become more free and fluid, often set within many concentric circles. They are by now largely carved in relief. After around 500, they use greater quantities of incised 'beading' and vegetal motifs.

Tate's careful comparison of such typologies with epigraphy has suggested that although such styles tend to overlap somewhat, a reliable general chronology can be constructed.

Tate's chronology has been supplemented by excavations at Dehes, which suggests that though some Hellenistic activity is recognisable, the first major building phase took place at the end of the third or early fourth century. Following this, the economy of the region continued to grow until the late fourth century, a conclusion suggested by an abundance of coins up to 379. The fifth century appears to have witnessed no further construction and a



slight 'levelling off' of economic activity, until the late fifth and early sixth century saw renewed construction. After the early sixth century, no further expansion took place, and the buildings appear not to have been maintained (Sodini et al 1980, 294-301). Of particular note, however, is that the later stages of the sequence elongated the traditionally understood chronology for the region by demonstrating that occupation of the site continued well into the eighth century, and in some areas as late as the tenth century.

The chronology which has resulted from this work asserts, in general, that settlements in the limestone massif began to appear in earnest during the late first and second centuries AD, followed by a slight fall off in building activity from the early third century (Tate 1992, 184). From around 330, building activity picked up steadily until a peak in the early to mid-fifth century. Subsequently, secular buildings continue to be constructed but on a smaller scale from around AD 500 onwards, and from 550 only churches or monasteries are constructed until the very beginning of the seventh century. From this moment onwards, no further new buildings are known. Kennedy has used this chronology, in combination with evidence from the 1930s excavations in Antioch and documentary sources, to suggest that the 'transition from antique to mediaeval Syria occurred in the years after 540, not after 640 and the Muslim invasion was more a consequence than a cause of changes which had been taking place over the previous century' (1986, 183).

Magness has questioned this chronology on the basis of a reassessment of the site of Dehes where she has generally pushed the phasing somewhat later, thus concurring with her more general conclusion that mid-sixth to mid-seventh century economic growth 'extended from the maritime cities of the Syro-Palestinian coast to the inland villages of Syria...to the towns and farms of the Negev' (2003, 205-6). However, it is unclear to what extent her assertion can be extrapolated across such a broad region. Indeed there is a sense that Magness' very thorough and well informed conclusions for the Negev are being stretched somewhat to encompass a potentially very different situation in northern Syria, 650km away. This is a mistake made also by Wickham, who asserts that villages throughout most of the eastern Mediterranean contracted 'rarely before the eighth century' (2005, 455). Magness is dismissive of the point that inscriptional evidence in the region ceases in the early seventh century, preferring instead to date all of the buildings at Dehes to no earlier than the mid-seventh century. While it is undoubtedly the case that Tate, Sodini et al have overstated the extent to which an abundance of pottery on the sixth to eighth century floors indicates impoverishment (it may, of course, indicate quite the opposite), there is as yet insufficient evidence to completely dismiss the Dehes chronology and to use that dismissal to argue for



a much later origin to settlement in the region as a whole. Thus, the broad chronology outlined by Tate is still used as a general guide here, until further work is provided by specific case studies like Dehes, but with the caveat that 'impoverishment' may be a crude term for the complex changes of the late sixth and seventh centuries.

One source which a number of scholars – and in particular Tchalenko – have used as a *terminus ante quem* for monastic sites is the so-called 'Four Monophysite Letters' (Tchalenko 1953 I, 150; III, 66-83). These consist of four letters of correspondence written by the Monophysite monasteries of Syria to those of Constantinople between 567 and 569. These letters name 80 institutions in all, around 50 of which have been identified by Tchalenko. However, only 13 of these 50 sites are claimed by Tchalenko to have a direct material correlate on the ground, thereby representing a very small proportion of his overall list of sites. Moreover, problems exist with these documents as a dating tool. The most obvious of these is the issue of relating the place names of the Four Monophysite Letters directly and reliably to sites on the ground. Many suspected monastic sites in northern Syria have now acquired labels which probably bear no relation to their names in Late Antiquity, such as Al-Dayr ('the monastery'), Kharab Shams ('sun ruins') and Qasr al-Banat ('palace of the virgins'). So although a useful guide for securely identified sites of the nature of Qal'at Sim'an and Dayr Turmanin, the Four Monophysite Letters evidence is treated here with caution.

Dating individual buildings with any reliability without the aid of epigraphy is difficult, but is possible via various means, as described above. Some structures are mentioned specifically in documentary sources, such as the monastery of Tell Ada existing by 367 (HR IV:8). Indeed using the references provided by Theodoret, it is possible to establish an approximate list of monasteries, and the date of their existence at various times, as in table 3 (overleaf):



Region	Place	Date	Reference
Mesopotamia	Somewhere in Osrhoene	c.320	II:3-5
Antioch	Gindarus	c.330	II:9
	Tell Ada	c.350	IV:2
	Various near Tell Ada		IV:13, XXVI:4
	South-East Cilica	c.360	X:3
	On Mount Amanus	380s	VI:13
	East of Antioch	early 400s	XXVI:8
Euphratesia	Zeugma	c.350	V:3-5
	Near Cyrrhus	c.365	XVIII:1
	Near Cyrrhus	c.390	XXII:2
Chalcis/Apamea	Various	360s	III:4-5
	Beroea (Aleppo)	420s/430s	XXIX:2

Table 3: Monastic institutions mentioned in Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Historia Religiosa* (after Price 1985, xvii)

At least nine of these mentions are specifically in relation to the foundation of a first monastic complex. Although Theodoret is likely to have been prone to exaggeration in the quantity of monastic establishments, the fact that these mentions are often very specific in their naming of place and time, and that Theodoret is known to have visited many of them in person, increases their reliability somewhat.

Vööbus' documentary study of sources such as the *Itinerarium Egeriae* (or *Aetheriae*), Theodoret's *Historia Religiosa*, Ishaq of Antioch as well as the Armenian sources suggest that coenobitic monasticism existed by 'the last quarter of the fourth century and in the first decades of the fifth century' (1960, 146). This is a somewhat later and more conservative estimate than the foundation by Gindaros in c.330 suggested by Theodoret, and used by many today as the earliest reliable implication of an institutional monastery (such as Biscop 1997, 44; Tchalenko also regarded the first monastic sites to derive from the first half of the fourth century [1953 I, 178]). Yet, even if we use Vööbus' more cautious suggestion of the last quarter of the fourth century, when compared with traditional thinking regarding the dating of *extant* monastic sites, we have a major contrast. This thinking tends to assume that the earliest monastic sites which we have archaeological evidence for were constructed at around about the same time, and are generally of the early sixth century. Tchalenko asserts that the only early example we have in terms of extant remains is the monastery of Qasr al-Banat, the church of which is dated by inscription to 420 (though some of this complex may



post-date the church) (Prentice 1908, 93), and that this is the only site of the fifth century (Tchalenko 1953 I, 177).

The reason given for this 'gap' of a century or more is usually, as section 4.6 pointed out, that later structures have destroyed their forebears, so that nothing now remains of our 'missing' period. And indeed it seems rather disappointing that such an important period for the understanding of the early development of monastic sites should be so sparsely represented.

Biscop's excavation at Dayr Dehes claimed to have discovered earlier phases of what is largely a fifth and sixth century complex (1997). The first phase of the 'communal habitation building' to the south-east of the site was constructed by the end – and possibly earlier in – the fourth century. The site was then expanded, the church built and a layout established which was along similar lines to its final plan, in the first quarter of the early fifth century. So although later alterations were made to the church, oil presses and communal accommodation, Biscop may well have demonstrated the presence of fifth and even fourth century phases at Dayr Dehes. Two problems remain, that the fourth century structural evidence may not necessarily have derived from a monastery and that the bulk of the dating evidence at the site relies on the style of the wall construction. However, this site does suggest at least the possibility of archaeological evidence for the earliest horizon of monastic activity.



*Figure 43: The 'communal habitation building' at Dayr Dehes, elements of which may date to the late fourth century*



Comparable examples may be found without necessarily having to engage in excavation. If we are more thorough in our definition of the range of sites which may have been used for monastic activity rather than simply relying on the most obvious, late and probably single phase complexes, we can inform this obvious lacuna in potentially helpful ways. Peña et al suggest that some sites contain 'very early' evidence, based on their style of construction. Ksajba (or Kseijbé) is one such site, which their inventory describes as 'among the oldest in Jebel Barisha' (Peña et al 1987, 158). However, the problem here is that they do not attempt to explain further *why* they regard it as potentially so early. A more fruitful approach would be the careful examination of the standing stratigraphy at monastic sites, which reveals that some of the examples already discussed thus far may contain earlier elements. Brayj has already been discussed as a multi-phase site, with the possibility of an early phase represented by the tower to the east of the site. Qasr al-Brad also possesses a tower, the alignment of which suggests that it may be a different date to the rest of the complex. Dar Qita and Baqirha may well have begun as collegiate churches, but developed later into fully monastic institutions. Examples such as these, and careful examination would no doubt reveal many more, demonstrate that Dayr Dehes is by no means the exception in displaying evidence for the 'missing' and supposedly destroyed earliest phases.

Of course, it may well be that the earlier phases of such structures were not monastic. It has been suggested that a number of sites consisted of converted Roman fortifications, as at Dayr Mar Musa (Dall'Oglio 1998, 11) and Dayr al-Nasrani (Butler 1919, 335), although in both cases, the dating of the original structure has not been verified. However, such non-monastic yet early origins may not necessarily be the case, and we do know through documentary sources of monastic sites beginning as very small complexes and developing through time, as in the case of Marcianus' monastery near Chalcis which was enlarged to accommodate more followers (*HR III:5*). Discovering and informing early phases and their subsequent phases remains a very real possibility.





*Figure 44: The restored monastic site of Dayr Mar Musa. The earliest phase can be seen in the lower portion in the centre of the building*

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

As knowledge stands at present, simply not enough work has been done on the examination and recording of monastic sites to carry this discussion any further. These tantalising glimpses are enough to suggest at least the possibility that much more information about monastic sites as early as the fourth century could be found. Given such glimpses, it would seem reasonable to conclude that monastic sites were indeed in existence in northern Syria from as early as the fourth century, and documentary evidence would suggest that the 330s and 340s is a possibility. If the phasing at Dayr Dehes is correct, other monastic sites may have been laid out in a coenobitic fashion early in the fifth century. Given the suggestions which Biscop makes of Dayr Dehes, and the overwhelming evidence provided by current knowledge of architectural styles, then the majority of the fabric visible on monastic sites belongs to the late fifth or early sixth century. This very general picture is almost certainly flawed and further work would modify it, but it remains a useful working hypothesis for the time being.

This chapter has reviewed the early development of Christianity and then monasticism in all of their various forms in Syria, and produced a methodological summary of how monastic sites may be defined. I have attempted here to examine how these places were first organised and what their role may have been. This thesis will now return to the specific model set up in Chapter 3, and confront the archaeological evidence for monasticism in



northern Syria. To what extent does the evidence allow the questions asked by this model to be confronted at all? And once monastic sites were established, what was their role in the landscape during their apogee in the fifth and sixth centuries?

Documentary evidence suggests the increasing influence of holy men living in a peripatetic fashion from the early fourth century, with some groups becoming institutionalised from as early as the late fourth. Assigning a concrete name or form to these early complexes is difficult, but it is clear that they performed ceremonies, engaged in communal prayer and contemplation, defined their complexes clearly in spatial terms, were occupied in a domestic fashion, and carried out some limited forms of production activity. Within Syria, ascertaining quite when such complexes earned the specifically and now commonly understood terms *monasterion* in Greek, *dayro* in Syriac or *dayr* in Arabic cannot be known. However, contrary to previous assumptions, the inspecific liturgy, disputed doctrinal allegiances and the likelihood of local experimentation makes direct equations between a clearly defined 'monasticism' as we may understand the term for later periods, and material correlates on the ground, challenging, but possible. Within the limestone massif, what we now have is a broad distribution of well-built settlements within and around which monasticism was certainly practised. An archaeological assessment of the forms and locations of these monasteries will help to throw light on the social and economic realities in which the monastic movement flourished.



## Chapter 5

### Inter-site Perspectives: Distribution, Scale & Variation



*Chapter 4 defined the various elements considered typical by previous scholars of monastic sites in Syria. These various types were deconstructed, and a new, more carefully defined description of what a monastery consists of was set out. Chapters 5 and 6 will now present the evidence available for these, and analyse their distribution and layout. This spatial analysis will be conducted in order to explore the model laid out in Chapter 3. Later, Chapter 6 will take on the issue of variation among monastic sites, by looking in detail at three different types of monastery in depth. This micro-scale study will explore the internal layout of each monastery, the features present and the activities which they suggest. But first, Chapter 5 looks at the macro-scale distribution of monasteries across the limestone massif of north-west Syria. What is the range and extent of the information resource for monastic sites? Were monastic sites placed in locations which enabled them to take part in activities going on within settlements, or was interaction between monastics and the secular population rare and sporadic? Did those locations draw settlements into an ideological relationship which made them part of a sacred landscape at the centre of which stood a monastery? To what extent do the answers to these questions suggest variation across the region?*

#### 5.1 Research questions and methodology

The questions posed above were addressed by the research programme of which this thesis is the outcome. The programme, drawn up in table 4 (below), lists work undertaken on the ground and later, arranged under five headings.

*1) Which sites hosted monastic activity in the fourth to seventh centuries?*

Q1.1	Find all references to monastic sites which have been surveyed, especially the surveys of Butler, Tchalenko, Tate and (with caution) Peña et al.
Q1.2	Assess which sites within the region may be open to reinterpretation, given the nature of their form and position. This is especially with regard to (a) ecclesiastical sites with surrounding 'ruin fields' which have not been examined in detail and (b) outlying 'villa' sites.
Q1.3	Amend this information with detailed plans and observations made by visiting a representative sample of site types.

*2) Where are the monastic sites located?*

Q2.1	Ascertain the whereabouts of all monastic sites using previously constructed maps, distribution plots, gazetteers and location descriptions.
Q2.2	Construct a reliable 'co-ordinate matrix' by visiting c.25% of sites in the field and obtaining their latitude/longitude co-ordinates by GPS.
Q2.3	Use this matrix to map all other monastic sites in the form of a Geographical Information System.

*3) Can we deduce what activities took place within and around monastic sites from their material form?*

Q3.1	Where possible, ascertain published ground plans which may suggest what form the monasteries took.
Q3.2	Assess the visible elements, such as churches, tombs, subsistence and production evidence, external walls, communal buildings, internal communication routes etc.
Q3.3	Scrutinise interpretation of these elements given by previous authors through visits to a representative sample of sites.



Q3.4	Build a database of information about monastic sites, including details of these internal features.
Q3.5	What do these features suggest about variation of form among the set of monastic sites? Can different types of site be discerned which suggest different kinds of monastic activity?
Q3.6	Do some or all of these sites display evidence for surplus production and storage, as well as the protection and management of resources, or do all suggest merely subsistence?

4) *In general, what kinds of relationship did monasteries have with other forms of settlement in the landscape around them?*

Q4.1	Use previously assembled maps and gazetteers to assess the range, nature and whereabouts of other forms of settlement around monastic sites.
Q4.2	What other features would have been visible and present within the landscape around monastic sites?
Q4.3	What evidence is there for water resources, communication routes and areas of topographic prominence for the fourth to seventh centuries? How were monastic sites situated in relation to these?
Q4.4	Construct a database of these features and add it to the GIS. Does this now enable the scale, variation and form of these additional features to be compared from region to region?
Q4.5	In general, what is the proximity of monasteries to areas of secular settlement?
Q4.6	Does the relationship between monasteries and communication routes suggest that some sites were more isolated than others?

5) *What was the relationship between the monasteries and these other settlements on a day-to-day basis?*

Q5.1	Use already existing archaeological plans, amended to include improved detail and height data, to construct a topographic model for specific case studies.
Q5.2	Add to this topographical model by making close observations of monastic and settlement sites on the ground, to include details not usually included on previous plans, such as the precise 'line of sight' between buildings and stratigraphic relationships in the standing masonry.
Q5.3	On a site-by-site basis, what topographical statement did the monastery make? Is it sited to emphasise prominence and visibility or seclusion and separation?
Q5.4	What was the nature of communication, whether visual or physical, between the monastery and other areas of settlement?
Q5.5	What was the nature of the journey between that monastery and its nearest areas of settlement? Was it structured in a way suggestive of frequent or occasional interaction?
Q5.6	As far as can be ascertained, which elements of the settlement and the monastery were most readily connected in this way? Which were most secluded?
Q5.7	Does our knowledge of the chronology of sites suggest a change in this relationship through time?
Q5.8	Did different types of monastic behaviour, indicated by different forms of monastic site, interact with secular settlement in different ways?

*Tables 4: A summary of the methodological questions tackled in Chapters 5 & 6*

There is, of course, a tendency for methodological intentions to seem rather 'dry', simplistic and functional when laid out in this fashion. However, each question is elaborated upon and discussed more fully within the chapters that follow. Broadly speaking, these five questions break down into two discrete parts. To begin with, the first four questions will be dealt with



here in Chapter 5. They are concerned with the assessment, distribution and appraisal of the sites at a general, inter-site level. I begin by defining the study area in section 5.2, and the organisation of the resulting data set in 5.3. I will then go on to examine the spatial relationship between monastic sites and their landscape in 5.4 to 5.9. Section 5.10 will discuss distinct types and regional trends, before a final discussion in 5.11. Chapter 6 then considers the spatial arrangements within selected sites, and considers the issue of chronology in detail.

Firstly, the precise location and specification of the study area, and the origin and nature of the information within that area, will be outlined.

## 5.2 Selection of study area and the information resource

Chapter 3 explained that the limestone massif of Syria has been subject to a large amount of archaeological study, partially due to the amount of activity evidenced for the late Roman period, but also the attraction of those remains due to the extraordinary preservation of that evidence. These two factors, hand-in-hand, are the reason for the quantity of archaeological literature. Because of this quantity, I too have chosen to concentrate on the limestone massif in this thesis. However, it should be made clear that this does not assume that the limestone massif was somehow special or unique within the context of the Antiochene hinterland as a whole. As discussed in Chapter 3, the lower-lying Amuq Plain may also have been host to a large amount of settlement activity in the late Roman period, at least some of which was probably monastic (Casana 2004, Vorderstrasse 2004), but the nature of the evidence has not attracted archaeological attention, nor permitted easy recovery. Although efforts are underway to resolve this potential disparity (Wilkinson et al 2004), the results published thus far do not permit easy comparison with the limestone massif to the east. The Amuq Plain is therefore excluded from the data set considered in detail here, although general comparisons will be made later. So it is to the limestone massif that I will now turn for a summary of the evidence used in this thesis.

The limestone massif is generally equated with the Roman toponym *Belus Massif*, and presents fairly easy definition as a discrete geographical region, on the basis of its raised limestone plateau. However, to consider even this area as a whole with the detail deemed necessary in this thesis would be an enormous task. Based on Tate's enumeration of villages, there are at least 700 sites within all of the limestone massif (Tate 1992, 1). Although analysis of settlement and monastic sites within this whole region would, of course, be advantageous in the long term, subdivision of a smaller, discrete data set is all that can be



achieved at this stage. This presents us with a further problem: how to select a meaningful sub-region which is both fairly typical of the region as a whole, yet has discrete and justifiable bounds?

Selecting an area based on late Roman administrative sub-divisions is problematic, since we do not have enough information about how smaller areas within the Belus Massif were defined. Tchalenko assigned broad agricultural units, which he termed 'plantations', each with a 'centre rural' at its centre (Tchalenko 1953 II, 32). However, it is not clear how he arrived at these boundaries and centres, other than by surmising what seemed logical to him at the time<sup>10</sup>. Alternatively, a randomly placed 'sample square' could be applied, which would choose a discrete region on purely statistical grounds, ensuring that a suitable number of sites was included, and with no cultural or administrative classification at all. However, preliminary examination of the distribution of sites shows that settlement patterns can be highly localised given the uneven topography of the region, with collections of villages and monastic sites occurring in highly variable ways. Using modern local divisions may be helpful. It is interesting to note that no broad geographical term exists in Arabic to describe the whole of the limestone massif, yet its various topographic units are referred to separately as *jibāl* (singular *jebel*, mountain). These ascribe the following seven terms (within the dark areas marked in the centre of the map in figure 45):

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<sup>10</sup> There are exceptions to this, such as where he defines the bounds of the 'domain' attached to the monastery of Qasr al-Banat, based on a physical boundary visible on aerial photos (1953 I, 175).



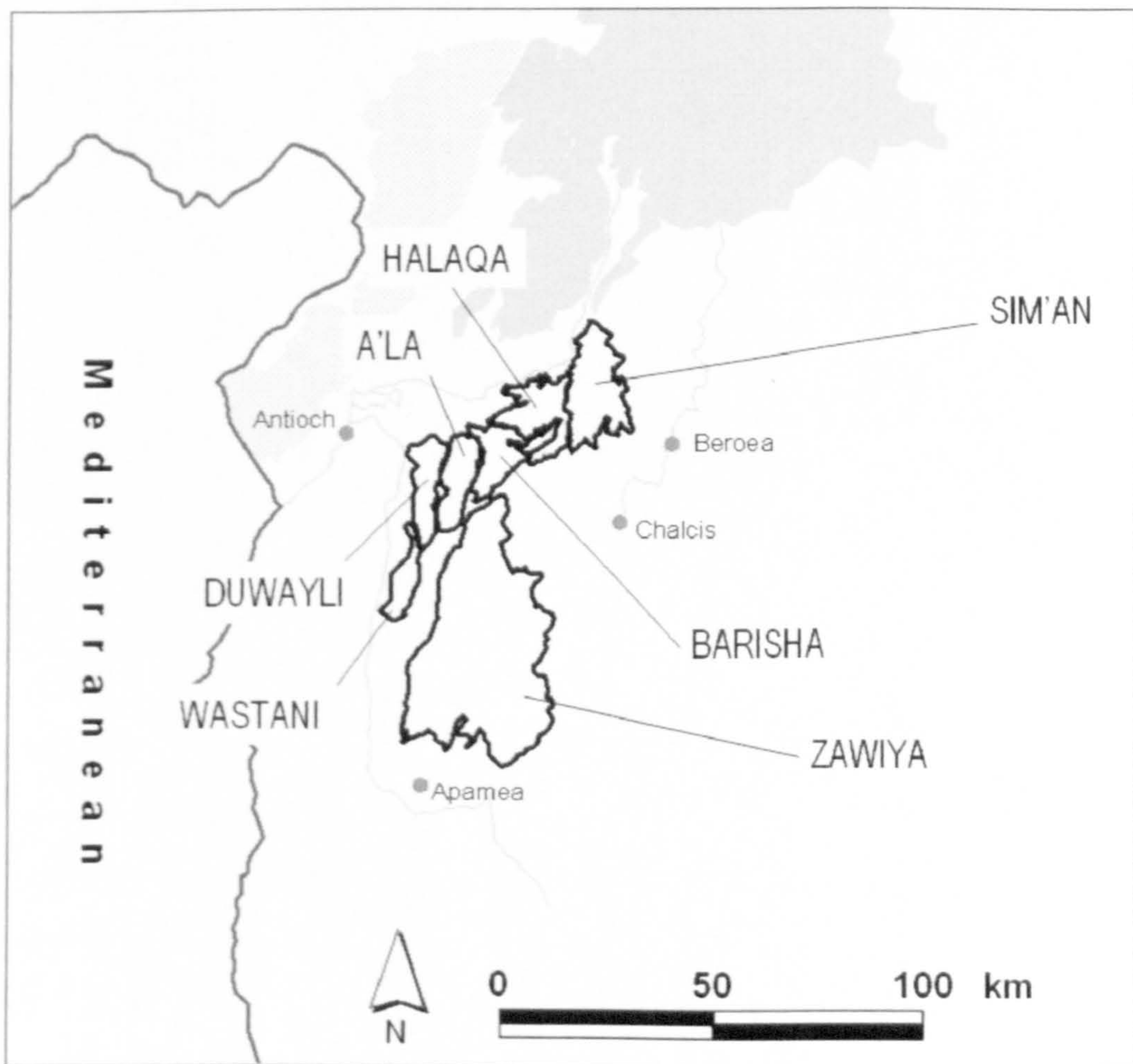


Figure 45: Map of the north-west of Syria showing the seven main mountainous areas of the limestone massif (in capital letters), as well as the major city sites mentioned in the text

Peña et al, in their various surveys throughout the region, have used these divisions (for example, (1987, 1990, 1999)). They seem to represent a series of subdivided, approximately comparable units of study. Although their modern names may not necessarily derive from ancient divisions at all, it is hard to imagine that the obvious geographical units did not bear separate names in antiquity. For these reasons, I decided to use multiples of *jebel*, as a compromise between meaningful cultural divisions and numerical desirability. Of the surveys published thus far, the Jebel Sim'an is most thoroughly covered, and therefore offers the best quality evidence. The adjacent Jebel Halaqa to the south and west has been almost as well covered. Yet these two present only seventy-eight settlement sites, and fifty possible monastic sites (which can sensibly be reduced to just fourteen for the purposes of analysis, see below). It was felt that this was not sufficient data to investigate the ideas proposed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, Jebel Sim'an and Jebel Halaqa, as the northernmost areas, may not necessarily have been subject to the same kinds of settlement activity as areas further south. Therefore, it was decided to include Jebel Barisha also. This now encompasses a total of 147 settlement sites, and 135 monastic sites (reduced to 61 for the purposes of analysis – this reduction is explained below).



It was decided *not* to include the area of Jebel al-‘Ala to the south-west for three reasons. The first is that inclusion of this area would have swelled the data set to a size which may have been unwieldy, and which it may not have been possible to analyse within the time available for this thesis. Secondly, this area is topographically quite distinct from the other three, as it is more genuinely mountainous, with rugged, limestone terrain extending to heights of 8-900m, and with deep, water-cut valleys. Finally, although the monastic sites in this region can morphologically be quite similar to those to the north and east, they tend in general to be somewhat dissimilar, being smaller and containing more eremitic cave sites, as in those in the Wadi Habis near Harem (Peña et al 1990). That is not to say that such differences are not interesting or significant. However, I decided not to include them within the bounds of the current study.

I use a reasonably flexible definition of the three areas. I do not, for example, include *only* those sites located on the limestone plateau in strict terms. If sites are located within a kilometre or so of one of the *jibāl*, and still display significant similarities of form, then they have been included. This takes into account the various flat, soil-rich plains which occur between the *jibāl* also.

Within these three areas – Jebel Sim’an, Jebel Halaqa and Jebel Barisha – it is important to outline why I have chosen the data sets which I have, and which elements of these have been chosen for use and why. Chapter 1 described the various surveys which have taken place throughout the north-west of Syria, from the late nineteenth century until the present day. These surveys provide us with highly varied data sets, presented in a range of ways. The socio-political context of these various surveys presents us with some problems when deciding which to use. Ideally, one might think, all of them would be utilised to provide as much information as possible about the settlement and monastery sites in the area. However, the intellectual underpinnings of de Vogüé’s highly selective survey render his results problematic. Butler’s evidence is rather more useful, since it was at least systematic, and his team contained a variety of specialists. Some of this data is used here, though it is clear that the Princeton Expedition had little interest in monastic sites, and never sought to define them clearly, preferring instead the pre-Christian structures and carvings, as well as the grandest of communal churches, which it saw as the precursors to European civilised architecture (Butler 1907, iv). Poidebard (1934), Lassus (1935), and Mattern (1944) provide some interesting observations, but tended to be less systematic and did not present a gazetteer in the same way as Butler, or as subsequent authors were later to do.



By far the most useful survey, and the one used primarily in this thesis, is that of Tchalenko's *Villages Antique* (1953 I-III). His survey was systematic, clearly presented, and provided some (though selective) mapping. Tchalenko had a tendency to conflate various different types of structure, documentary references and place names all under the ill-defined heading of 'monastery', though he often makes the derivation of his evidence clear. Further, Tchalenko concentrated overwhelmingly on the northernmost areas of the limestone massif, and particularly Jebel Halaqa and Jebel Sim'an. His reasons for doing this are not made clear, though the intellectual efforts being expended at Qal'at Sim'an, which stands in the very centre of Jebel Halaqa and Jebel Sim'an, during the 1930s and 1940s must have concentrated attention (and logistics) on that region. It may also be that the northernmost *jibāl* were, on the whole, less densely occupied during the 1930s to 1950s than the Jebel Barisha and other areas further south. This made ruins more accessible, and presented in a greater number of cases the perfect, untouched vista of Christian architecture with which Tchalenko was so clearly enthralled. Tchalenko's bias towards the northern two *jibāl* necessitates the use of Peña et al's gazetteer of Jebel Barisha (1987). The problems inherent in this piece of work have already been discussed in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, the three Franciscan monks Peña, Castellana and Fernandez visited far more sites, and far more currently inhabited sites, throughout the 1980s than Tchalenko ever did in this area in the 1930s to 1950s. Peña et al have not surveyed Jebel Sim'an in the same manner, and so cannot be directly compared with Tchalenko in terms of thoroughness and detail. However, it is clear from their presentation of Jebel Barisha that they present evidence for a total of eighty-five monastic sites, compared with Tchalenko's twenty. The dating evidence for these sites is not always reliable, and their interpretation of what qualifies as 'monastic' is not always transparent. Yet their sheer thoroughness warrants inclusion of their results here.



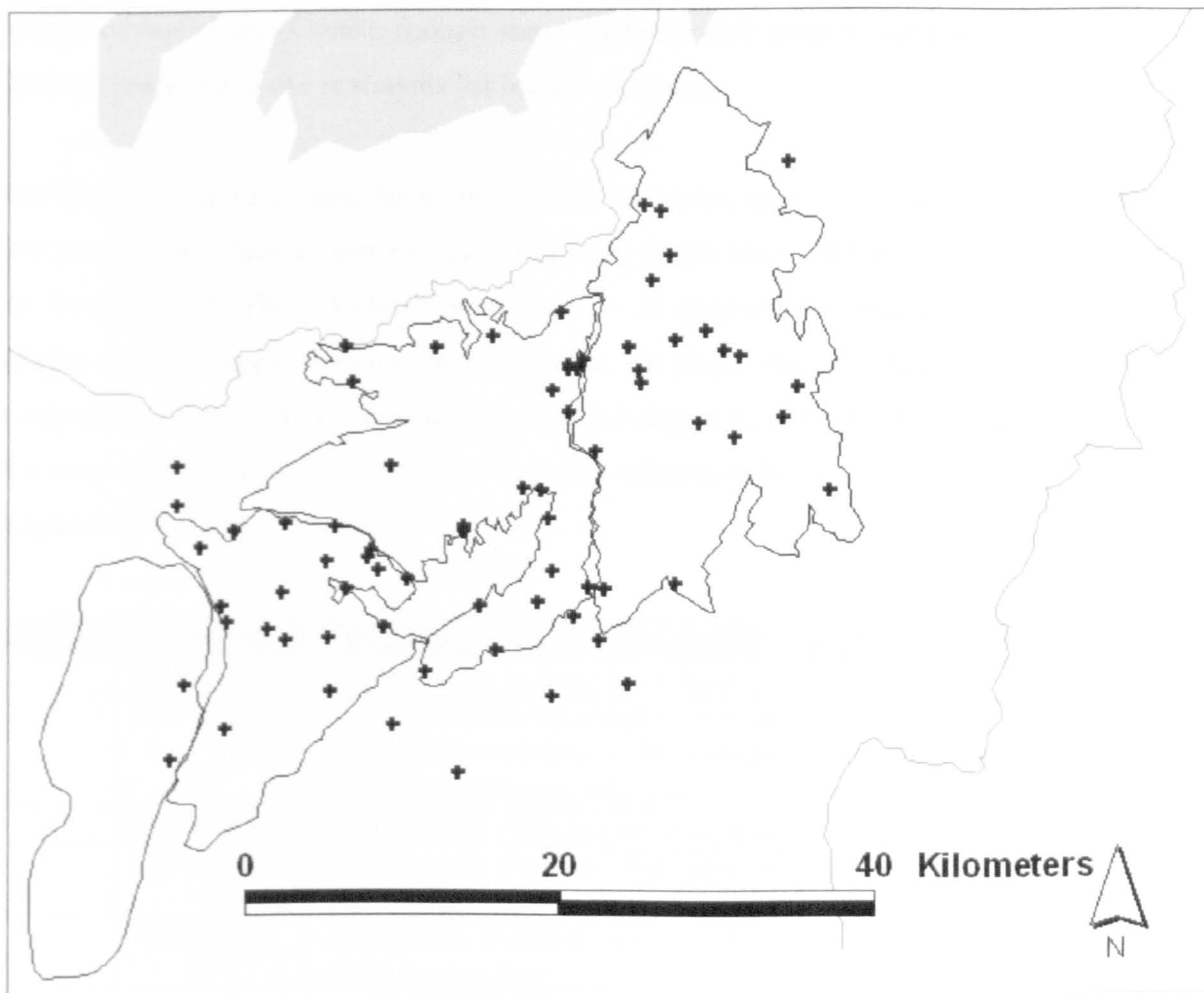


Figure 46: The full distribution map of monastic sites within the current study area, according to Tchalenko

The survey presented by Tate (1992), though useful in its general conclusions regarding settlement and chronology, is of limited use here on a site-by-site basis. His discussion of monastic sites is very brief (taking place in just nine out of 364 pages), and consideration of settlement sites though thorough, was not intended to be systematic.

As Chapter 4 concluded, defining what constitutes either a ‘monastery’ or a ‘settlement’ is no straightforward task. This is particularly so given the lack of explicit reasoning - yet clear difference of opinion – displayed by previous scholars on the subject. In order to counteract this, I employ here a clear and explicit definition of both. My definition of a monastery, outlined in the previous chapter, is stated again here for the sake of clarity. It is a structure or complex of structures used for the sustained contemplation of God under a Christian belief system. Such a structure or complex necessitated residential accommodation, and often - but not necessarily – the generation of subsistence materials. Such a complex was very often adorned with Christian symbolism, and may have involved the use of a church, whether on- or off-site. A monastery may have been inhabited by one or many monks or nuns. Such a complex was referred to in late Roman Syria as a *dayro* (in Syriac; *dayr* in



Arabic) or *monasterion* (Greek), though some contemporary authors (such as Theodoret of Cyrrhus) preferred to use synonyms for literary purposes.

This definition is, of course, far from flawless. However, it at least represents a clear and firm point from which to sort the data, and from which the model presented in Chapter 3 can be examined. The evidence for monastic - or suspected monastic - sites is varied, ranging from a single documentary reference or place name to fairly clear, standing architectural evidence. It was decided to assess the degree to which the monastic designation of a site could be trusted. Every one of the sites referred to by Tchalenko or Peña et al was assigned to one of the 'categories'.

Category	Description	Definition
1	Not known	Site is known to have been destroyed
2	Not known	Site not visited or published, but assumptions made on the basis of place name evidence or the equivalence of a modern place name with a documentary reference
3	Certainly not	No domestic evidence, no ecclesiastical evidence, date unclear
4	Unlikely	No domestic evidence, but some ecclesiastical evidence and a correct date
5	Perhaps not	Ambiguous domestic evidence, but some ecclesiastical evidence and a correct date
6	Likely	Definite domestic evidence, a correct date, with some - but not necessarily clear and unambiguous - ecclesiastical evidence
7	Very likely	Definite domestic and ecclesiastical evidence, and a correct date
8	Certainly	All of the above, with strong contextual information provided by inscriptional, documentary or excavation evidence

*Table 5: The definitional categories used in this thesis*

Application of these categories will be described in more detail below. It may first be necessary to qualify some of the criteria described in this table, and provide some examples by way of illustration.

**Category 1** applies to sites that are known to have been destroyed. That is, they had been visited and recorded, and have been subsequently visited and found to have disappeared. This has occurred in only two cases, Dart 'Azza and Qasr al Mudakhar. There may well be many more such cases, but since at present only 22% of sites have been visited as part of this current work, this cannot be ascertained for sure (although in this basis, around 7-10 sites could be assumed to have been destroyed since their initial discovery). Consequently, many such sites fall within the largest category, 2.



**Category 2**, or 'Not Known', sites are common in part due to the sheer size of the data set. Neither myself, nor any previous author (including Tchalenko), has visited all of the sites indicated by documentary references or place names. Many sites have been recorded, but only in terms of being verified in a previous gazetteer and placed as a 'dot on a map', without further description that may permit a higher category. If information about the physical existence or the internal morphology of the site is missing, it has been assigned this category until further fieldwork enhances the information available. At Zuq al-Kabir, for example, Tchalenko notes the existence of a modern village within a broader field of ruins. He equates these ruins with the place name 'Zwqnyn' in the Four Monophysite Letters. However, Butler's survey stated only that 'so much building material has been carried away that it is impossible to form any idea of the form of any of the ancient buildings' (1920, 325), and the site has not been recorded or published in any detail since. It would seem reasonable to conclude, given the rate of recent expansion in the village, that any traces of the monastic site (even if a parallel can indeed be drawn between the modern Zuq al-Kabir and the Syriac 'Zwqnyn') have been destroyed. However, because this cannot be absolutely verified, the site is assigned to Category 2.

**Category 3** was assigned during construction of the database, but never used. It refers to sites which are certainly not monastic. In all cases, a site has been initially considered as monastic due to its attribution as such by a previous scholar in an inventory. For a site to be certainly dismissed as such, the information resource would have to be exceptional. Since very few monastic sites have ever been excavated, and certainly none that were in any case in doubt, this category has not been used.

**Category 4** refers to sites where no domestic evidence is apparent, but where some ecclesiastical evidence exists. This may take the form of an isolated church, as at Douerrih where a church stands next to a single tomb with no other structures apparent (Peña et al 1987, 58), or where an inscription or carving implies Christian presence, as at Burj 'Akkush A where it is carved that this is the 'Tower of Ya'qub, the sinner' (1987, 152). Such sites may conceivably have been monastic, if it can be shown that domestic elements exist but are not clear on the surface. Otherwise, sites of this category must be considered either isolated sites of non-residential worship, or agricultural buildings with inscriptions made by Christians.

**Category 5** is more ambiguous, since it refers to sites with some ecclesiastical evidence, and further structural evidence which may be domestic but is unclear. Sites such as Dayr Mi'az A fall into this category. This consists of a surrounding wall, within which stands a single



building, around 10m north-south by 15m east-west, with a portico on the south and west sides. Large quantities of roof tile and some sherds of local, table-ware pottery are present, and a rock-cut cistern exists 15m to the south-east. The site would appear to represent a single, residential structure therefore. If any further structures ever existed at the site, they have now been destroyed. Although the building is aligned approximately east-west, its layout suggests it is unlikely to have been a church. The site stands in a region of marked monastic activity, evidenced by the well-attested and clearly monastic sites of Dayr Ayzarara (just 700m to the north-east), Khirbat al-Sanad and Kafr Daryan, and the possible monastic sites at Qal'at al-Tuffa and al-Ruqaq. A major baptismal complex exists on the east side of the settlement at Mi'az around 1km north-west of Dayr Mi'az A. The proximity of such sites within a 'tight' distribution does not necessarily suggest that Dayr Mi'az A is also monastic. However, they could invite such a suggestion, and given the clear domestic activity here, it illustrates the thought-provoking, though far from certain, 'monastic' status of category 5 sites.



*Figure 47: The site of Dayr Mi'az A (scale: 1 m)*

**Category 6** refers to sites where there is definite domestic evidence, which seems to take a form compatible with the definition of monastic activity given in Chapter 4. Many sites in this category have ecclesiastical evidence, in the form of a church or inscription (often in the form of pilgrims' graffiti as at Dayr Ayzarara or Douerrih). However, some do not, or possess buildings whose use and purpose in Late Antiquity is unclear. This category of sites



are thought, in general, not to be villa sites since villa sites are rare in north-west Syria. This reasoning may appear circular to an extent, but is reinforced by the fact that many category 6 sites, such as Burj Dayr 'Aman or Ksajba, do not appear to have been sufficiently well-constructed to represent high status accommodation. Nor is their scale, nor the range of facilities, suggestive of a villa site (although in some cases, production facilities *are* evident, for which see each of the case studies in Chapter 6).

Category 7 sites are more securely identifiable as monastic sites. They have both ecclesiastical evidence (in this case, almost always in the form of a church), and clear residential facilities. Sites such as Kharab Shams qualify for this category, and are very likely to have been monastic. The only reason why they are not considered *certainly* monastic is that strong supportive information in the form of excavation, close architectural survey or documentary evidence, is not yet available to corroborate or contextualise interpretation.

Category 8 consists of sites whose ascription as monastic is certain, and where strong contextual information in the form of intensive archaeological study and/or documentary evidence is available. Sites such as Qal'at Sim'an or Dayr Dehes qualify for this category, as excavation projects and their resulting publications have provided detailed chronological information, finds assemblages and structural analysis (Biscop 1997, Kazanski et al 2003).

Definition of what constitutes a settlement is slightly clearer. I define a settlement here as the close spatial arrangement of multiple domestic dwellings of late Roman (ie fourth to seventh century) date, which *does not* appear to be monastic. This also excludes such sites as Burj Baqirha which were almost certainly used solely as a pagan temple. It does include sites of a great range of sizes, however, though most villages in the limestone massif seem to consist of between twenty and eighty dwellings. Both Tchalenko and Peña et al apply approximate dating based on architectural styles, which in themselves derive from known examples with inscriptions. This architectural dating could not always be relied upon with absolute confidence at the time of these studies (prior to Tate's chronological analysis in 1992; caution is expressed especially with regard to Peña et al). Since I was not able to visit more than twenty-three settlement sites overall in order to verify whether or not they were in use during the fourth to sixth centuries, a degree of uncertainty exists here. However, it is generally assumed that the region as a whole was certainly heavily settled during those dates, and that this settlement activity produced architecture which is reasonably uniform and easily recognisable. In the majority of cases then, it is assumed that Tchalenko and Peña et al are correct.

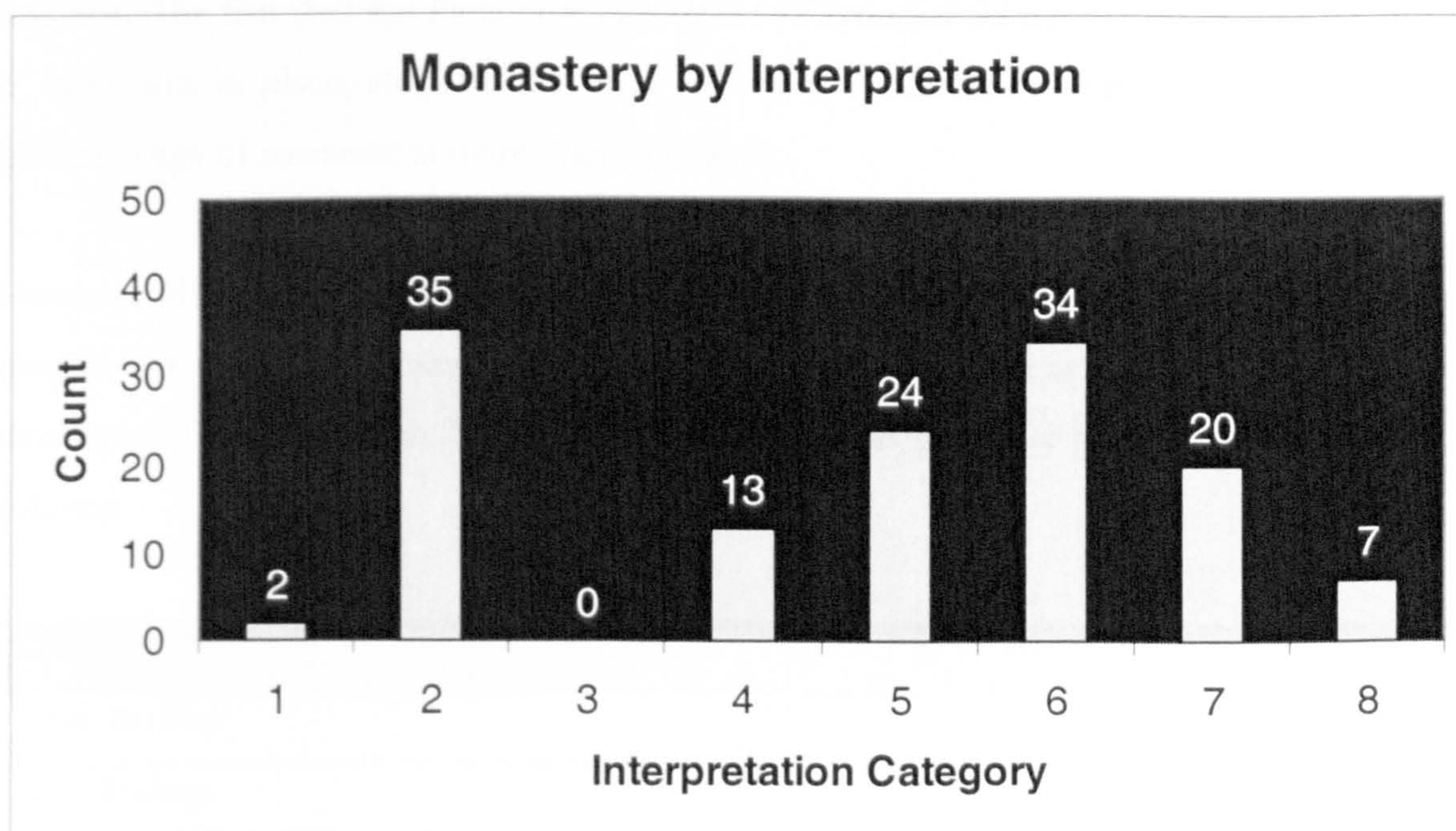


Given these definitions, and the selection of the three study areas as outlined above, the archaeological evidence for settlements and monasteries as presented by previous survey work is as follows:

	Settlements	Monasteries
Jebel Sim'an	32	22
Jebel Halaqa	46	28
Jebel Barisha	69	85
TOTAL	147	135

*Table 6: Monasteries and settlements in each of the sub-regions within the study area*

It was explained above that the ambiguous and differing definitions of what a monastery actually is in the various previous surveys meant that by no means all of the possible monastic sites concord with my own definition. The categorisation of sites according to their degree of concordance with this definition can be seen as follows:



*Figure 48: Bar chart showing monasteries by interpretation*

In spite of these careful definitions, it is striking that the number of monasteries present on Jebel Barisha is far higher than the other two areas. The reasons for this are twofold. The first is that the information resource for this area is greater, since Peña et al (1987) constructed a gazetteer for Jebel Barisha, but have not yet done so for the other two. Tchalenko (1953) surveyed all three areas, but in a different fashion to the Peña team. Peña tended to include a far greater range of sites, including those for which the evidence is more



ephemeral. Tchalenko, on the other hand, included only those sites for which there was either assumed documentary or place name evidence, or substantial archaeological remains. With regard to these archaeological remains, he only included (on the whole) sites that were large and probably coenobitic in character. Peña et al, on the other hand, covered the more ephemeral sites, some of which may have been eremitic in origin, including those which never developed into large institutions. This might include, for example, sites such as Khirbat al-Sanad, where only two courses of masonry suggest a surrounding wall, a tower, a further structure and a single tomb carved into the rock. The remains sit high on a hill around 120m above the plain below. It was not recorded by Tchalenko, and is not sufficiently substantial nor impressive to attract the attention of other scholars.

The caution with which the work of the Peña team must be regarded has already been noted (Chapter 1). The 1-8 rating is intended as a safeguard, ensuring - with as great a certainty as can be conceived without further fieldwork - that only sites which are *likely* to have been monastic are included. **If the definition of a monastic site outlined above is used, then for the sake of clarity categories 6, 7 and 8 are taken as being monasteries, and 1-5 are not.** The fact that the Peña et al gazetteer *still* included far more sites, even with this '≥ 6' safeguard in place, suggests that their survey was more thorough, and thus covered a greater range of monastic activity than Tchalenko.

However, there is a second point to be added here. It may be the case that on Jebel Barisha, simply *more* monasteries may have existed in the fourth to sixth centuries than in the other two areas. The sites which Tchalenko *did* include in his gazetteer break down into areas as follows:

Location	Number of monasteries (all categories)
Jebel Barisha	20
Jebel Halaqa	24
Jebel Sim'an	22

*Table 7: Number of monasteries within each sub-region*

However, given that many of these sites are evidenced by nothing more than place name evidence, it may be more reliable to apply the '≥ 6' categorisation. This produces the following result:



Location	Number of monasteries ( $\geq$ category 6)
Jebel Barisha	47
Jebel Halaqa	10
Jebel Sim'an	4

Table 8: Number of monasteries per sub-region, once definitional control is imposed

Thus it can be seen that Tchalenko surveyed more monastic sites in Jebel Barisha than Jebel Halaqa or Jebel Sim'an. In which case, it would seem sensible to conclude that although Peña et al surveyed more sites there, the reason *why* there are far more likely monastic sites on Jebel Barisha is *largely* because there were simply more sites there anyway. This accords with Tate's work, which has shown that in the sixth century, Jebel Barisha had the largest number of buildings in the limestone massif (1992, 311).

It can also be concluded that the proportion of monasteries in comparison to settlement on Jebel Barisha is high. Indeed, as the table below shows, on Jebel Barisha it is somewhat higher than the other two:

Location	Monasteries : Settlements
Jebel Sim'an	1 : 8.00
Jebel Halaqa	1 : 4.60
Jebel Barisha	1 : 1.47

Table 9: Ratio of number of settlements to each monastery

It seems likely then that the Jebel Barisha simply contained more monasteries than anywhere else in the study area. The specific reasons for this are explored further below. However, having explained how the study area and data set were selected, an explanation of how the site data was organised and then mapped will take place, before a discussion of the overall relationship between monastic and settlement sites in section 5.5.

### 5.3 Organisation of the data

Given the complexity yet interconnectedness of the information described above, it was decided to organise the data in a series of tables within a single Microsoft Access database. On the one hand, this allowed each discrete component to be built up in a manageable fashion, yet on the other for fairly complex queries to be constructed across several tables. Of course, it was not possible to enter every piece of information recorded by Tchalenko, Peña et al and others, nor was this particularly desirable. Instead, three broad forms of



information were contained within the database: morphological and location data for monastic sites, morphological and location data for settlement sites, and overall administrative data relating to bibliographical information and the transcription of place names. These three groups are intended to address specifically the questions raised in the methodology in section 5.1. The tables are as follows:

Database group	Code	Title
1: Monasteries	1.1	Monastic Sites
	1.2	Monastic Churches
	1.3	Communal Buildings
	1.4	Agricultural Infrastructure
	1.5	Water Management
	1.6	Accommodation Structures
	1.7	Dating
2: Settlements	2.1	Settlements
	2.2	Inscriptions
	2.3	Non-monastic Tombs
	2.4	Non-monastic Churches
3: Information Resource	3.1	References by Site
	3.2	Place Name Index
4: Fieldwork	4.1	Site Visits

*Table 10: Database scheme used in this study*

The main database tables used were 1.1 and 2.1. In the case of database table 1.1, this is displayed in the form of a gazetteer in Appendix E. Table 2.1 is presented in summary form in Appendix D, while both tables are within the full database in Appendix F (on CD). It can be seen from these appendices that each of the most commonly occurring elements of a monastic site were each assigned their own table, within which information relating to their size, materials, dating and any doubts about their identification could be recorded. Of course, it would have been ideal to include such information for settlements also, but this task would have taken far longer than the time available for the current project. A combination of all tables was used to produce the gazetteer in Appendix E, with each page representing all of the important information about every suspected monastic site in the dataset.



#### 5.4 Mapping and locating the evidence

Locating these settlement and monastery sites in a reliable fashion has proved a great challenge. This is largely for two reasons. The first is that many different mapping techniques and systems have been used in Syria since the nineteenth century, with no widely available, standardised system used throughout. Secondly, it is often difficult to interpret the form and accuracy of the mapping, because of the reluctance of previous cartographers to publish metadata along with their maps. Consequently, it may not become clear for some time that a particular site distribution is actually very unreliable, since it may appear, superficially, to be of a high standard.

Since the 1920s, some mapping of archaeological sites has been carried out using aerial photographs. Poidebard, for example, included some site plans made using either rectified oblique or vertical aerial photographs in his *La Trace de Rome dans le Désert de Syrie* (1934). Unfortunately, such images have been used in only the most minimal fashion in the north-west. More recently, satellite imagery, and in particular declassified Corona imagery from the 1960s, has been used in Syria to map the location of individual sites, as well as their juxtaposition across the wider landscape (Philip 2002a, Ur 2003). This has been contributed to by a growing understanding of how to rectify and use such images in the field. As yet, very little use has been made of Corona in the north-west<sup>11</sup>, perhaps in part because the current state of mapping is thought to be sufficient by archaeologists working there.

When using these various forms of mapping, certain obstacles must be overcome before they can be used to plot archaeological sites accurately. The first of these problems is that different co-ordinate systems have been used. Most are an attempt at a projected, 'flat' grid, rather like the UK Ordnance Survey. Some maps have used a French 'Mandate' grid, while other, more recent maps have used a Syrian government grid. It is not entirely clear how these two systems relate, and clarifying the accuracy and origin of the Syrian grid is problematic due to reasons which relate to military sensitivity (Mohammad Dbiyat *pers comm.* October 2004). Owing to these problems, it was decided to locate all sites using Longitude/Latitude co-ordinates, employing the WGS84 datum, and presenting co-ordinates in decimal degrees. This system has been used on a large number of archaeological projects in western Asia in recent years (for example in the Ghor al-Safi, Jordan, Politis et al *forthcoming*, in the Homs Region survey in Syria, Philip et al 2005; and in Abu Dhabi, King et al 2003). In order to locate the various maps and plans in 'flat space' on a Geographical Information System, the Longitude/Latitude co-ordinates were then converted to the

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<sup>11</sup> An exception being the brief examples used in Chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis.



Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) projection system. In this way, spatial data could be presented in metres, thus establishing a universally recognisable system, usable at regional as well as site-specific scales. The sites presented as part of the gazetteer in Appendix E are given in both Longitude/Latitude and UTM co-ordinates, but all plans and maps are presented solely in UTM.

Given the variability in accuracy and co-ordinate systems, as well as the considerable variation in how different sites qualify as 'monastic', it was decided to review completely the corpus of monastic sites known for the region, and to re-map them accordingly as part of a single, coherent GIS. In this way, a reliable, flexible project could be established in order to serve as the foundation for future work. It was anticipated that such a GIS would also be of use to the Syrian Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums (DGAM), since it represents a first attempt at an accessible and relatively reliable record of the location, condition and morphology of monastic sites in the north-west.

It was decided to use the GIS package ArcView to map and present the data, since this is a widely-used, accessible and relatively 'user-friendly' programme. Reliable ground maps for Syria are notoriously difficult to access. The 1:50,000 versions in Arabic, though slightly easier to obtain, are at various stages of completion and update, and do not always fit together in a reliable way. On other projects in the region, the topographic accuracy and effectiveness of these maps has been found to be of limited use for archaeological research (Philip et al 2002, 8). The far more accurate 1:25,000 maps are only available from Al-Mū'sasa al-Āmat al-Msāha (the land survey department of the Syrian Army), and require special permits in order to obtain them. Consequently, only the map relevant for one, discrete area of study is permitted at any one time. Given these problems, it was decided instead to use satellite imagery for base mapping. The images used in this instance are those provided through the NASA sponsored project to provide a 'geodetically accurate global compendium' of Landsat imagery for scientific and educational use (Tucker et al 2004). These were downloaded from the University of Maryland website (<http://glcf.umiacs.umd.edu/data/landsat/>). They are the same series of images provided by the General Organisation for Remote Sensing, and published in the volume *Syria: Space Image Atlas*, and consist of Landsat TM images taken in 1990 (Beckel 1996, 168).

These images are typically divided into a series of 60 x 90km tiles, and are georeferenced. However, the accuracy of this georeferencing was checked by plotting five, easily recognisable ground control points (road junctions, bridges and clear topographic points



such as spurs). It was found that the accuracy of the location of these points on the satellite image varied according to the location of the origin point used, and that in general the base mapping and GPS co-ordinates taken on the ground differed by hundreds of metres. Therefore, it was decided to re-rectify them, using the UTM co-ordinates of four ground control points as follows:

No.	Ground Control Point Location	Easting	Northing
1	Aleppo citadel, centre	334738.42	4007623.25
2	Kharab Shams monastery	315416.16	4023719.62
3	Marat al-Noman museum	289919.20	3947538.00
4	Deir Tell Ada	303841.00	4014792.00

*Table 11: Ground control points used*

The satellite image was then manipulated using the 'rubber sheet' function in the 'Terrain' programme. The accuracy was then checked again in ArcView by plotting some further ground control points in diverse locations across the image. These points were found to be a maximum of 200m out of place, and in most cases under 50m. Greater accuracy would be possible through a more rigorous geo-referencing programme, and would, of course, be desirable. However, the current margin is considered acceptably correct, given the coarseness of the macro-level analysis employed here.

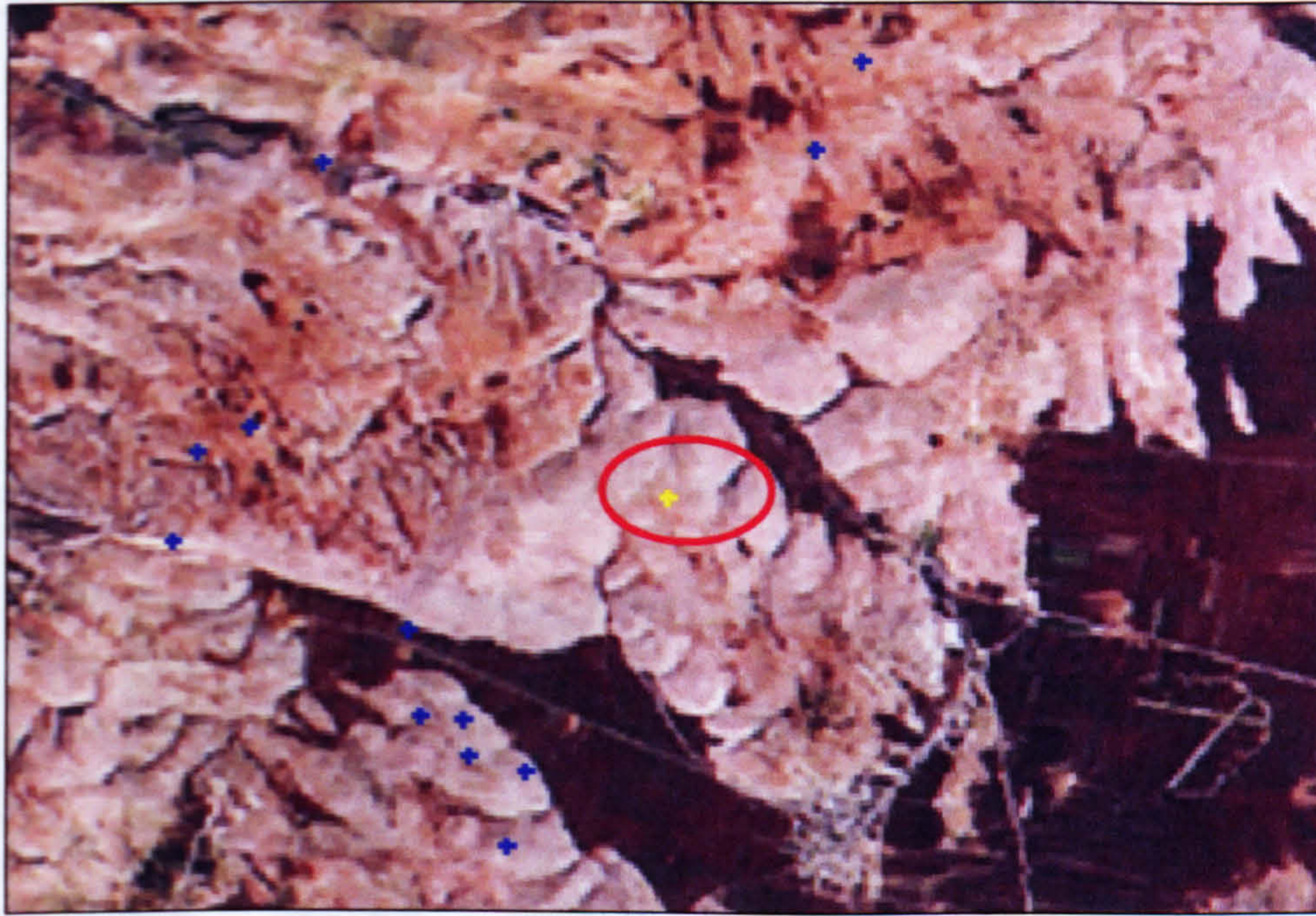
The archaeological sites were then plotted on top of this base map. The site data available comes from the various surveys described in Chapter 1, especially Butler (1907-9), Tchalenko (1953-8) and Peña et al (1987), with subsidiary information provided by Mattern (1944), Lassus (1947), Khoury (1987), Ruggieri (1992), Tate (1992), Biscop (1997), Loosley (2001), Hadjar (2003) and Trombley (2004). In order to locate the sites, the descriptions given in these volumes, in combination with the rudimentary maps they provide, have given a fairly good degree of accuracy. For example, the site of Ksajba was located through these descriptions:

'The ruins of this town are distinctly visible from the Plain of Sermeda; they stand on the top of a spur at the east end of the group of foot-hills at the northern end of the Djebel Barisha. The site is a commanding one, falling steeply on all sides, and is rather difficult of approach.' (Butler 1909, 157)



'Ruines sur le versant septentrional du Ġebel Bariša, à 3 km au Nord -Ouest de Sermada...' (Tchalenko 1958, 99)

These descriptions were used to place the site as follows (site circled in red):



*Figure 49: Sample map of the north of Jebel Barisha, showing the location of Ksajba*

Ksajba was then visited on the ground, in order to verify the accuracy of the technique employed. Comparing the two sets of co-ordinates produced a 60m discrepancy, which was felt to be acceptable. In total, 28 of the total 135 monastic, or possible monastic, sites were found and visited in the field in this way. This represents around 21% of the total. At each of these sites, GPS co-ordinates were taken and then added to the spatial database in order to form a 'co-ordinate matrix' of the kind described in 5.1, above. In the majority of cases, it was found that a satisfactory degree of accuracy had already been achieved. Where sites did require correction, this then enabled all of the sites around them to be more accurately located also, since they were located in relation to the known point. In this way, the accuracy of the overall map of monasteries and associated sites gradually increased. However, the fact remains that the majority of sites were *not* visited and so GPS co-ordinates could not be obtained. Consequently, the possibility exists that most monastic sites are only located according to the quality of the previous mapping and descriptive evidence. Since this is highly variable, location categories were applied to account for the perceived reliability of the placement of every monastery and settlement. These categories are as follows:



Location categories	Description
1	Site is located, but position <i>unlikely</i> to be correct
2	Site is <i>possibly</i> located in the correct place
3	Site is <i>probably</i> located in the correct position
4	Site <i>almost certainly</i> located in the correct position
5	Site <i>reliably</i> located with GPS co-ordinates

Table 12: Summary of location categories applied to the data

These location categories, when applied to the range of plotted sites, can be broken down as follows:

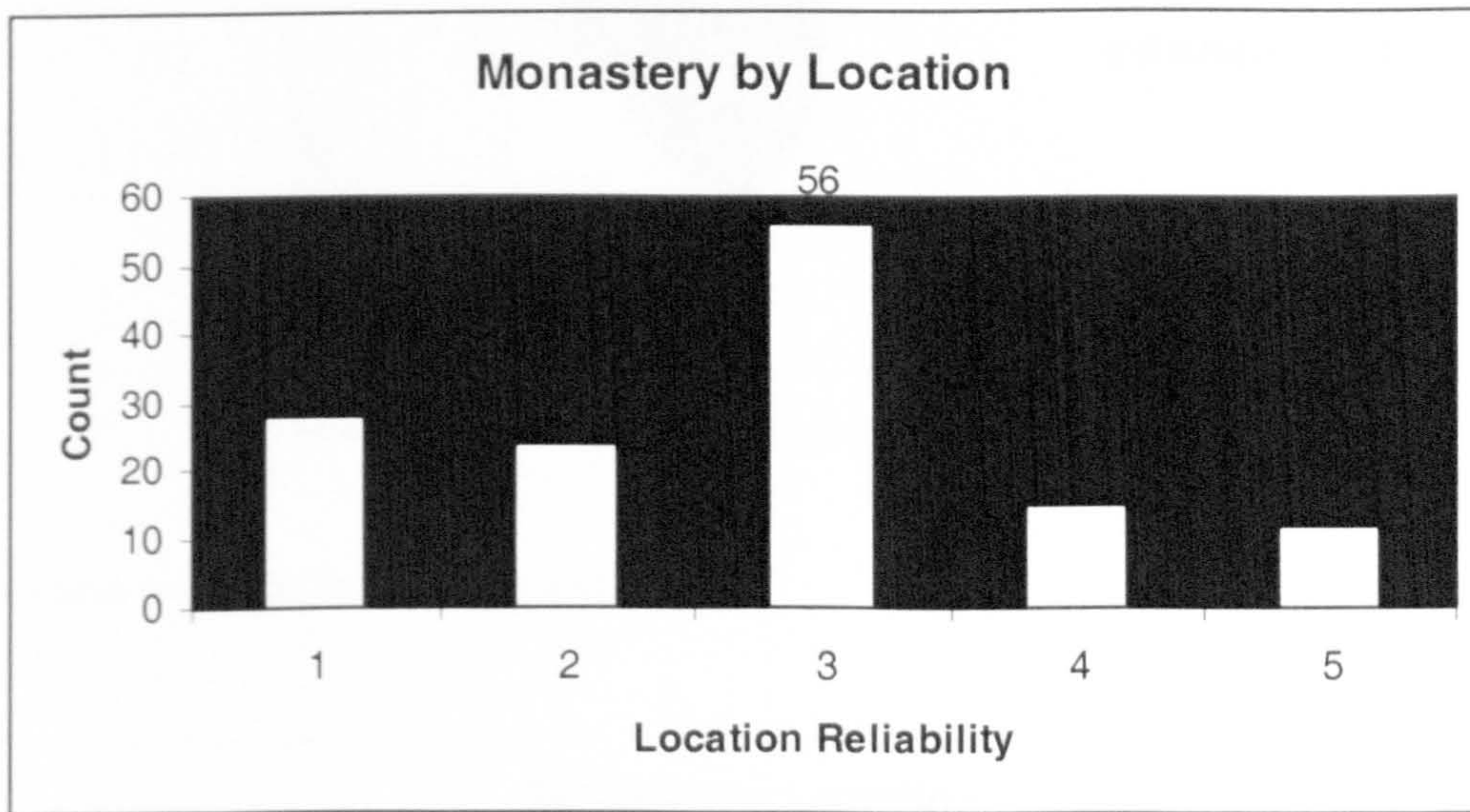


Figure 50: Bar chart showing the number of monasteries per location category

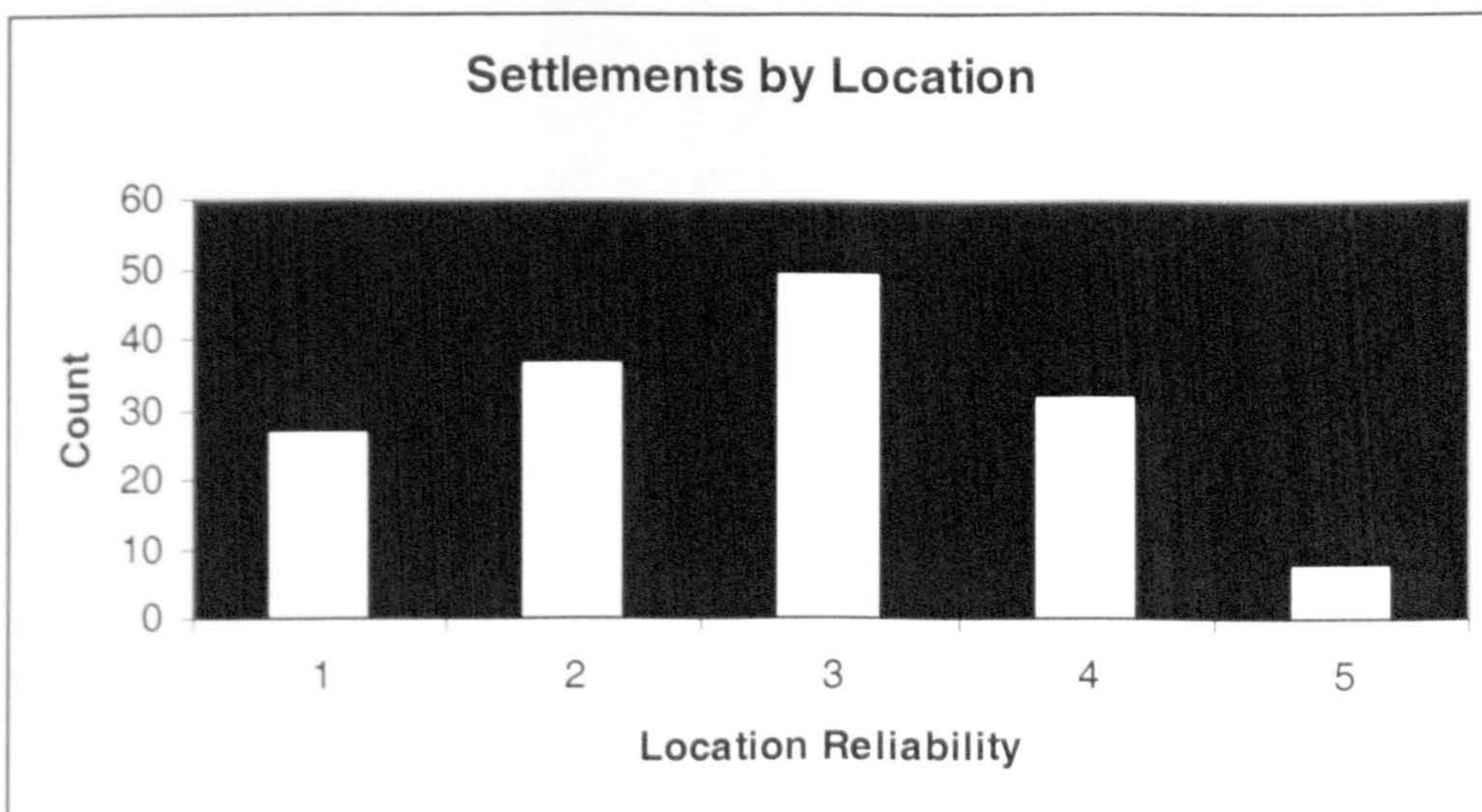
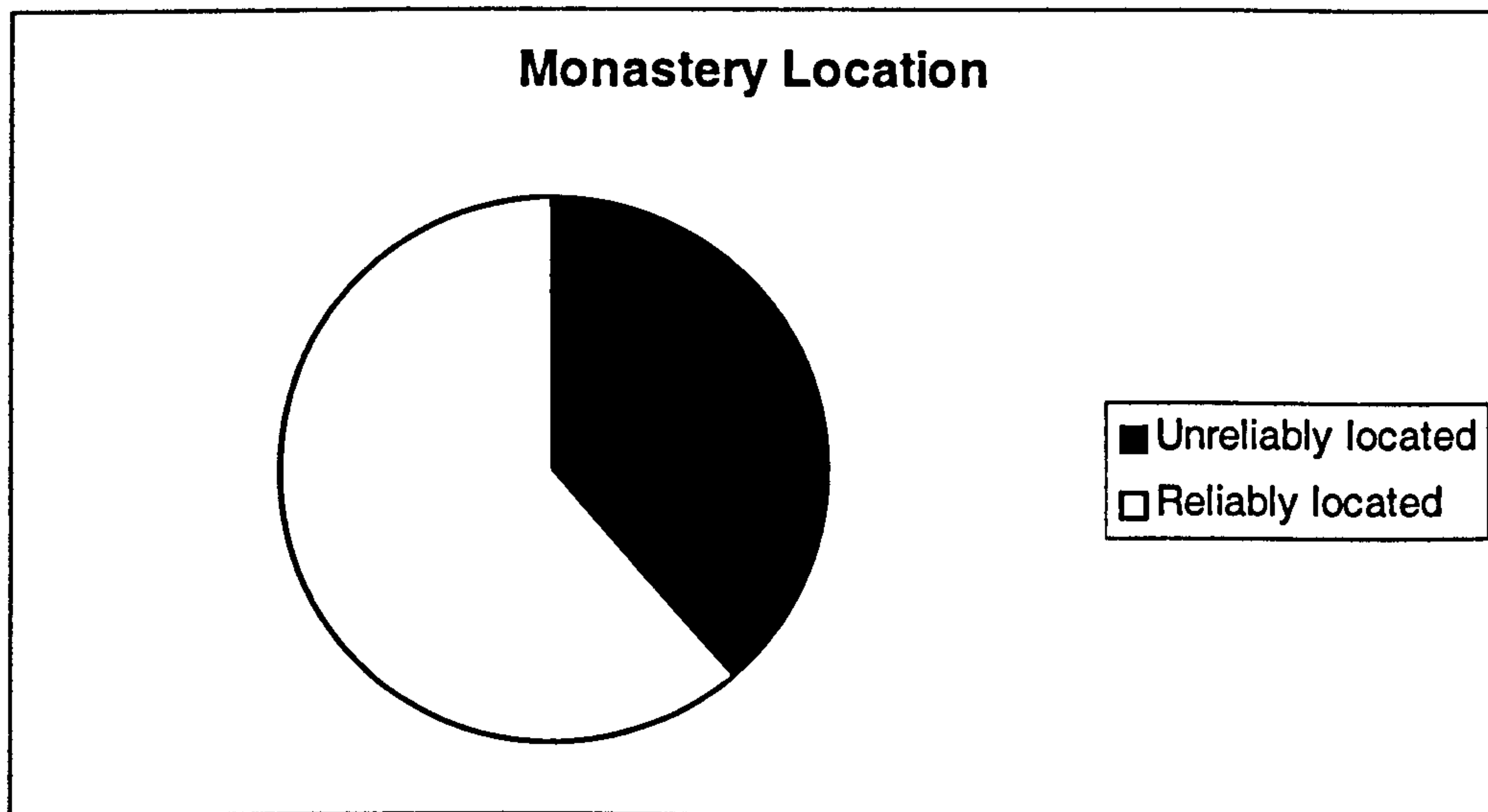


Figure 51: Bar chart showing the number of secular settlements per location category

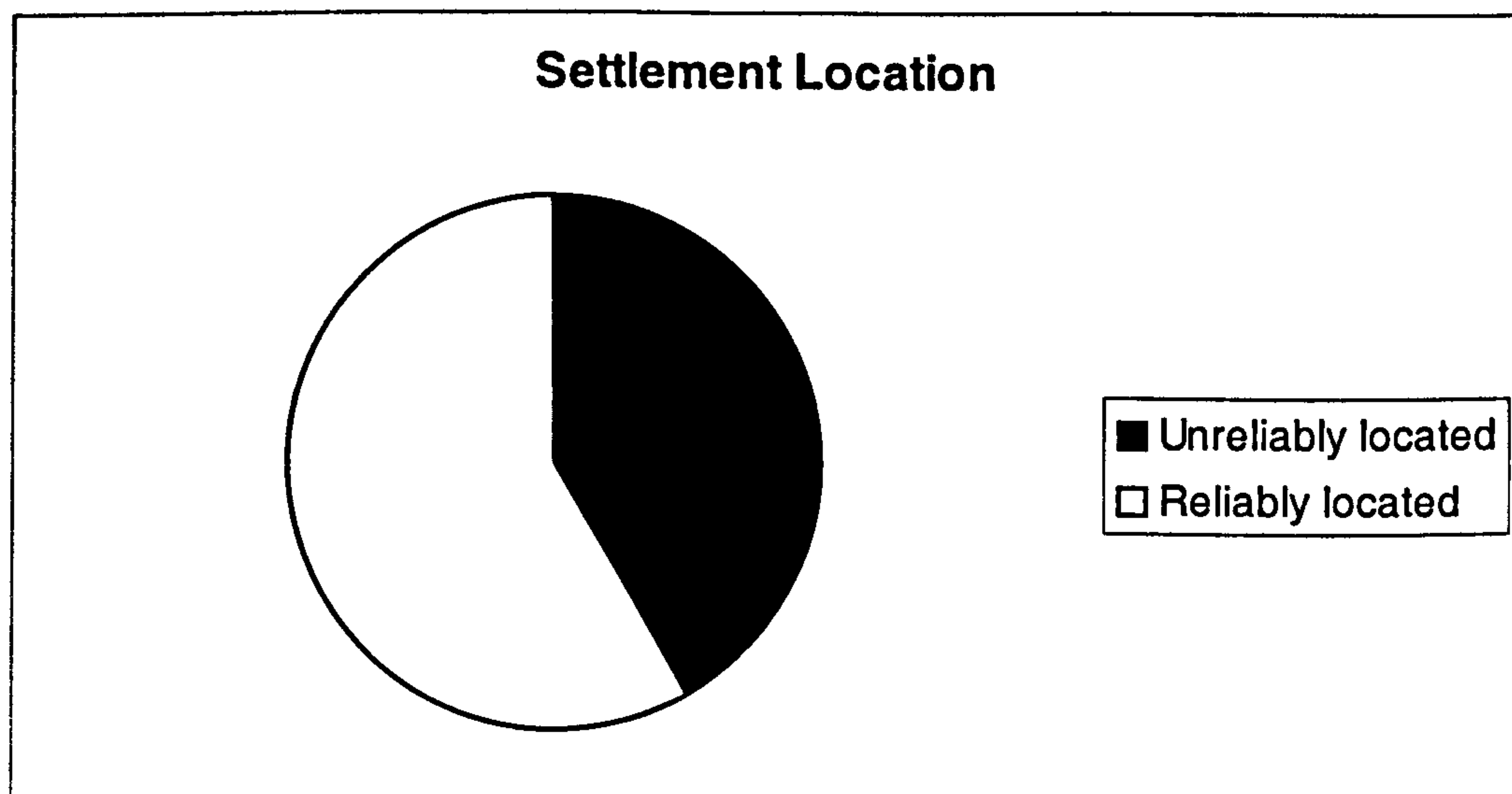


It was decided that whenever specific spatial relationships are examined (for which, see section 5.4, below), only those sites which are probably located in the correct place have been included. Consequently, sites whose location category is 2 or below are discounted as unreliable. This produces the following situation for monasteries:



*Figure 52: Pie chart summarising the reliability of monastery placement*

The situation is similar with settlement data:



*Figure 53: Pie chart summarising the reliability of settlement placement*

Of course, this may impose a bias towards those sites which are larger and more visible in the landscape, and thus more likely to have been visited, mapped and preserved in some fashion. Thus, smaller, eremitic sites, which may be slightly less visible, less often visited and are more likely to have been destroyed, may be excluded by this process. However, since so many sites are (at present) poorly located, this was felt to be an important safeguard. But



where spatial information is not considered important to the analysis employed (as in dealing with site distribution at a broad level, or where site morphology is discussed), poorly located sites are included as part of the data set.

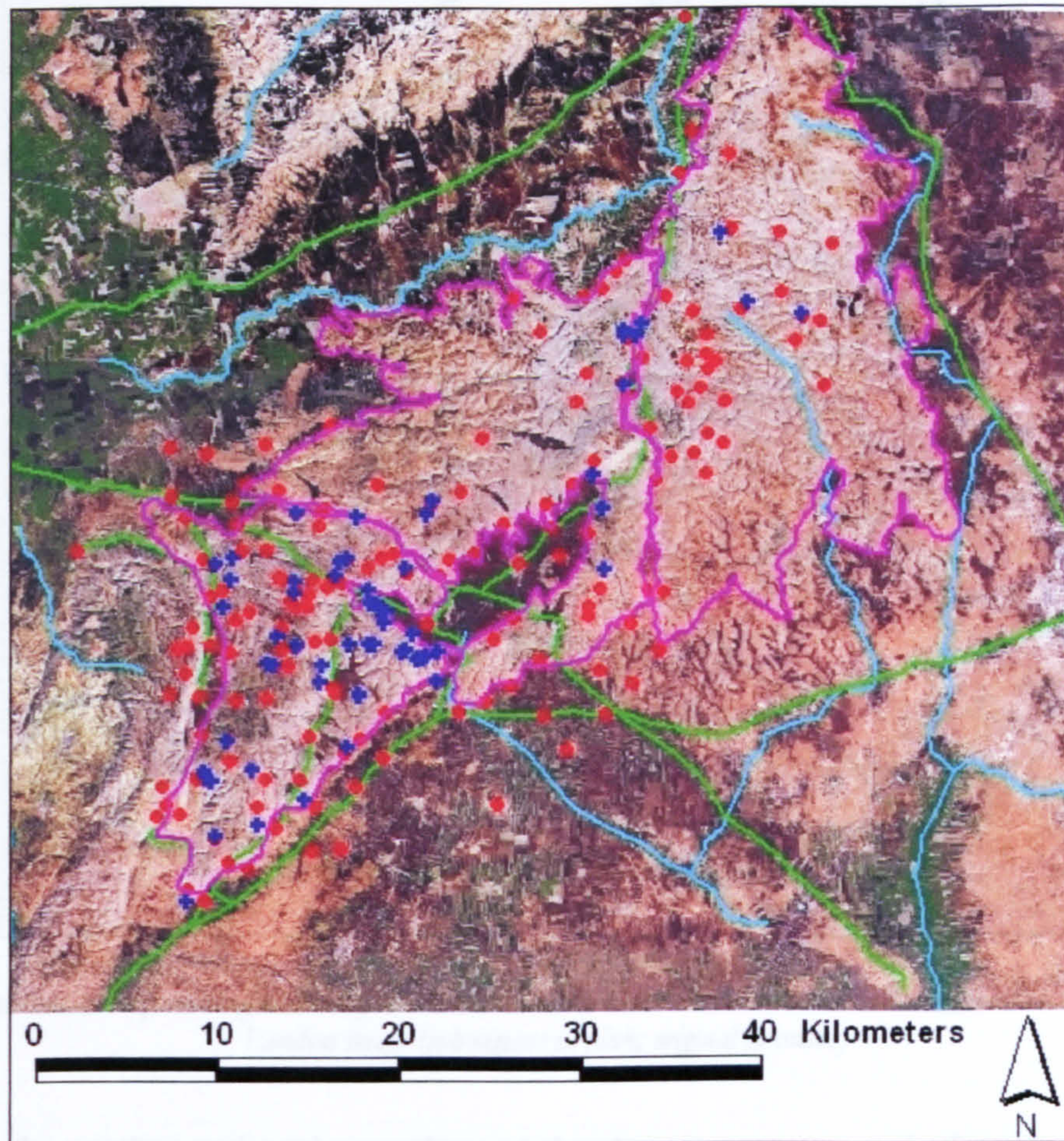
Communication routes were plotted using information provided by Dussaud (1927), Poidebard (1934) and Tchalenko (1953 III). Where ambiguity exists, and it seemed modern routes followed approximately the same course as ancient routes, modern routes were followed. In places, the course of visible features (usually lines of white - presumably limestone - debris with high reflectivity) showed up against the dark red soil. In the mountains, the easiest course was followed, if the route was not already clear. It will be evident that there are many flaws with this data set. In some cases, roads can be archaeologically verified by their construction, still evident today in the form of Roman flagstones. Some milestones exist, though in general these are rare, and cannot be used to verify every route proposed here. In some areas, such as around the large settlement of Brad in Jebel Sim'an, very little evidence for roads exists currently, though a settlement of such a size must have been served by a number of routes. However, given that a broad indication of the position of communication routes only is desired, the crudity of these techniques was thought adequate until better evidence becomes available.

Water resources are plotted using modern data provided from de-commissioned United States Defense data, itself digitised from aeronautical charts. This is available from a website provided by Dr. Stephen Savage at Arizona State University (<http://archaeology.asu.edu/Jordan/index.html>). Since this information used a different projection system, and proved difficult to re-project, the information was taken and re-digitised in the appropriate UTM projection using ArcView. This is, admittedly, modern data, and it may differ slightly from late antique evidence. However, recent technological developments are unlikely to have changed the course of water resources markedly, and the only obvious effect is the extent of 'greening' around each course due to diesel irrigation pumps. The examination of climate change presented in Chapter 3 established that there is likely to be only a fairly small difference between modern levels of rainfall and those of the fourth to seventh centuries.

A full map displaying all of the features described thus far can now be shown. It displays monastic sites as blue crosses, settlements as red dots, communication routes as green lines and water courses as blue lines. The pink outlines denote the area of the 3 *jibāl*, Sim'an, Halaqa and Barisha. A larger version of this map can be found in Appendix A. The



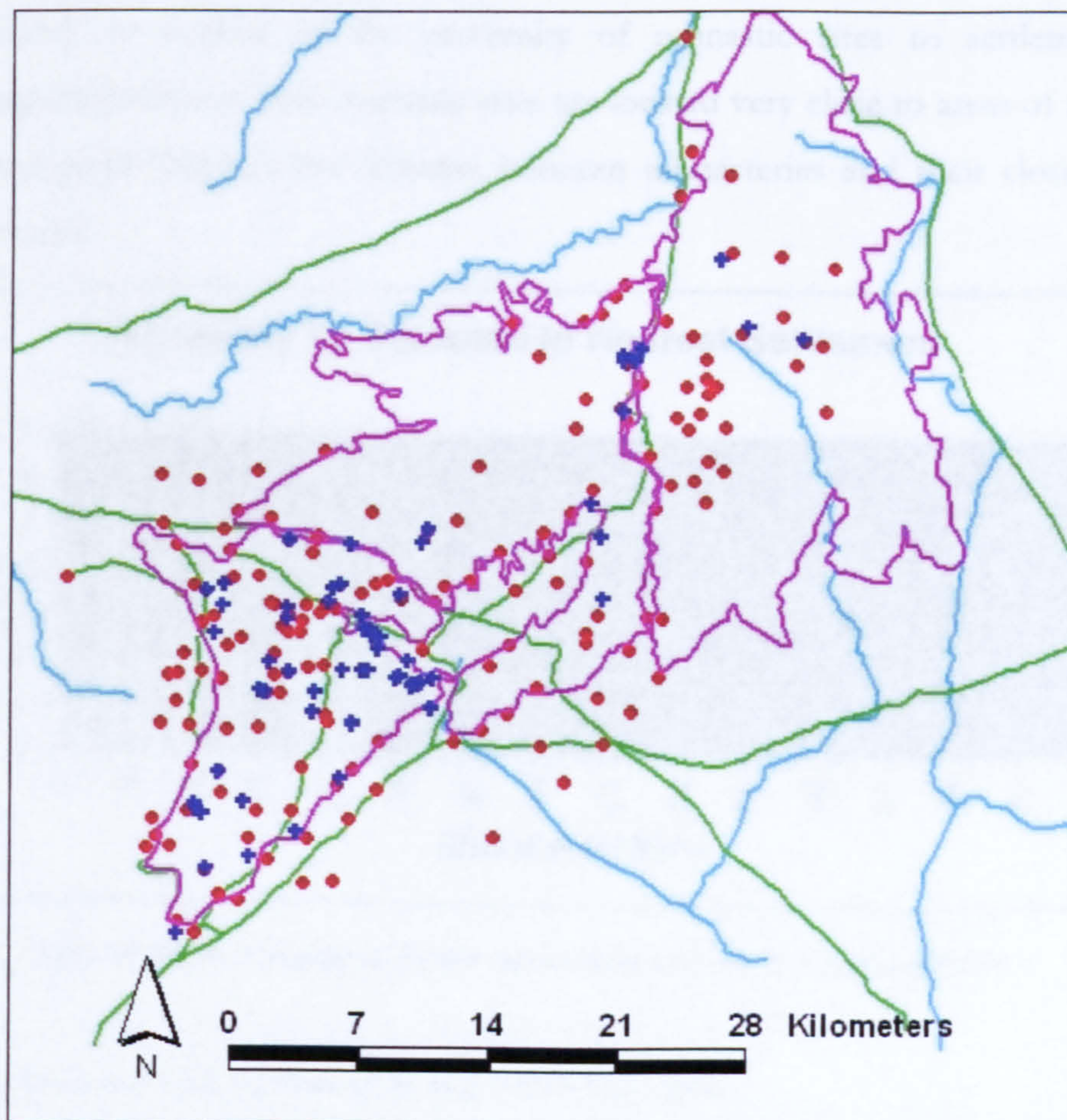
identification of individual sites on the map can be found by referring to the GIS in Appendix F.



*Figure 54: Distribution map showing monastery and settlement sites, water courses and ancient communication routes overlaid onto a Landsat image (sub-regions in pink; original in colour)*

The same distribution, but simplified to show features without the satellite image as a backdrop, is as follows (also in Appendix B):





*Figure 55: Distribution map showing monastery and settlement sites, water courses and ancient communication routes without the Landsat image (sub-regions in pink; original in colour)*

This level of precision and understanding of the data was necessary before the relationship between monasteries and the landscape could be reliably investigated.

### **5.5 Settlement-monastery distribution**

Having plotted the monasteries and settlements, this section will explore their spatial relationship. How are monasteries and settlements distributed, and what does this distribution suggest? Were monastic sites located in order to enable them to take part in the behaviour and activities occurring in settlements, or were they placed in order *not* to facilitate such interaction, or for it to be rare and sporadic? Were monasteries placed so as to draw settlements into an ideological relationship, or to retain separation?

The various analyses which follow will attempt to address these questions. It should be emphasised that from now onwards, only those monasteries conforming to category 6 or above (see section 5.4) in terms of their definition as a monastic site will be included in such analyses.



The first factor to explore is the proximity of monastic sites to settlements. The overwhelming impression is that monastic sites are located very close to areas of settlement. The following graph displays the distance between monasteries and their closest area of secular settlement:

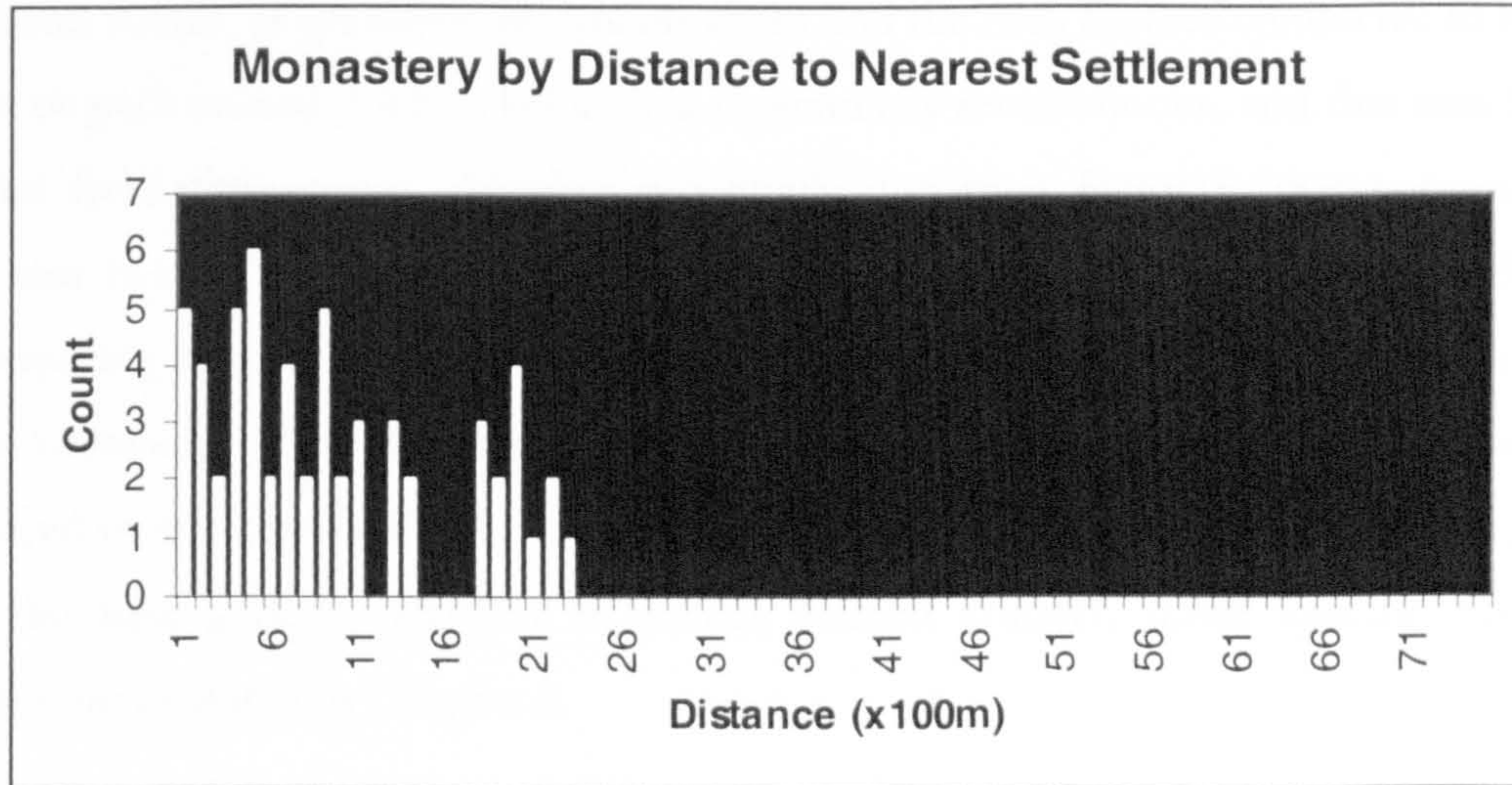


Figure 56: Bar chart showing the distance between monasteries and their nearest settlement

Alternatively, this could be expressed by the following tables:

Mean	0.9074
Standard Deviation	0.6615
Minimum	0.03
Maximum	2.21
Number 'Not Known'	3
Total number of monasteries	61

Table 13: Summary of monastery-settlement distance data (distances in km)

% Monasteries	Within a distance of (km):
28.89	0.00 - 0.5
21.48	0.51 - 1.0
14.07	1.01 - 1.5
11.85	1.51 - 2.0
4.44	2.01 - 2.5
3.70	2.51 - 3.0
1.48	3.01 - 3.5
2.96	3.5+
11.11	Not Known

Table 14: Summary of monastery-settlement distance per 0.5km catchment

As can be seen, over 50% of the monastic sites are within 1km of a secular settlement, and over 75% are within 2km.



Of course, the danger here is that by considering the nearest site in physical terms, I may be imposing a simplistic, functional gloss over what are in fact more complex relationships. For example, the closest site is not always the most accessible, depending on the nature of the terrain. However, the topography of the limestone massif is, in general, not prohibitive to fairly direct routes, as gradients are usually slight and the rock surface conducive to transport by foot or pack animal. Only Jebel al-A'la is genuinely mountainous, and this area has been excluded from this survey. Another potentially distorting factor is that communication routes may have been reliant on, or restricted by, property and land divisions, with certain areas requiring circumvention, and others more able to be crossed. However, given that our current knowledge of field systems in the limestone massif is patchy, this factor cannot be considered to any reliable depth. Consequently, I felt that the nearest distance was, in most cases, the best general indicator of actual, human contact. More specific routes and pathways are explored in Chapter 6.

The site data used thus far includes *all* monasteries, including those whose location may be unreliable. It is worth comparing these results with those whose location is deemed reliable (ie, which have a location category of 3 or above). This produces the following graph:

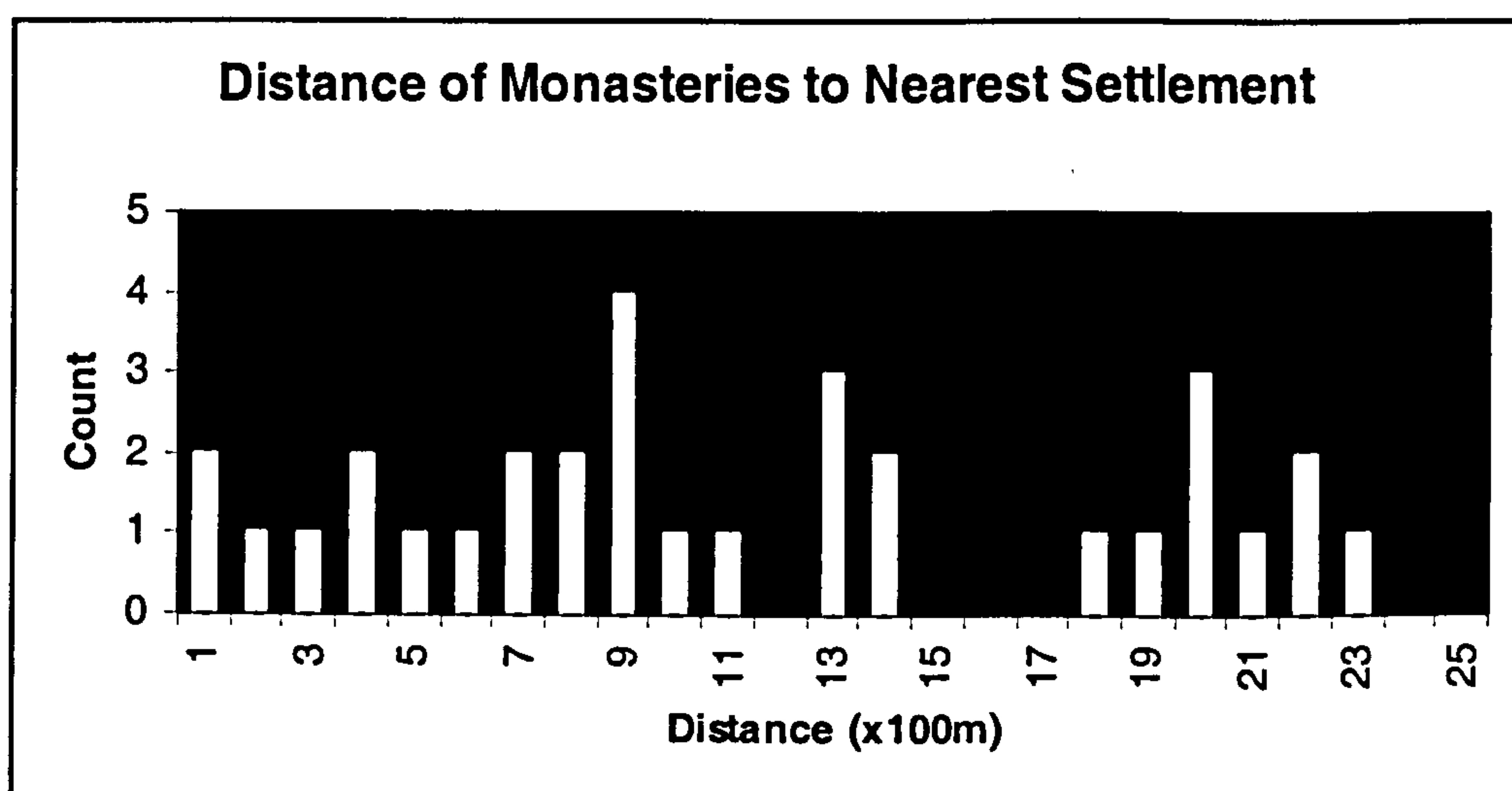


Figure 57: Bar chart showing the distance between monasteries (reliably located) and their nearest settlement

Alternatively, this could be expressed by the following tables:

Mean	1.098
Standard Deviation	0.678
Minimum	0.030
Maximum	2.210
Number 'Not Known'	1
Total number of monasteries (location category $\geq 3$ )	33

Table 15: Summary of monastery-settlement distance data (for reliably located monasteries)



% Monasteries	Within a distance of (km):
21.87	0.00 - 0.5
31.25	0.51 - 1.0
18.75	1.01 - 1.5
15.63	1.51 - 2.0
12.50	2.01 - 2.5
0	2.51 - 3.0
0	3.01 - 3.5
0	3.5+
1	Not Known

Table 16: Summary of monastery-settlement distance per 0.5km catchment (monasteries reliably located)

These results, of monasteries reliably located, differ very little from those produced by the analysis of *all* monasteries, no matter how well they are located. Again, over 50% of monastic sites are located within 1km of a settlement. And in this case, over 80% of them are located within 2km.

It is noticeable that a distinct group of monastic sites are located further away from areas of settlement than the rest. This group can be seen as follows:

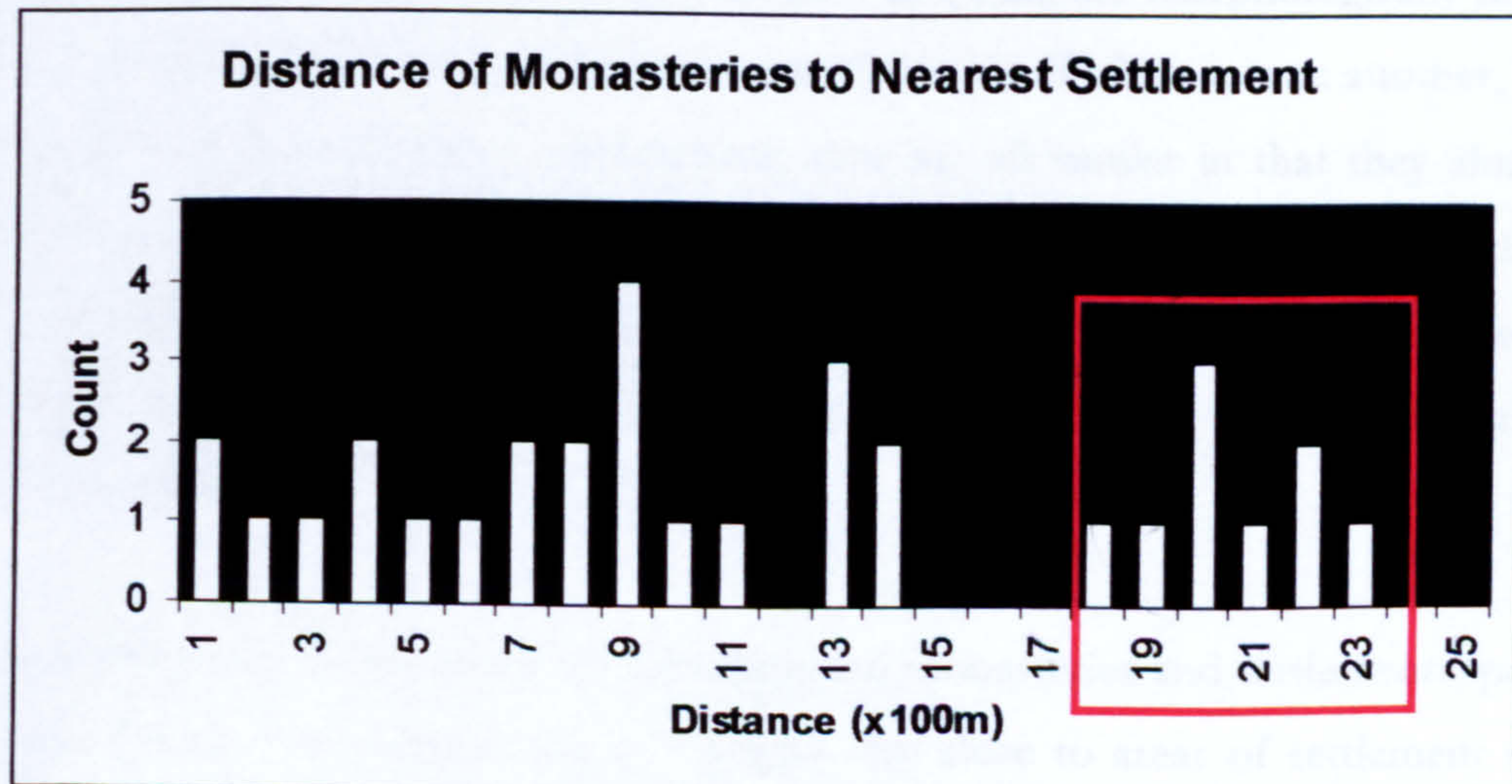


Figure 58: Bar chart showing the distance between monasteries (reliably located) and their nearest settlement, with a more 'isolated' group marked in red (original in colour)

This group of thirteen sites is located between 1.7 and 2.3km away from settlement. Why is this? Do these represent a distinct type of monastery? They are as follows (see table 17, overleaf):



ID	Name	Distance
3	Dayr Turmanin	1.73
35	Qasr al-Banat	1.82
65	Burj Nimra	2.21
84	Kafr Fansha	1.97
101	Burj Jalahah	1.89
103	Burj Jaber	1.76
104	Burj Nasr	1.98
105	Dayr Burj Nasr	2.05
107	Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi	2.11
114	Burj Sarakhta	1.77
116	Sarakhta D	1.91
121	Burj Suwayd A	1.97
122	Burj Suwayd B	2.18

Table 17: List of monasteries within this 'isolated' category

The first two monasteries, Dayr Turmanin and Qasr al-Banat, are morphologically different to the rest, and are in Jebel Halaqa. However, the others are all close to one another, within a particular area of Jebel Barisha. Furthermore, they are all similar in that they almost all have towers, over half have an agricultural press, and almost none has a church or a baptistery. So what does this group represent? This specific group will be discussed in more detail in section 5.9, then again in 5.10. It is mentioned here only to highlight variation within the overall dataset.

Returning to the issue of the overall distance between monasteries and settlements, perhaps it is the case though that monasteries are located very close to areas of settlement simply because there is insufficient 'empty' space (however one defines this, whether in terms of physical topography or land ownership) within the landscape to place monasteries in isolation. Could it be that proximity is not ideologically significant, but actually just a necessity? In order to investigate this, I generated a series of random points, within the three *jebel* areas. Exactly the same number of random points as monasteries were generated, and these were generated in the same 'density-per-*jebel*' ratio as with the real monasteries (ie four in Jebel Sim'an, ten in Jebel Halaqa and forty-seven in Jebel Barisha). The genuine monasteries were then removed from the map, and the 'real' settlements plotted, as follows:



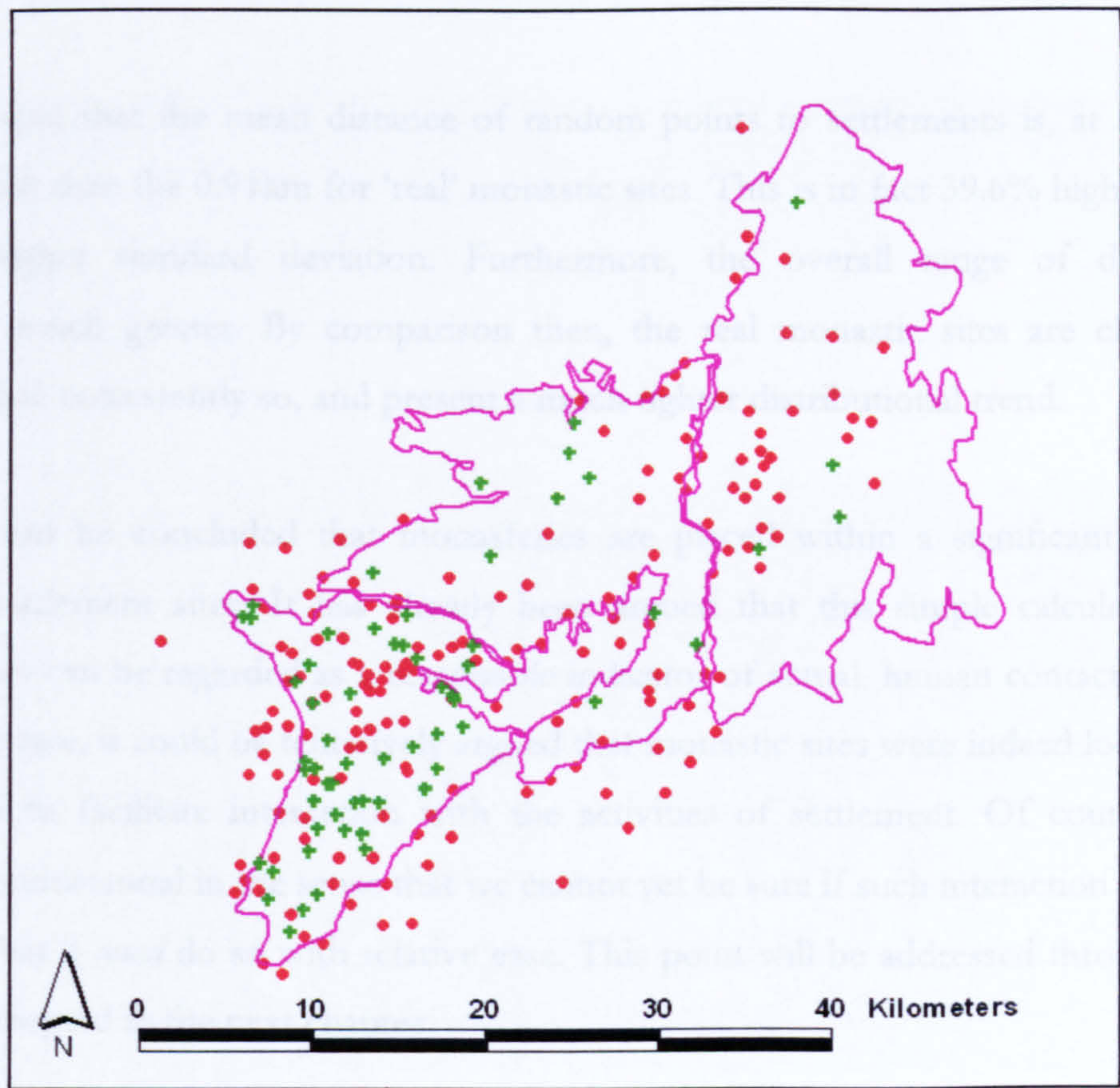


Figure 59: Distribution plot of settlements (in red) and 'random' monastic sites (in green; original in colour)

Using this map, the distance between the new, randomly generated 'monastic' sites and their nearest settlement was measured. This produced the following result:

Mean	1.237
Standard Deviation	0.809
Minimum	0.040
Maximum	4.820
Total number of monasteries	61

Table 18: Summary of settlement-'random' monastery site data

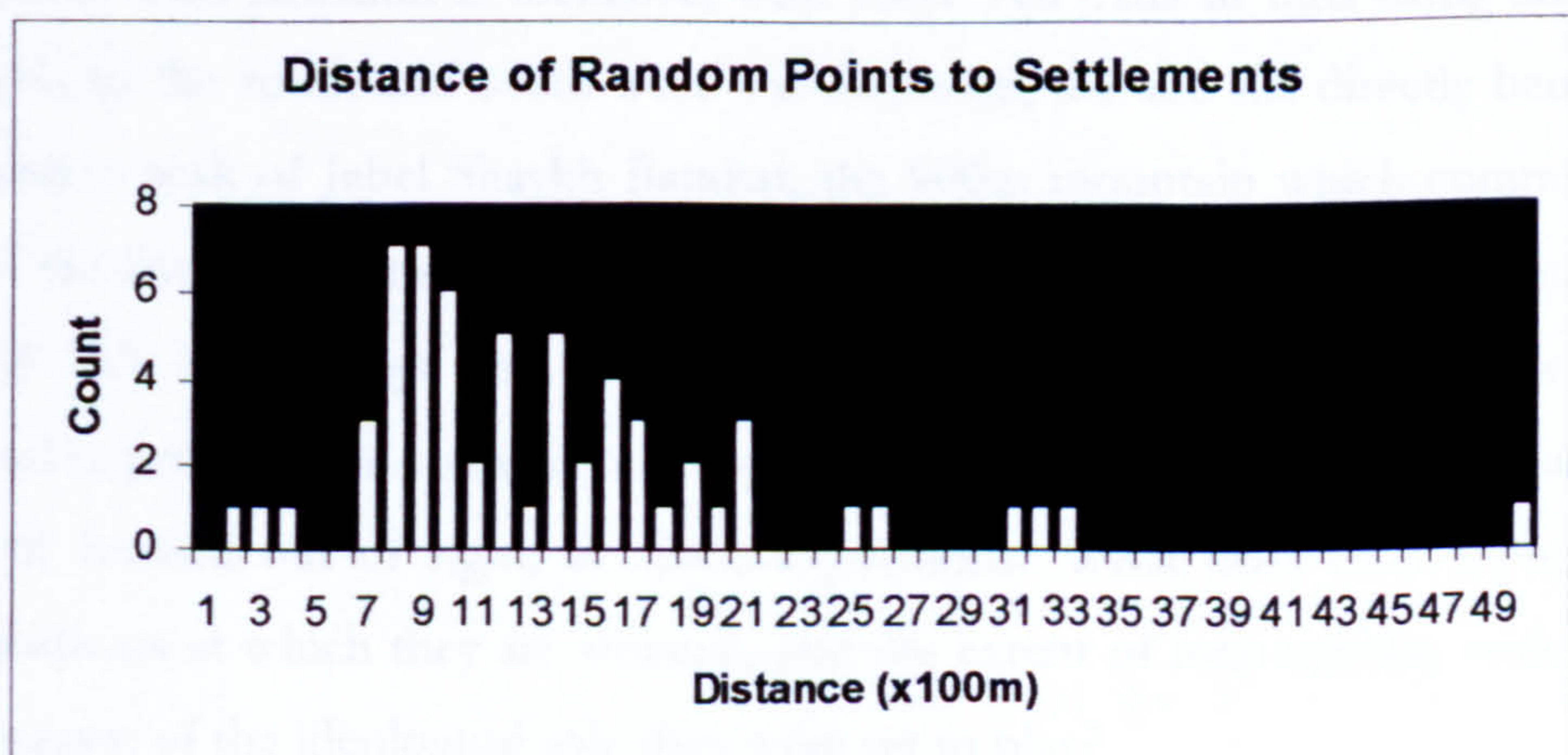


Figure 60: Bar chart showing distance between 'random' monasteries and their nearest settlement site



So, it can be seen that the mean distance of random points to settlements is, at 1.27km, somewhat higher than the 0.91km for 'real' monastic sites. This is in fact 39.6% higher, with a markedly higher standard deviation. Furthermore, the overall range of distances represented is much greater. By comparison then, the real monastic sites are closer to settlements, more consistently so, and present a much tighter distributional trend.

From this, it can be concluded that monasteries are placed within a significantly close proximity to settlement sites. It has already been argued that this simple calculation of physical distance can be regarded as a reasonable indicator of actual, human contact. If this was indeed the case, it could be tentatively argued that monastic sites were indeed located in such a way as to facilitate interaction with the activities of settlement. Of course, this reasoning is circumstantial in the sense that we cannot yet be sure if such interaction *did* take place, merely that it *could* do so with relative ease. This point will be addressed through the case studies presented in the next chapter.

## 5.6 Siting, gradient and intervisibility

Distance across a supposedly 'flat' area is only a two-dimensional indicator of a site's potential interaction with those around it. Across the gently undulating landscapes of the limestone massif, it is apparent that sites are positioned in a variety of ways, each lending a distinct character, and certain advantages and drawbacks. Sites can see and be seen in different ways according to their position, and so affecting their prominence or seclusion within the landscape. The monastic site of Dayr Tell 'Ada, for example, is positioned at the very head of the Plain of Dana, raised above the flat agricultural land in a way which is highly visible for the whole of the plain's 13km length, its villages and the heavily settled margins beyond. This situation is recursive, with Dayr Tell 'Ada in turn being able to see great distances to the south and south-west. Furthermore, the site sits directly beneath the starkly dominant peak of Jebel Shaykh Barakat, the 900m mountain which commands the landscape of the limestone massif and surrounding land (known as Koryphê, or 'summit' in antiquity; *HR IV*). So, is Dayr Tell 'Ada unique? To what extent were monastic sites in general placed in positions of dominance? Were they meant to see and be seen, or were they in fact mostly located out of sight, in discrete positions? What does their topographical siting, the gradients at which they are situated, and the extent of intervisibility with areas of settlement suggest of the ideological role they were set to play?





*Figure 61: The prominent siting of Dayr Tell 'Ada (in the foreground) commanding extensive visibility of the Plain of Dana*

In order to answer these questions, height data is required. Given the difficulties with most modern cartography for the region already discussed, it was decided to use the recently released Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM) data, acquired by NASA in February 2000. SRTM collected 3-D measurements of the Earth's surface, through a specially modified radar system (NASA 2005). Two resolutions of data are available, the first sampled at 3 arc-seconds, which is 1/1200th of a degree of latitude and longitude, or about 90m (295 feet). A second resolution, at 30m, is available for certain areas of the world (especially North America). Unfortunately, only the former are currently made available by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). This data presents some problems, in that it is relatively crude and contains 'dead zones' in which no data was able to be collected. It is fortunate that the areas of interest discussed here were not severely affected by this problem. It was therefore possible to download the data from the USGS, convert it into 'grid' files using the Grid Machine 6.20 extension for ArcView, and fit together the various 'tiles'. Since these work best in longitude/latitude co-ordinates (expressed in decimal degrees), the monastery and settlement point data was converted in ArcGIS, and overlaid onto the SRTM data. It was then possible to ascertain height co-ordinates for every site. A summary of the height of monastic sites is as follows (see table 19, overleaf):



Mean	467.00
Standard Deviation	65.829
Minimum	327
Maximum	588
Number 'Not Known'	2
Total number of monasteries (location category $\geq 3$ )	33

Table 19: Summary of the altitude of monastic sites

The same analysis for settlements produced the following results:

Mean	462.80
Standard Deviation	117.97
Minimum	179.00
Maximum	747.00
Number 'Not Known'	0
Total number of settlements	147

Table 20: Summary of the altitude of settlement sites

It can be seen, first of all, that the standard deviation for settlements is much greater, as would be expected as there are far more settlements than monasteries. Also, the settlements cover a wider variety of topographic locations than monasteries. However, in spite of these differences, it can also be observed that monasteries are generally sited between 4 and 5m above settlements. It could be argued that this is not so far as to be out of sight, but also consistently high enough to overlook the majority of villages.

Is it the case then that most monasteries are situated on hilltops? As might be expected, the situation is not as simple as this. The results are as follows:

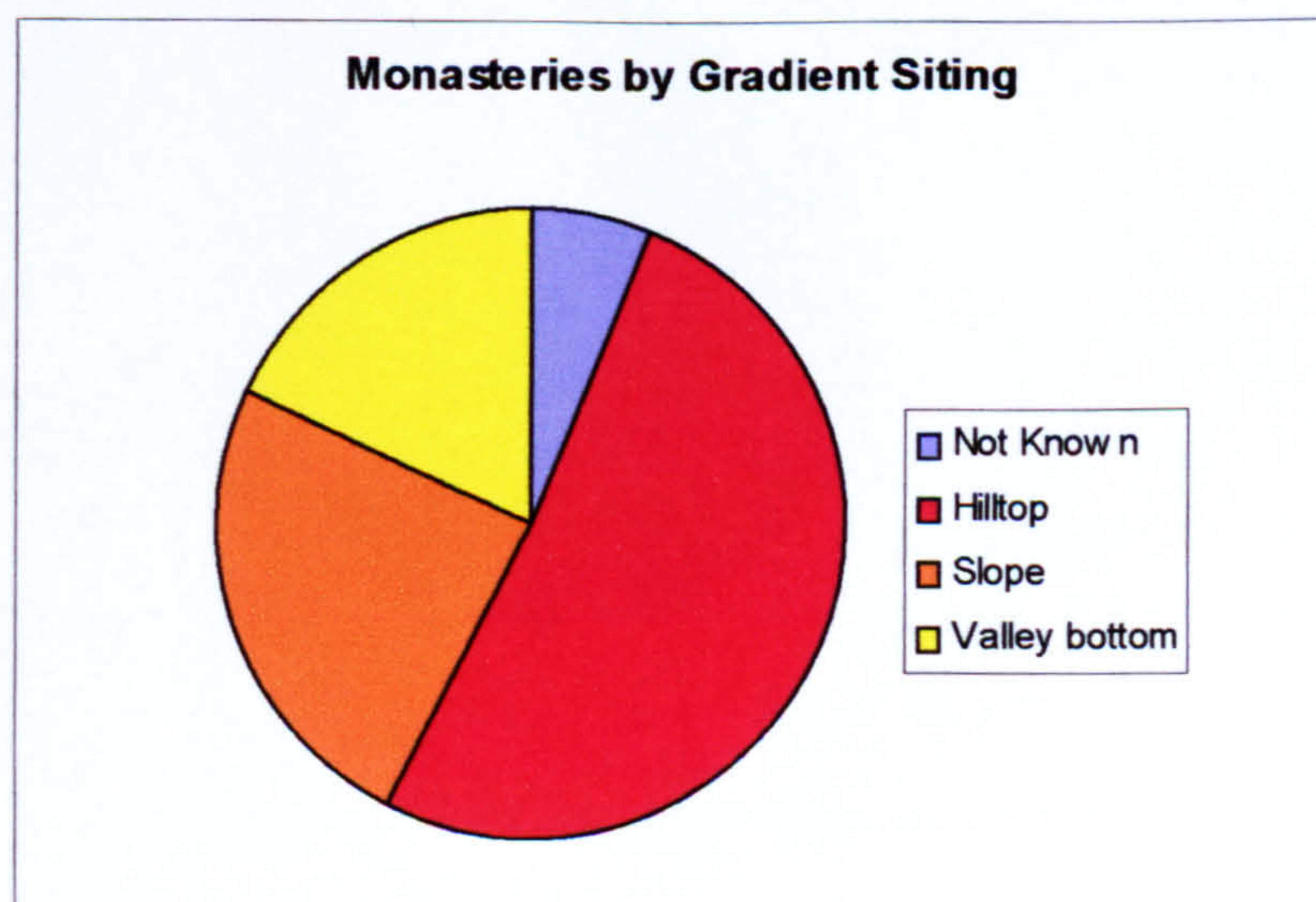


Figure 62: Pie chart showing the number of monasteries per gradient siting (original in colour)



As can be seen, a majority of monasteries are placed on hilltops (51.5%), though the picture is made more complicated as some sites are positioned on slopes (24.2%), and a minority (18.2%) in the valley bottoms. There may well have been more monasteries positioned in valley bottoms, especially away from the limestone massif in the Wadi 'Afrin to the north-west, and the Wadi Quwayq to the east. However, such sites are no longer available to us, presumably since they were constructed of mud brick and have now been destroyed (though survey work in the Amuq Valley (Casana 2004) and the Homs region (Phillip 2002a) suggests that such sites may still be visible, though not necessarily identifiable as monasteries, in the form of artefact spreads and soil discolouration).

If monastic sites are generally situated higher than settlements, as well as more prominently than settlements, does that mean that a high degree of intervisibility was possible? To what extent could monasteries observe the activities of settlements? In order to answer this question, a simple viewshed analysis was carried out in ArcView, by asking which areas of land could be seen from monasteries, then observing to what extent plotted settlement sites occurred either within or outside visible areas. In order for a settlement to qualify as 'visible' from a monastery, all of the settlement had to be within the area. Tree cover was not considered a problem since non-cultivated trees are likely to have been sparse due to the very thin soil cover, and cultivated trees are assumed primarily to have been either olives or vines, or orchard varieties. It should be noted that since a general indication only was required in this instance, visibility has been calculated from a height of 0m above ground level. Of course, monastic sites contained architecture of variable heights, and this issue is discussed with regard to monastic towers, the position of windows and other factors in the next chapter. Nevertheless, a general indication of the visibility of settlements from monasteries is as follows (figure 63, overleaf; settlement sites are shown as yellow dots):



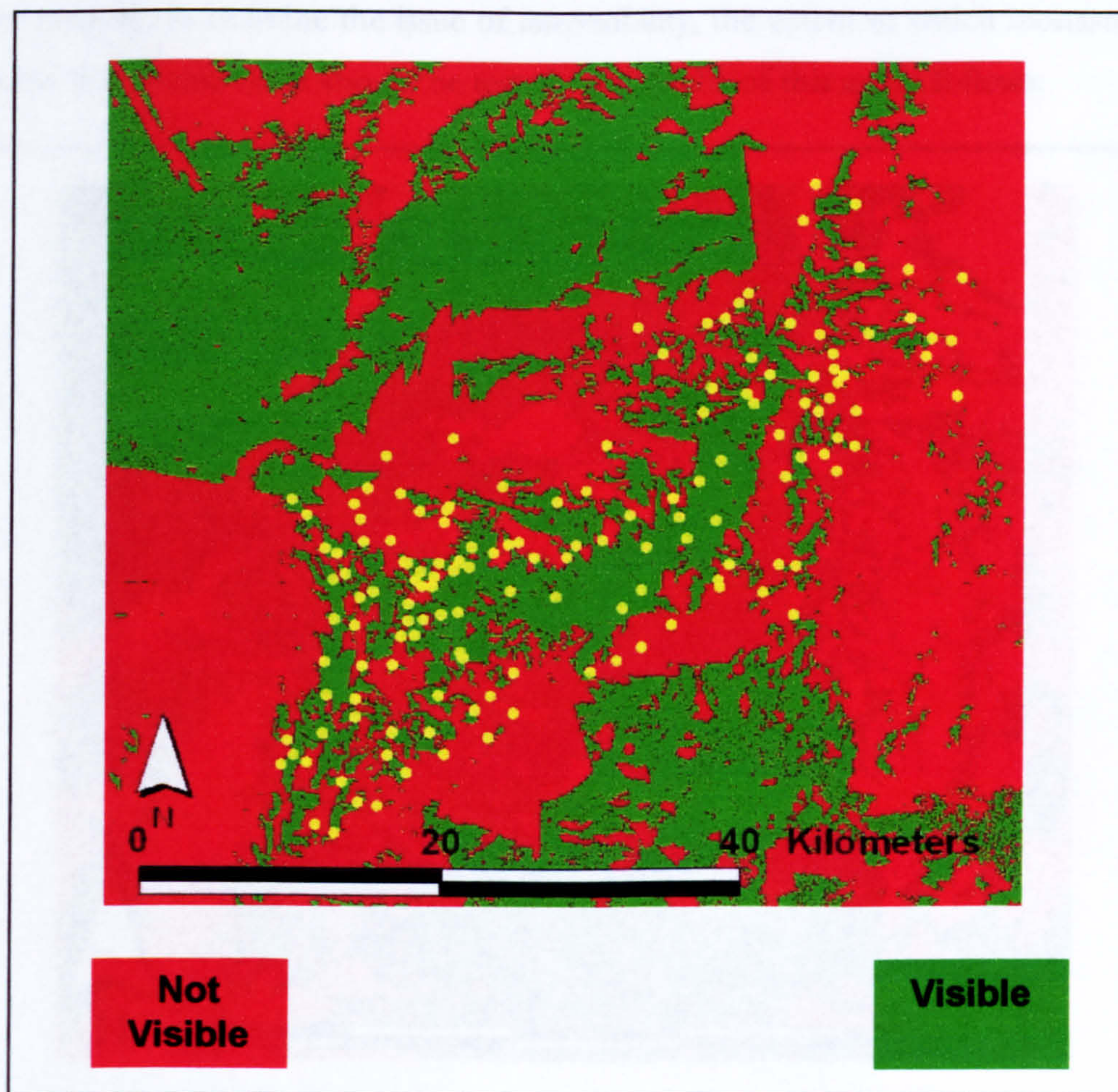


Figure 63: A viewshed plot showing settlements as visible from monastic sites (original in colour)

As can be seen, the majority of settlements in the region are indeed visible from at least one monastic site. The proportions are as follows:

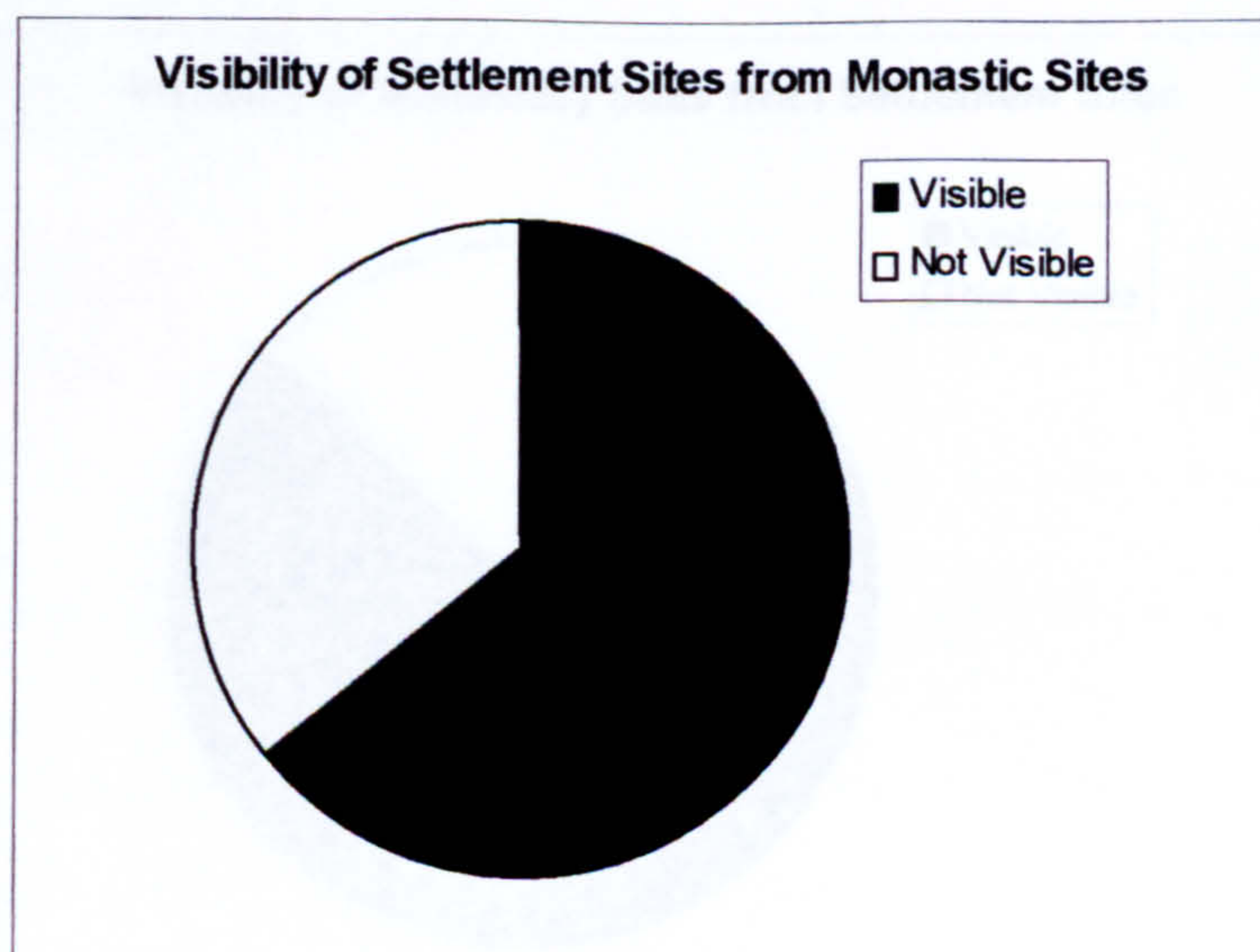


Figure 64: Pie chart showing the proportion of settlement sites visible from monastic sites



In order properly to examine the issue of *intervisibility*, the extent to which monasteries are also visible from settlements should be tested. The results of this are as follows:

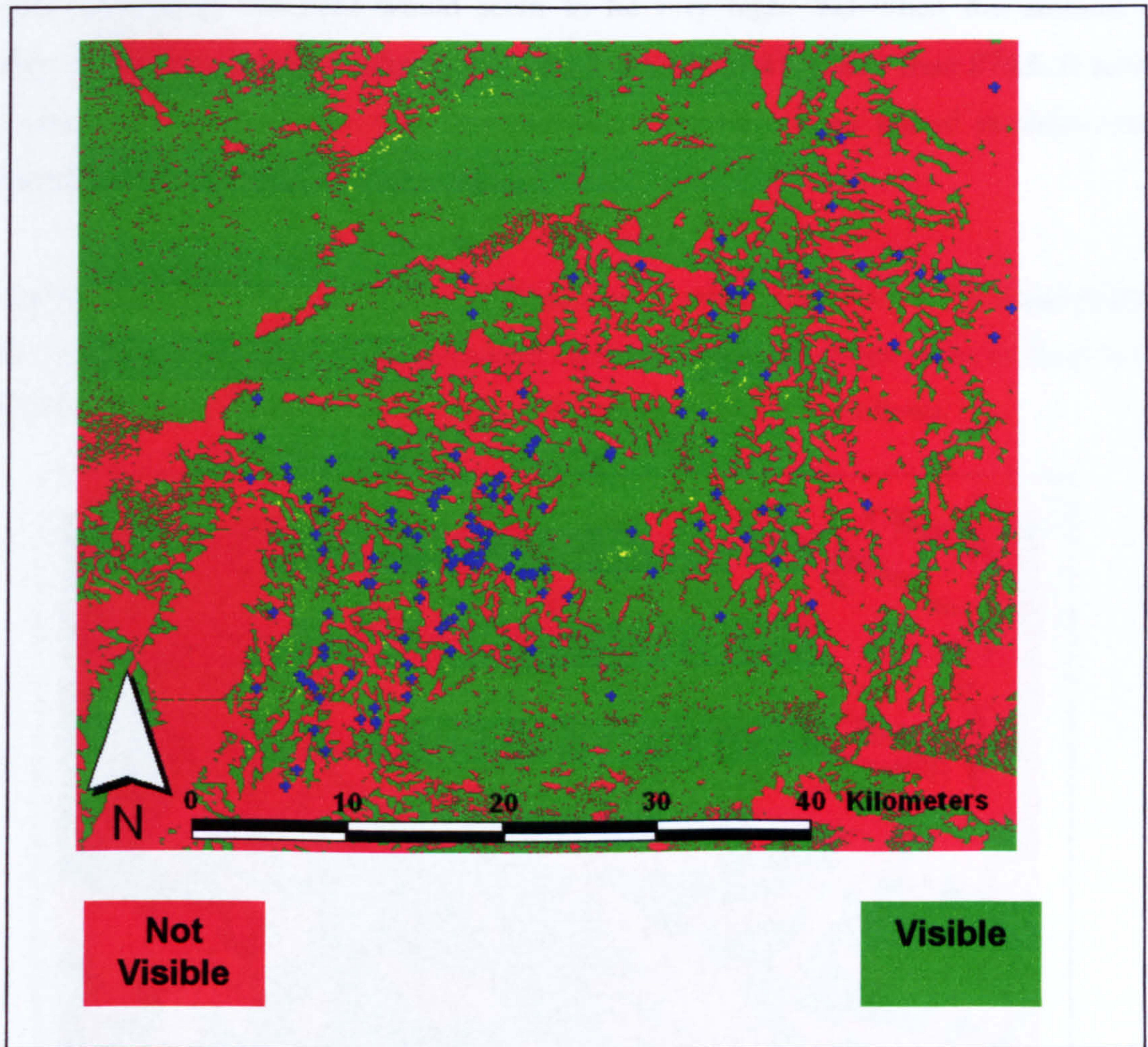


Figure 65: Viewshed plot showing monasteries as visible from settlement sites (original in colour)

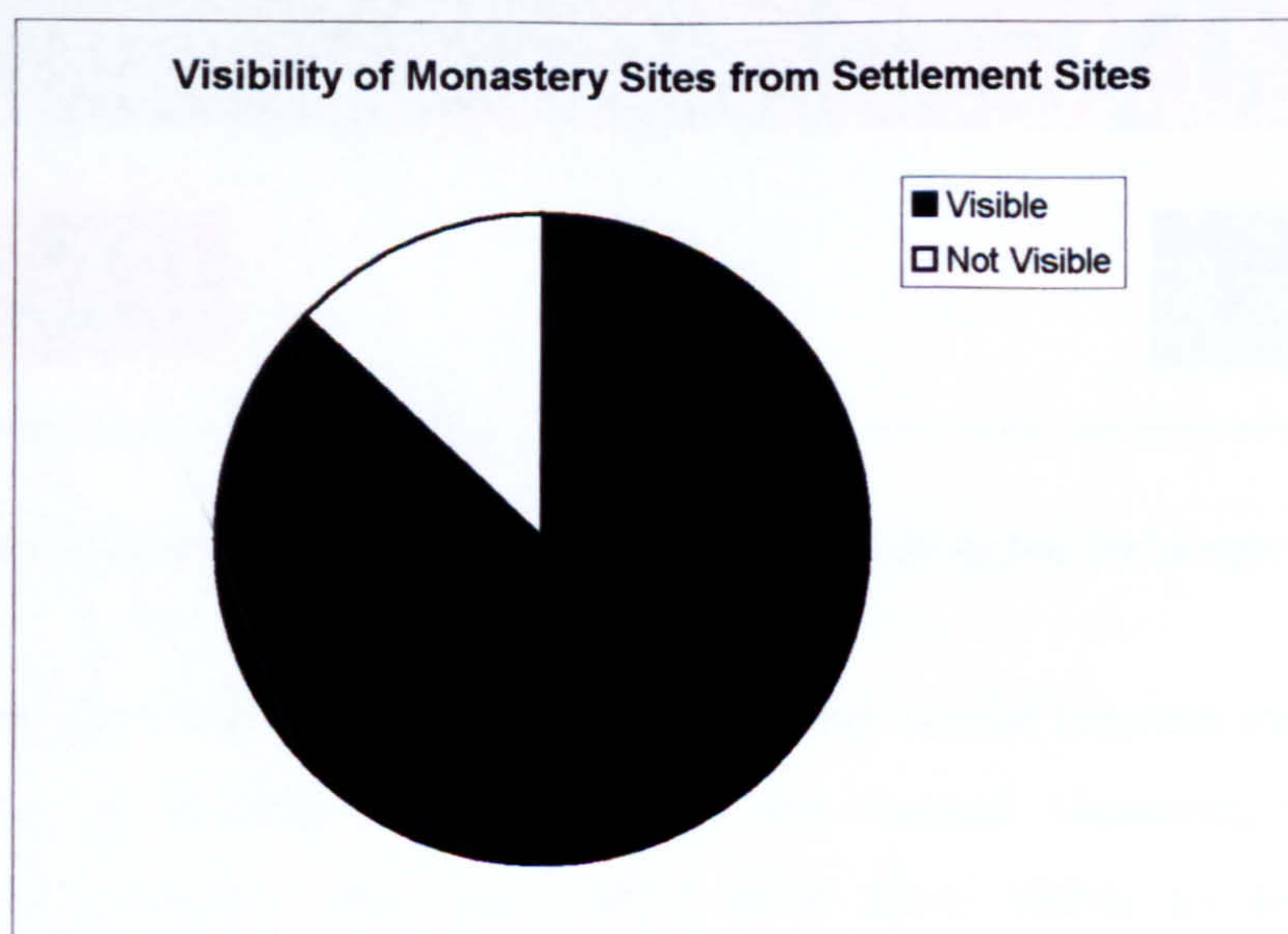


Figure 66: Pie chart showing the proportion of monastic sites visible from settlement sites



Of the monastic sites, 87% are visible from a settlement site. Perhaps this is unsurprising, given that there are 147 settlement sites in the study area, and thus the possibilities of monastic sites being observed would seem to be very high. Yet when the amount of 'invisible' to 'visible' area is calculated, the ratio is actually 59:41, rather than 87:13. It seems reasonable to argue from this that monastic sites may have been placed in deliberately prominent, visible positions in the landscape.

This can be illustrated by a sub-region of Jebel Sim'an, where the topography is particularly variable, and so the choice of site selection especially apparent. Sites seem to have been placed deliberately in positions of visibility, rather than seclusion, as follows:

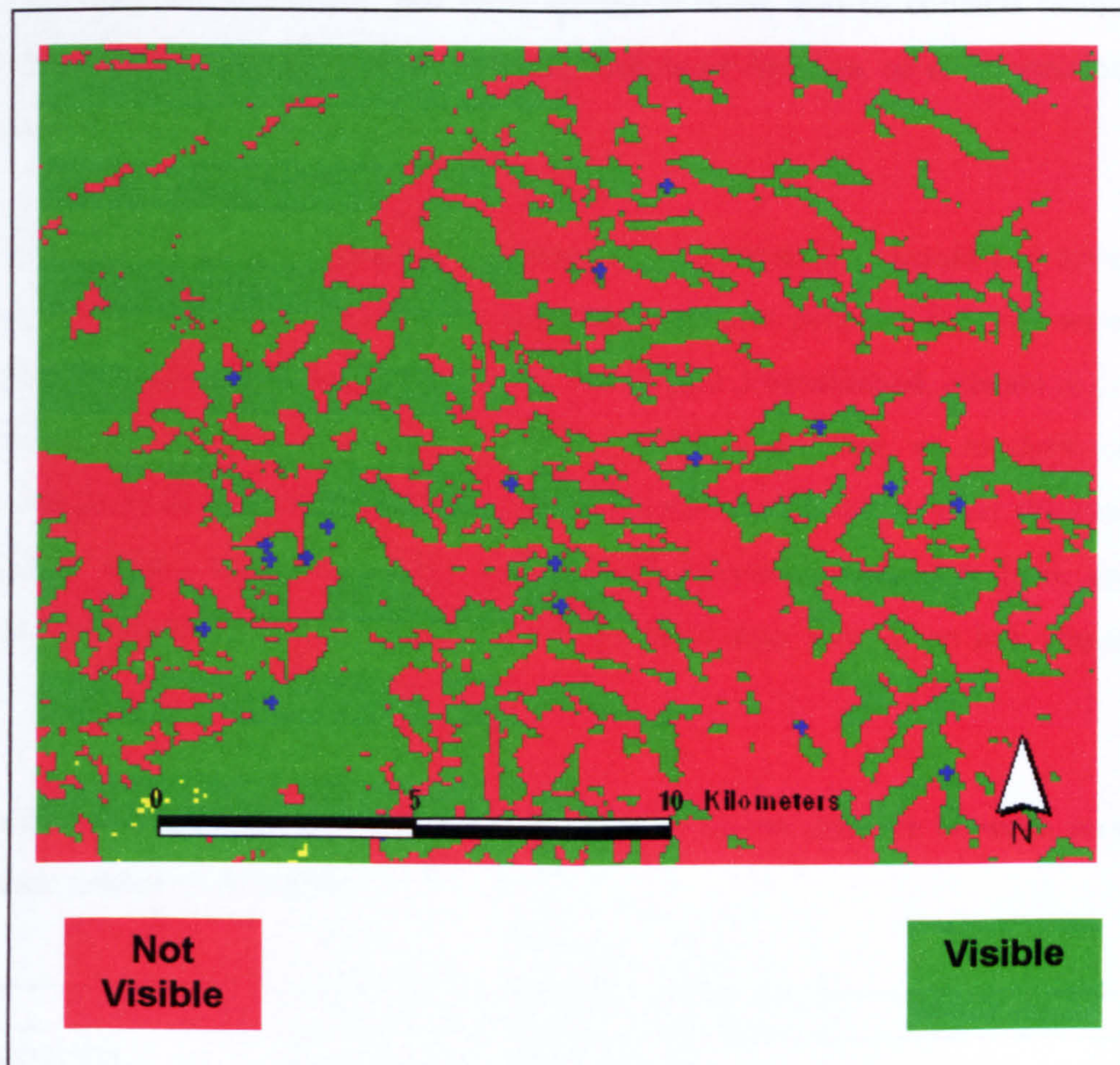


Figure 67: Viewsshed plot showing monasteries as visible from settlement sites in the Jebel Sim'an region (original in colour)

And so it can be seen that a high degree of intervisibility existed between monastic sites and settlement areas. In general, this intervisibility was mutual. However, the relationship between the two suggests that monasteries were more visible to settlements, than settlements to monasteries. Although it may be rash to draw too much inference from this, it could be argued that the emphasis in site selection for monastic communities may therefore have been prominence, rather than surveillance.



## 5.7 Access, communication and resources

How did the location of communication routes and water courses affect the choice of sites for monastic communities? At a broader level, communication routes and water courses have ramifications for the degree to which monastic communities desired connectedness both throughout the region and beyond it. Price, among others, suggests that 'contact with the outside world seems to have been cultivated rather than shunned' by monastic communities (1985, xx). Did they seek to place themselves close to routes which would enable transport and communication to other areas or does their location in fact suggest the opposite, that a desire for isolation resulted in sites being selected which were distant from such routes? In a sense then, these questions are similar to those asked when settlement-monastery distance was examined. But these questions relate also to contacts beyond the region, to major urban centres such as Antioch, Chalcis or Apamea, or to connection with broader monastic and ecclesiastical networks.

Section 5.3 outlined how these forms of information were sourced. It would also have been valuable to explore the nature of modern vegetation cover and potential for crop resources. The potential for such a discussion exists since, as Chapter 3 established, climate is unlikely to have differed a great deal between the fifth century and today, so modern satellite imagery could be used to estimate such resources. However, it is not yet clear the extent to which modern diesel irrigation pumps and other mechanical machinery have enabled agricultural expansion into areas which in Late Antiquity may have been less abundantly exploited.

With regard to communication routes, a simple analysis of the distance between monastic sites and their nearest is as follows:

Mean	1.425
Standard deviation	1.237
Minimum	0.120
Maximum	7.060
Total number of random 'monastic' sites	61

*Table 21: Summary of the distance between monastic sites and nearest communication route*

When compared with the same analysis but for random sites (instead of the 'true' monastic sites), we can see the following (table 22, overleaf):



Mean	2.149
Standard deviation	2.017
Minimum	0.190
Maximum	7.750
Total number of random 'monastic' sites	61

Table 22: Summary of the distance between 'random' monastic sites and nearest communication route

It was decided not to undertake the same analysis for water courses, since the softness of the limestone geology has probably contributed to movement of *wadis* through time. Furthermore, information relating to other water sources such as spring lines is not easily available at present. Instead, general observation of the position of monastic sites in relation to water courses (shown as light blue lines) can be made from the following map:

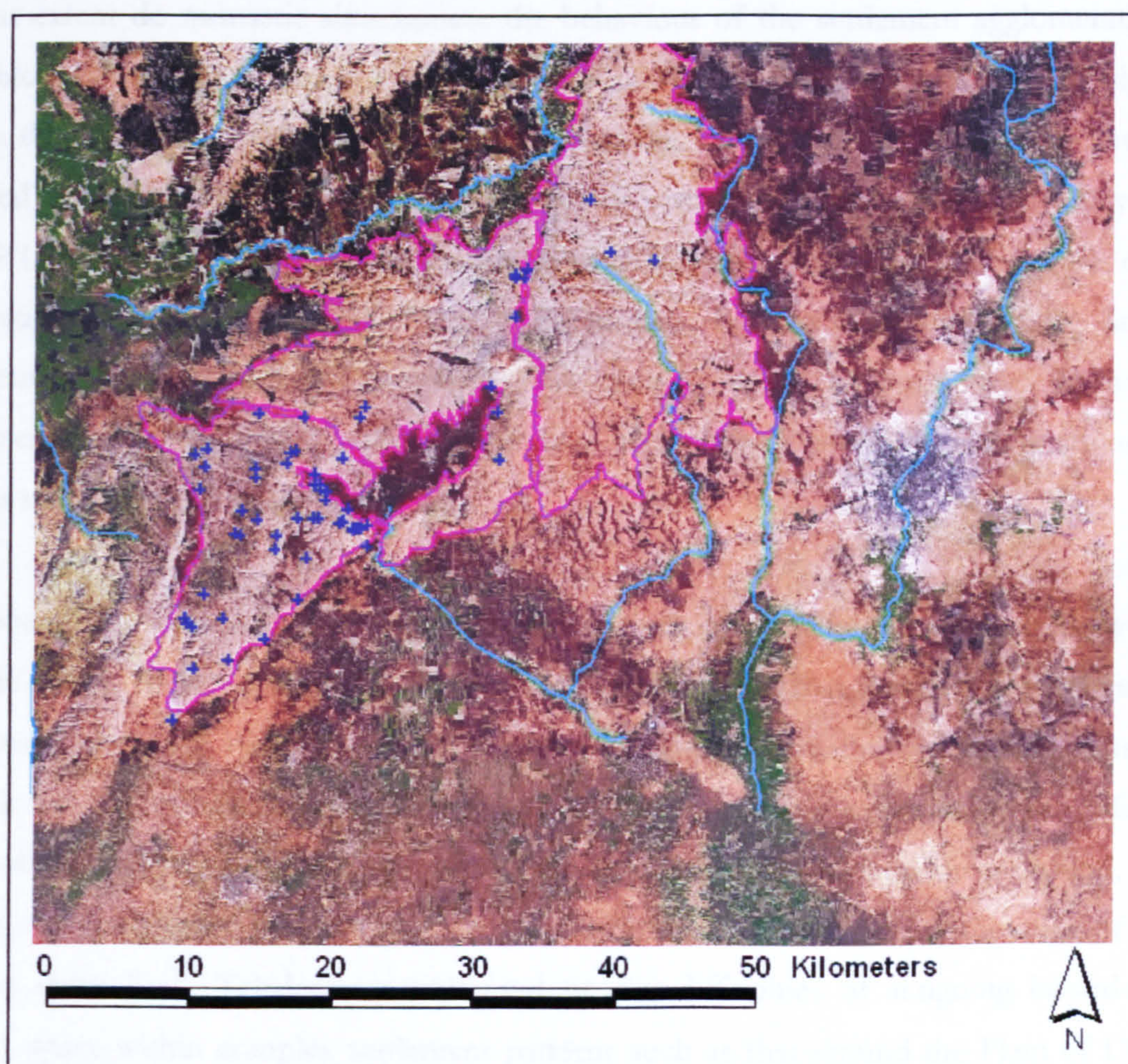


Figure 68: Distribution map showing position of monastic sites (crosses) in relation to water courses (blue lines; original in colour)

This would seem to suggest, as far as current information permits, that monasteries were *not* positioned with any significant reference to water courses. Some sites, such as Burj Haydar, are indeed located very close to a *wadi*. And it may be that many monastic sites once stood within the 'Afrin Valley. However, given that this area is largely outside the present study area, and that archaeological information alongside the river is highly likely to have been destroyed due to subsequent, heavy agriculture, such possibilities cannot be considered



further here. Most monastic sites within the current study area are in fact located between 4 and 9km away from a water course. This would not seem to suggest that water courses played any great role in site selection and that water was instead obtained through precipitation and storage in cisterns (evidence for which is present at at least 35% of monastic sites) and wells (evidence for a sample of which was recorded by Tchalenko, 1953 II, 30). This stands in partial contrast to communication routes where some collocation can be seen, but this collocation probably depended on the kind of monastery, and thus the particular intentions of individual communities. Variation of intention and behaviour among monastic sites will be the focus of section 5.9. First, the issue of scale is examined.

### 5.8 Site surface area

To what extent do monastic sites imitate the behaviour of the settlement agglomerations with which they are most closely associated? Is there a direct relationship of scale, implying perhaps that the two are so closely associated that the scale of the monastery was set, or expanded to become, similar in scale to the secular settlement area beside which they are located? In simple terms, were their design and socio-economic fortunes tied together, or is this relationship more complex? Could it be in fact that the land surrounding larger settlements was more closely controlled, thus allowing space for only small monastic complexes to be established, thus representing an inversely proportionate relationship between settlement and monastery?

For monasteries, surface area is calculated on the basis of the whole area covered by the monastic space. This is, in most cases, much greater than that covered by individual architectural elements alone. It is instead the area bounded by the outermost limits of monastic space. Sometimes, this is defined by a surrounding wall. Occasionally, it is defined by the obvious topographical limits of a space: a hilltop with a steep drop around, for example, or a cliff edge. In some cases, it is very difficult to know where the edge of the monastic space lies<sup>12</sup>. Tchalenko commented on the difficulties of assigning bounds to monastic space within complex settlement patterns such as that around the Plain of Dana (1953 I, 176). In others, such as the domain attached to Qasr al-Banat, a surrounding wall visible on an aerial photograph makes such a distinction somewhat clearer. But where ambiguity is present, this difficulty of definition may in itself be indicative of a deliberate 'blurring' of monastic and secular space, as described in Chapter 2. Where substantial

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<sup>12</sup> Chapter 4 discussed the prevalence of enclosure boundaries around monastic sites in north-west Syria. However, these were rarely genuinely defensive (with the exception of monasteries in the region of Apamene further south), so defining such ephemeral features today can be problematic. Added to this is the fact that enclosures may never have been complete circuits, and seem to have been particularly ill-defined on the village side of the monastery.



difficulties exist, however, such sites were not included, so that it is only where the spatial limits of a monastic site are fairly clear that calculations were included in the database.

For settlements, it was decided *not* to calculate this surface area at the level of house-by-house measurement as, for example, Tate has (1992, 307-314), but by the total surface area occupied by an agglomeration of late antique dwellings. This prompts obvious problems of chronology, since it is not clear from such measurements what size a settlement was at a particular time. Was the monastery built when the settlement had already reached its greatest extent, or was expansion a more complex, mutual process, with the monastic site being placed on the margins of a pre-existing settlement, but with both then expanding throughout the fifth and sixth centuries? Of course, it is often unclear which areas of a settlement were already in existence when a monastic site was initially constructed, and which may have developed afterwards. As Chapter 4 described, Tate has sought to demonstrate on the basis of building inscriptions and architectural styling across the region, a broad chronology for the region is that settlements began to appear in earnest during the late first and second centuries AD, then a slight fall off in building activity from the early third century (1992, 184). From around 330, building activity picked up steadily until a peak in the early to mid-fifth century. Subsequently, buildings continue to be constructed but on a smaller scale from around AD 500 onwards.

With regard to monastic sites, we know that the general situation in this region was of an emergence of the earliest reliably dated monastic sites in the mid-fifth century, but that there were perhaps many more, initially lower status, monastic structures emerging earlier than this. There was a much greater expansion in the last quarter of the fifth and first quarter of the sixth centuries. In which case, we could assume that probably all settlements were already in existence by the time monastic activity began to take architectural form, and that the majority of *each* settlement was in existence also. Some subsequent expansion probably paralleled monastic expansion until around 550. From this point onwards, monastic and church architecture are the only forms for which we have building inscriptions.

First of all, let us assess the range of surface areas represented by monastic sites. This can best be done by referring to table 23 (overleaf):



Mean (m <sup>2</sup> )	6365.09
Standard Deviation	9441.95
Minimum	150.00
Maximum	43919.00
Number where surface area is known	23
Number 'Not Known'	38
Total number of monasteries (interpretation checked)	61

*Table 23: Summary of the surface area of monastic sites (where known)*

As can be seen, the range of surface areas is very great, from the smallest at Ksajba to the largest at Qal'at Sim'an. These sites represent clearly different activities and types of site. Within this great range, most sites in fact occur around the 2000m<sup>2</sup> to 5000m<sup>2</sup> range.

For settlements, the data available can be summarised as follows:

Mean (m <sup>2</sup> )	85122.00
Standard Deviation	71224.00
Minimum	29700.00
Maximum	201600.00
Number where surface area is known	7
Number 'Not Known'	142
Total number of settlements	149

*Table 24: Summary of the surface area of settlement sites (where known)*

As can be seen, the information here is severely limited, as only 4.7% of settlement sites have been surveyed and published well enough to be included. Thus, when both monasteries and their associated settlements are compared, these data problems are somewhat compounded. Only a total of seven monastery sites had sufficient information available to allow analysis of this kind. Severely limiting though this is, it is worth displaying the results, as follows. For each monastery on the graph (shown in blue), its corresponding settlement is shown (in red) immediately above it:



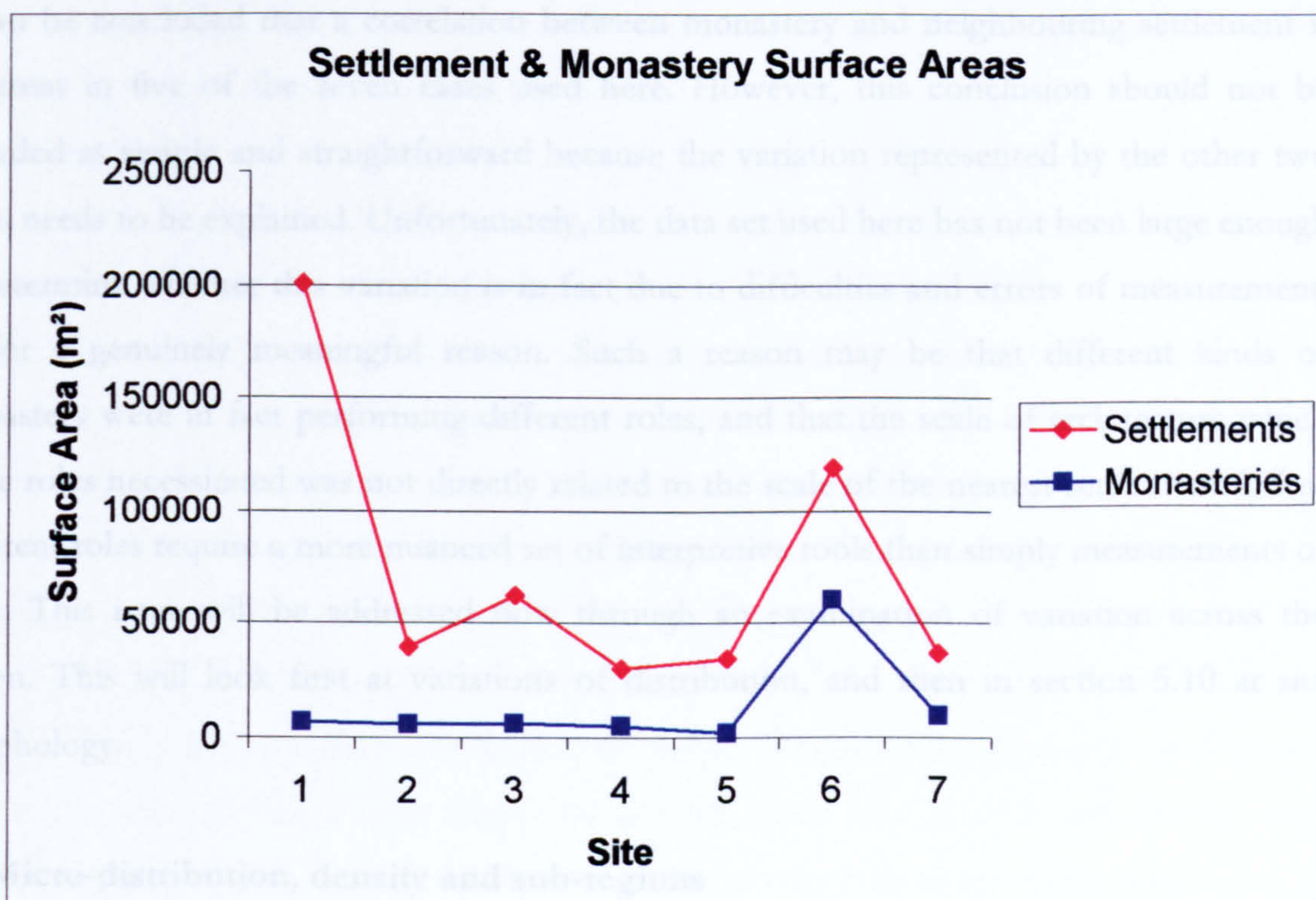


Figure 69: Line graph showing the relative scales of adjacent settlement and monastic sites (original in colour)

This simple analysis shows three things. The first is that the data is just too sparse at present to draw any reliable conclusions. It would require more monastery and settlement plans being made (and being published once they have been made) for reliable patterns to be derived. Secondly, what could be suggested of the data thus far (such as it is) is that for some of the monastery sites, a directly proportional relationship can be seen between its surface area, and that of the nearest settlement. That is, in some cases, the bigger the monastery the bigger the settlement and the smaller the monastery, the smaller the settlement. Their spatial behaviour can be linked in some cases then. However, this is clearly not the case for site number '1' (the monastery of Qasr al-Brad, next to the town of Brad). Though Qasr al-Brad is a fairly large monastery (ranked '3' of the total of seven considered here), evidence for the town of Brad suggests that it was very large indeed, in fact one of the largest in the limestone massif as a whole. This lack of correspondence may suggest that Qasr al-Brad was a relatively self-contained, coenobitic monastery, with a degree of independence which meant that its scale and activities were not directly proportional to Brad. Alternatively it may have been that the large size of Brad meant that a correspondingly large number of land owners were present, thus meaning that the fields surrounding the town were tightly controlled by the time the monastery was founded. More detailed discussion of this site will take place in Chapter 6.



It can be concluded that a correlation between monastery and neighbouring settlement is apparent in five of the seven cases used here. However, this conclusion should not be regarded as simple and straightforward because the variation represented by the other two cases needs to be explained. Unfortunately, the data set used here has not been large enough to determine whether this variation is in fact due to difficulties and errors of measurement, or for a genuinely meaningful reason. Such a reason may be that different kinds of monastery were in fact performing different roles, and that the scale of architecture which those roles necessitated was not directly related to the scale of the nearest settlement. These different roles require a more nuanced set of interpretive tools than simply measurements of scale. This issue will be addressed now through an examination of variation across the region. This will look first at variations of distribution, and then in section 5.10 at site morphology.

### 5.9 Micro-distribution, density and sub-regions

Thus far in this chapter, general trends and questions have been examined across the whole of the area covered by Jebel Sim'an, Jebel Halaqa and Jebel Barisha. It has been seen that monasteries are positioned within significant proximity to settlement sites, that monasteries are situated prominently in relation to villages, and that a high degree of intervisibility existed between the two.

If the mean surface area of monastic and settlement sites (where known) is calculated, the mean distance between monastery and the nearest secular settlement, the mean elevation and topographic siting of each and an approximate average for the surface area and height of structures in monasteries and settlements worked out, a 'typical' situation may be represented by the following reconstructed cross-section drawing:

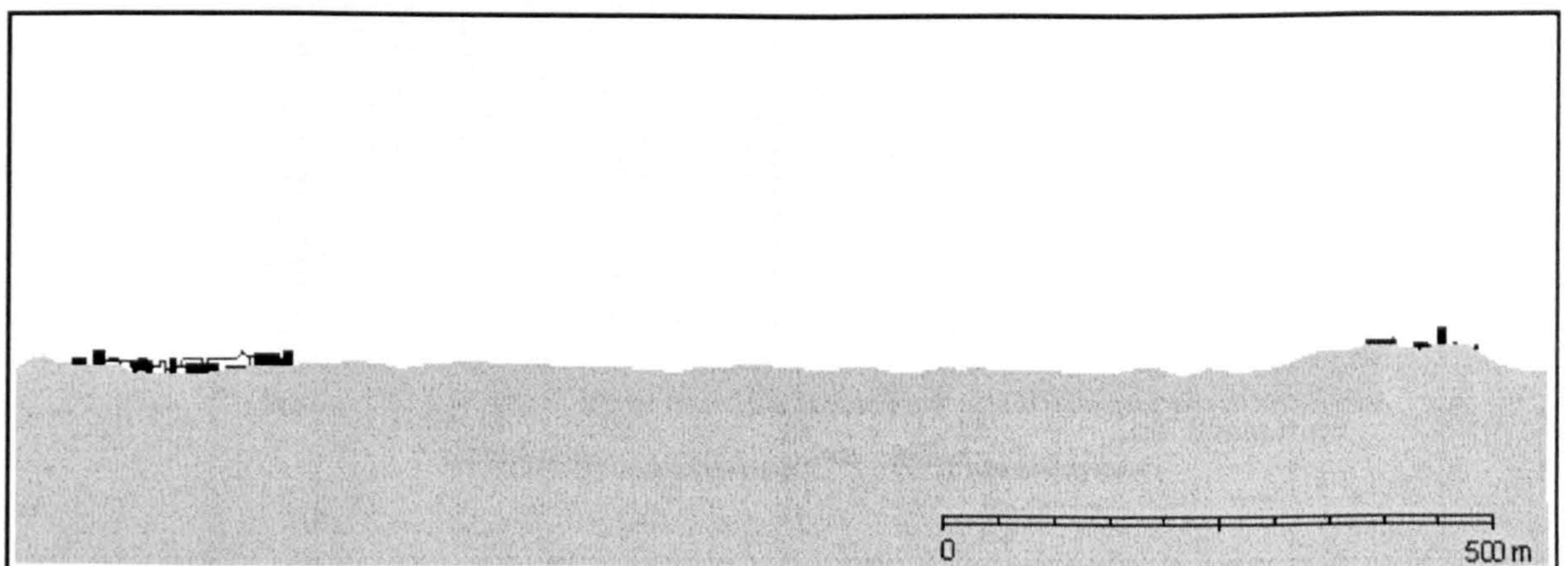


Figure 70: A reconstructed cross-section of a 'typical' spatial relationship, with a secular settlement (left) and a monastery (right)



Monasteries are generally well connected with communication routes, though they may not have been sited with this directly in mind.

It is thus far unclear to what extent this situation really is typical for the whole study area. Is it possible to observe variation *throughout* the study area? It has already been hinted that in certain areas, particular groups of monastic site may have been acting differently and distinctly. In order to examine this question further, the issue of the relative density of sites was examined. To begin with, specifically *monastic* site density was looked at. Where are monastic sites clustered, and where are they more distantly dispersed? Can foci of monastic activity be revealed by this method? In order to do this, I applied a simple density analysis in ArcView. This function applies a set radius or 'buffer' around every site (in this case, of radius 1km), and examines the extent to which overlap exists between the buffers of different sites. Where a large degree of overlap exists, and thus a high density can be assumed, the result is displayed as dark blue. Where very little or no overlap exists, and thus monastic sites can be assumed to be more distantly dispersed, the result is shown in light blue or white. The result of this analysis on the 61 monastic sites of the 3 *jibāl* is as follows:

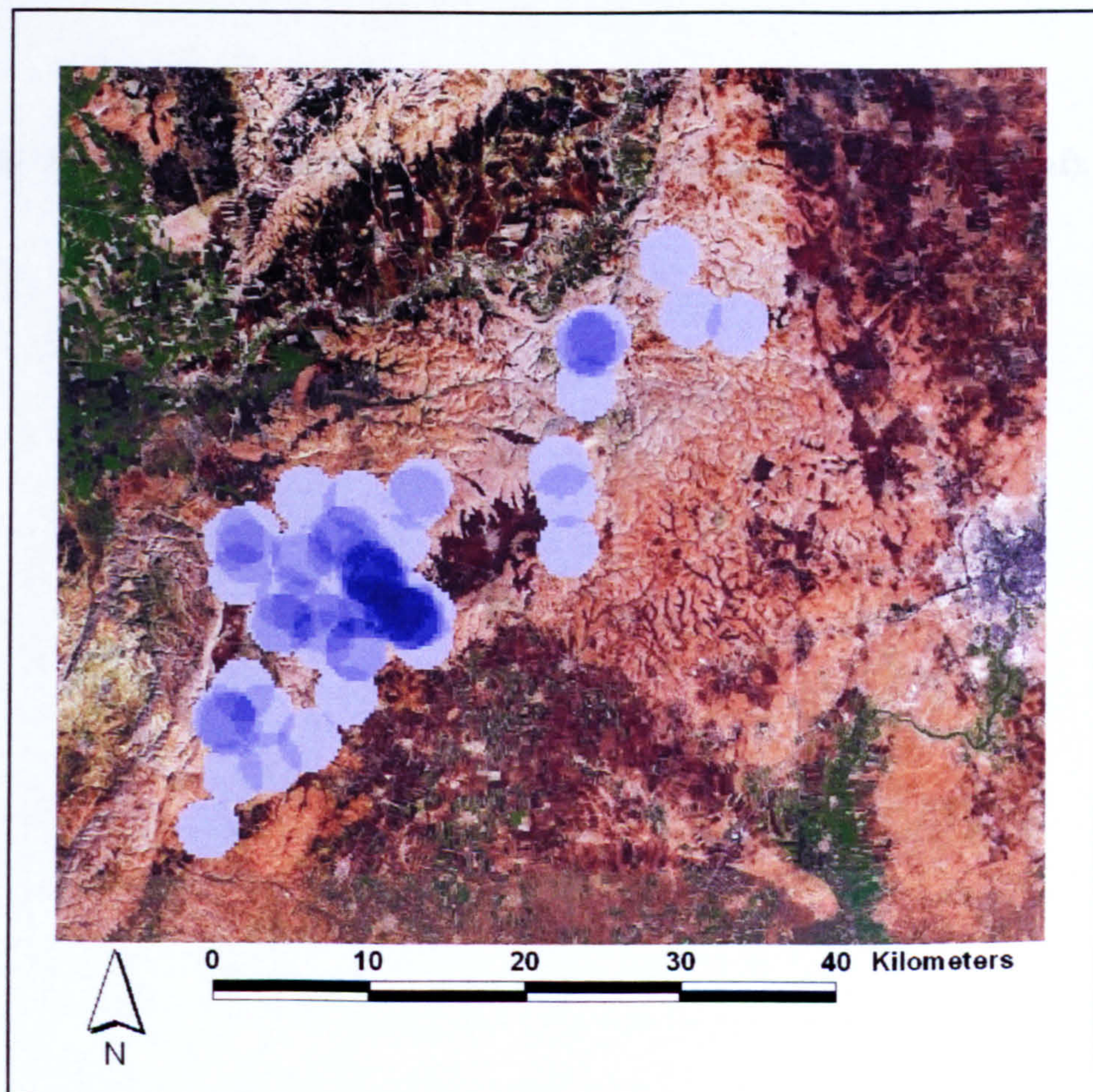


Figure 71: Plot showing the density of monastic sites (1 km radius; original in colour)



It should be borne in mind that the 61 monastic sites used in this analysis cannot truly be regarded as indicative of the distribution of monastic sites in Late Antiquity, and it is necessary to exercise some caution with regard to close interpretation of the distribution. These are only the 61 sites about which enough could be said to assess their conformity with the definition of what constitutes a monastic site used in this thesis (ie those that are category  $\geq 6$ ). They are therefore likely to exclude sites the evidence for which at present is poor, but which may well have been monasteries in the fifth and sixth centuries. It is significant that the density map shown above differs therefore from the assessment of monastic sites given by Tchalenko (1953 I, 19, 145-153), which describes the environs of the Dana plain as the centre for monastic activity in the region from as early as the late fourth century. However, Tchalenko felt more confident in drawing inferences between the place names of the Monophysite Letters of 567-9 and place names on the ground, even where it is not known what the archaeological evidence might suggest (either in agreement or to the contrary).

Having asserted that the density analysis has only been applied to known archaeological evidence, what does this map suggest? Three groups stand out as indicating particular density.

Running approximately from north to south, they are as follows (figure 72, overleaf):



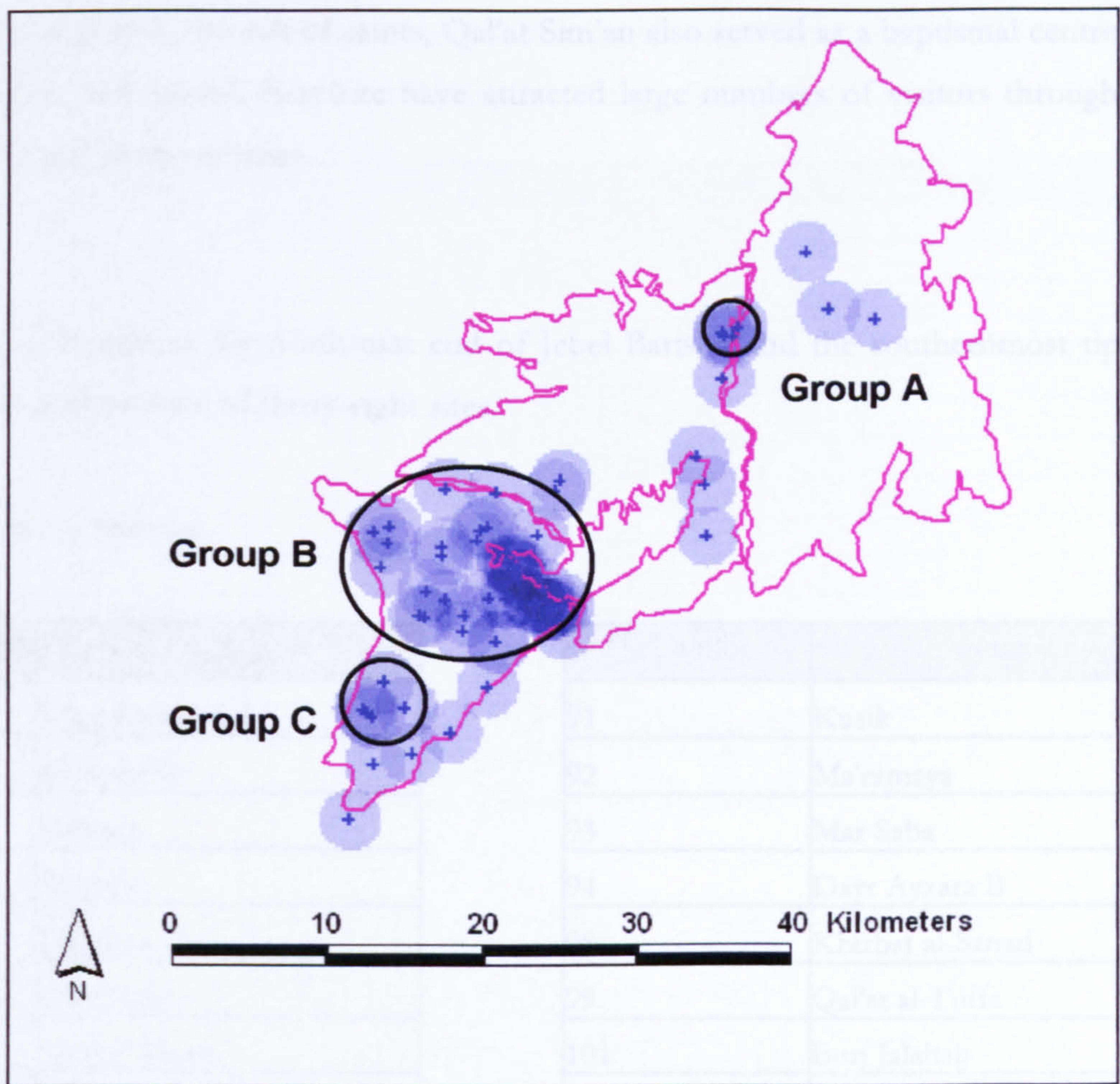


Figure 72: Plot showing the position of three groups of particularly high monastery density

### Group A

This group is located at the very northern end of the Jebel Halaqa. It is made up of four sites in all. These sites are as follows:

ID Number	Name
17	Qal'at Sim'an
18	Dayr Sim'an (NW)
41	Dayr Sim'an (SW)
42	Dayr Sim'an (SE)

Table 25: Sites within 'Group A'

All of these sites are large, each consisting of many architectural elements. The three Dayr Sim'an monasteries form a very tight group at the foot of the major pilgrimage centre, Qal'at Sim'an. The site of Sitt al-Rum is a little further away, at 2.8km south, but could perhaps be included within this group as it seems to be similar in terms of layout and type. It seems likely that this group of sites centred around the strong pilgrimage cult of Qal'at Sim'an. The town of Dayr Sim'an had a remarkably high number of accommodation buildings, probably created in order to cater for pilgrim traffic. As well as the intercessionary



powers associated with the cult of saints, Qal'at Sim'an also served as a baptismal centre (as discussed later), and would therefore have attracted large numbers of visitors throughout the later fifth and sixth centuries.

### Group B

This group is located at the north-east end of Jebel Barisha and the southernmost tip of Jebel Halaqa, and consists of thirty-eight sites.

These sites are as follows:

ID Number	Name
9	Dayr Bashakouh
12	Bashmishli
13	Bafettin
16	Baqirha
20	Dayruna
34	Qasr Iblisu
35	Qasr al-Banat
50	Qal'at Sirmada
51	Dayr Ayzara A
53	Kafr Daryan
58	Brayj
59	Ksajba
63	Dayr Qita
64	Burj al-Mu'allaq
65	Burj Nimra
68	Dayr Dehes
69	Dayr Sakhur
70	Burj Jamur
71	Burj Yahya

ID Number	Name
91	Kusik
92	Ma'ramaya
93	Mar Saba
94	Dayr Ayzara B
98	Khirbat al-Sanad
99	Qal'at al-Tuffa
101	Burj Jalahah
103	Burj Jaber
104	Burj Nasr
105	Dayr Burj Nasr
107	Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi
109	Radwa
110	Al-Soma'at
114	Burj Sarakhta
116	Sarakhta D
119	Aranta
120	Burj Nahas
121	Burj Suwayd A
122	Burj Suwayd B

*Table 26: Sites within 'Group B'*

This is a somewhat more numerous yet more dispersed group than Group A, though still no monastic site is more than 3km from another, and most are in fact under 1km. Most of the sites within this group consist of small structures of simple construction, and there are a large number of towers. Some of these sites are larger, and may have acted as administrative and spiritual centres for smaller, eremitic units spread throughout the surrounding



landscape, perhaps in the fashion of a *laura*. Closer observation of the distribution of sites within this group suggests that the following sites may have acted as centres:

Centre	Associated sites
Qal'at Sirmada	Burj Suwayd A
	Burj Suwayd B
	Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi
	Dayr Burj Nasr
	Burj Nasr
	Burj Jalahah
	Burj Jaber
Kafr Daryan	Burj Sarakhta
	Sarakhta D
Brayj	Burj Jamur
	Dayr Sakhur
	Burj Yahya
	Aranta
	Burj Nahas

Table 27: Group B sites which may relate to communal centres

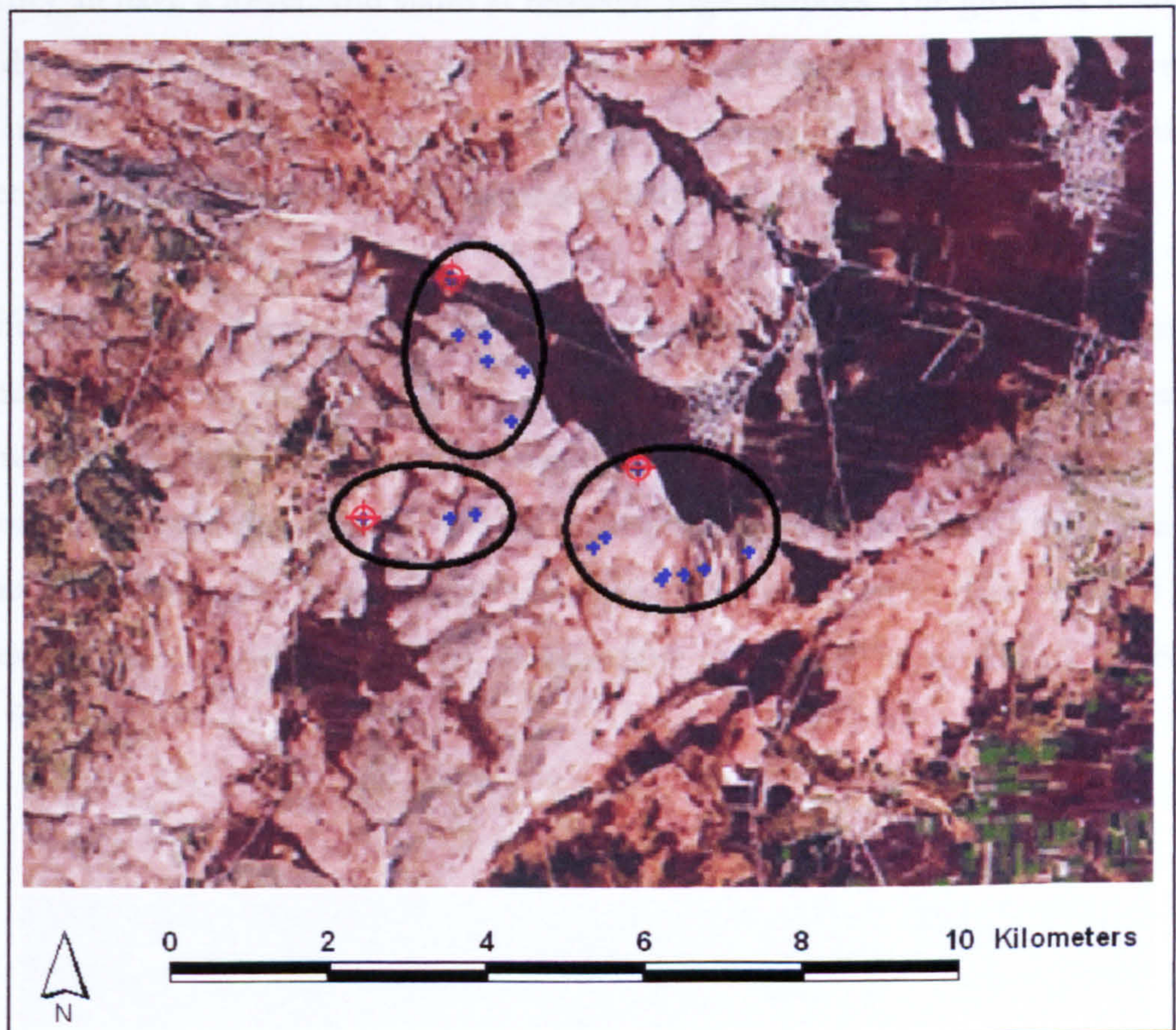


Figure 73: Distribution of possible central and dependant monastic units in Group B

There are a further twenty-one sites in Group C besides the seventeen just described. In general, these sites also conform to the type of monastic site represented by the Qal'at Sirmada, Brayj and Kafr Daryan sub-groups just described. They are mostly small, consist of single buildings which are often towers or simple accommodation blocks, and often have



some kind of agricultural press associated with them. The morphological structure of such sites will be discussed in further detail in section 5.10, below.

### Group C

Group C consists of five sites, which are as follows:

ID Number	Name
15	Dayr Banqusa
84	Kafr Fansha
85	Kukanaya
88	Burj 'Akkush A
89	Burj 'Akkush B

*Table 28: Sites within 'Group C'*

These sites are similar in some ways to the majority in Group B, in that they are small, open sites with no enclosure wall, and no large, central building which might imply communal activity. They all have a tower, and stand at relatively high altitudes. The group as a whole is relatively distant from other monastic sites, and the average distance between these five sites and their nearest settlement is greater than the overall average for monastic sites. Group C would therefore seem to represent a relatively isolated set of sites.

These different groups are interesting in their own right, but are they the same areas of density and dispersion as the non-monastic, *settlement* sites? Is the distribution just examined merely a reflection of the broader distribution of late antique archaeological sites of every kind? In order to investigate this, the density of the 147 settlement sites of the three *jibāl* was examined. In this case, areas of high concentration are shown in dark red, and areas where sites are more distantly dispersed, in light pink or white. The results are as follows (overleaf, figure 74):



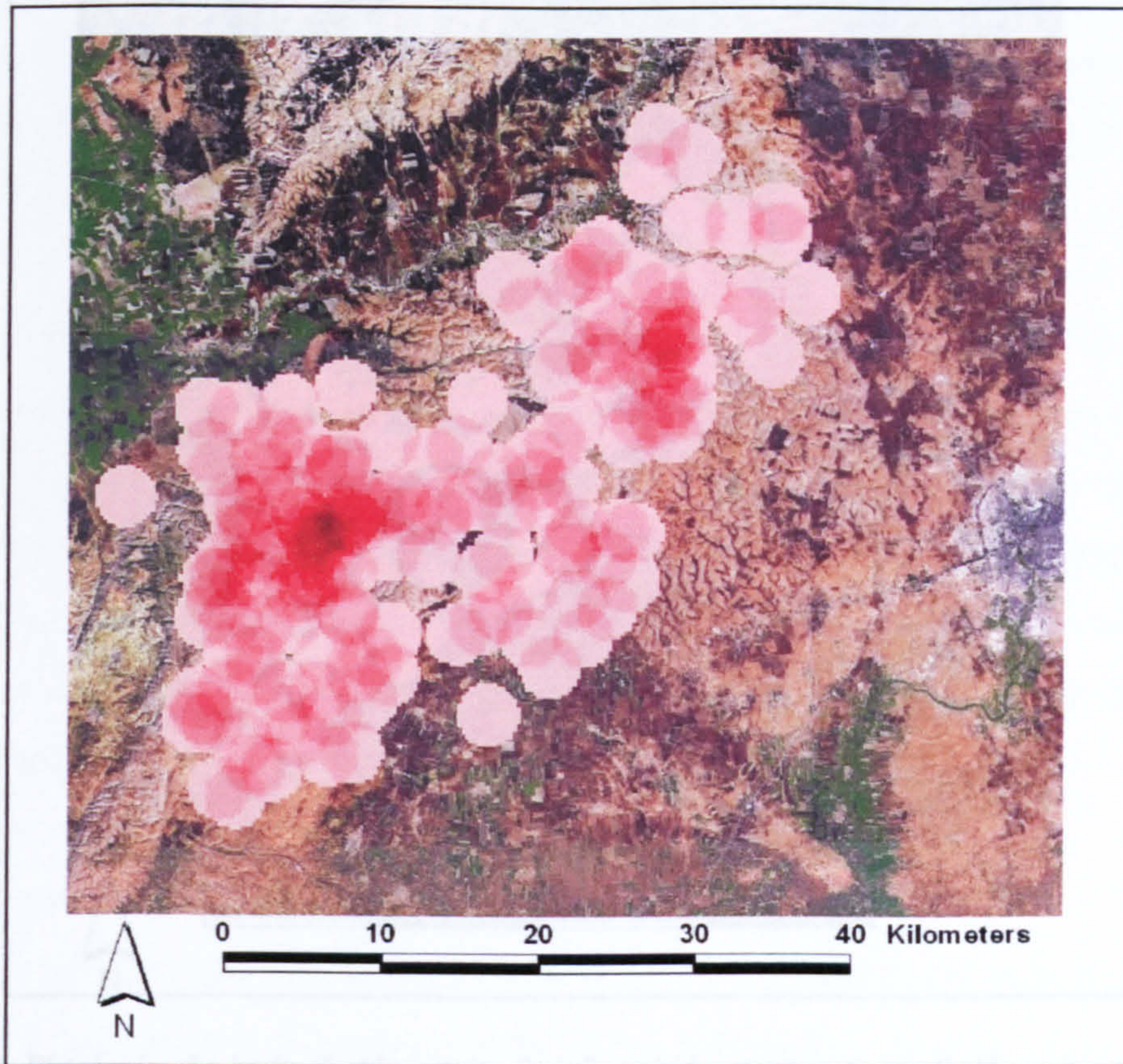


Figure 74: Plot showing the density of settlement sites (1 km; original in colour)

It can be seen that, in very general terms, similar areas of density are observable for monastic sites and for settlement sites. In this sense then, can we conclude simply that monastic activity occurred most where the 'background noise' of general settlement activity was located? The short answer here is no, since this would be a conclusion drawn from only a superficial analysis of the two density plots. Refining this analysis somewhat, rather different density groups emerge. For example, while in general terms the northern end of Jebel Barisha is densely populated with both settlement and monastic sites, these sites are not actually collocated. Settlements are dense around the north-west of the *jebel*, especially around Babutta, Bashmishli and Bamuqqa, yet the centre of this concentration is more than 6km north-west of the monastery concentration. The densest area of monastic sites actually coincides with a gap in the settlement pattern, as can be seen by the following plot, which overlays settlement density (in red) onto monastery density (in light blue), and highlights the main region of discrepancy.



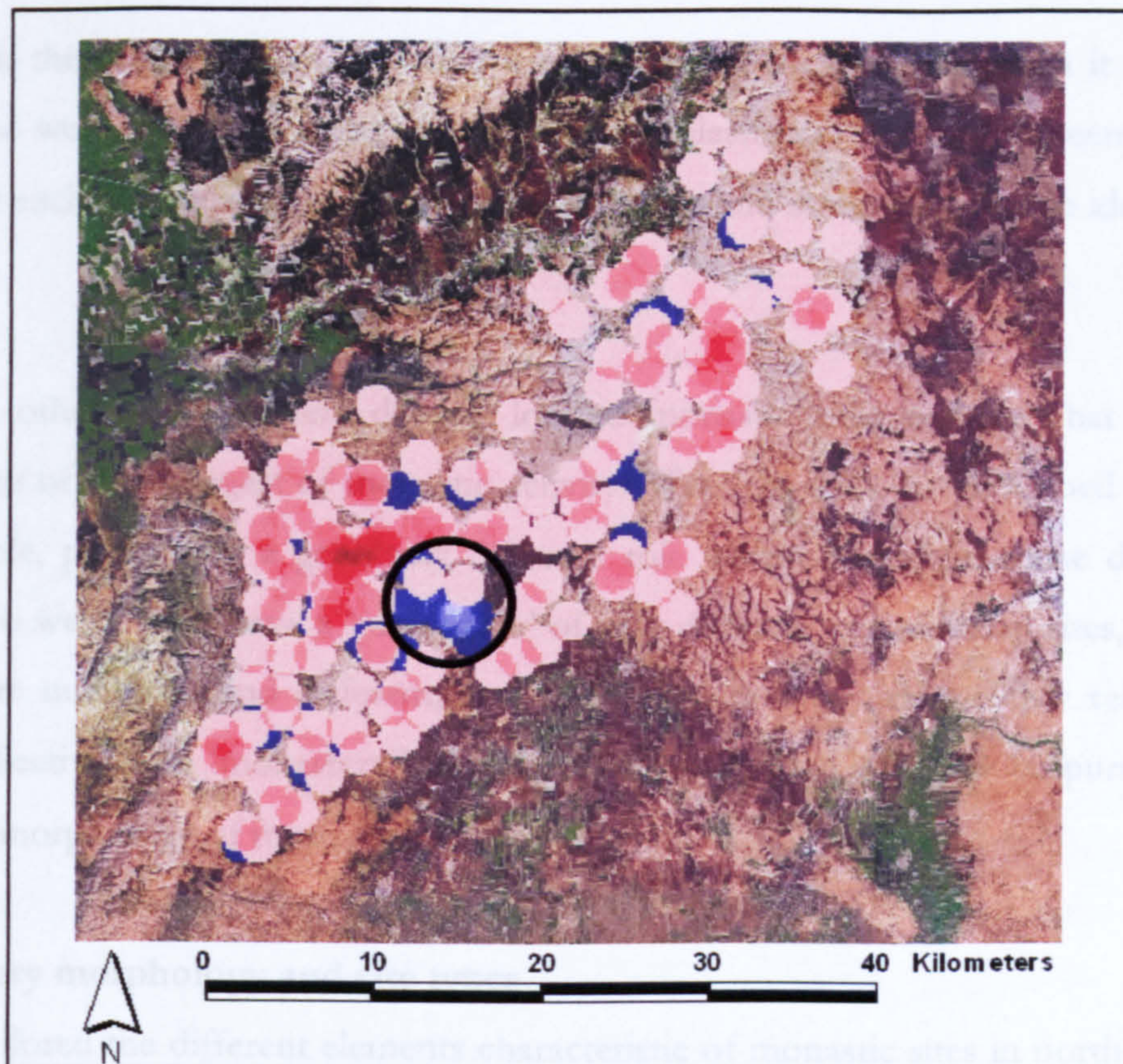


Figure 75: Plot showing the density of settlement sites (in red) overlaid on to monastic sites (in blue; original in colour)

So it can be seen overall that although some broad collocation of monastic and settlement density occurred, closer observation suggests that the *most intensive* monastic activity (Group B – marked with a circle on the map) took place in a region of relatively sparse settlement. It may be then that monastic communities were deliberately expanding into fairly ‘open’ areas where a particular type of monastic behaviour was desired. The monastic sites present in this ‘open’ area suggest dispersed, more eremitic practice, perhaps with a focus on particular communal centres which were used occasionally. This ‘*laura*’ form of monasticism is described in the Judean desert by Hirschfeld (1992). There, a *laura* consisted of ‘a community of monks who live in separate cells, spend most of the week in solitude, and assemble on Saturdays or Sundays for communal prayer and to receive provisions for the following week’ (1992, 18). Examples of this form of monastic complex in Judea are Gerasimus and Marda, and a total of 19 have been identified archaeologically by Hirschfeld and others. Examples in Syria are less well documented, though Peña et al describe ‘colonies of recluses’ (1980, 60). The site of Mar Musa al-Habashi near Nebk is likely to have been a *laura* institution also, given that more than 50 caves exist within the hills to the west of the main complex. The nature of the cells, or *kelliotai* in Greek, may vary, and may be very difficult to recognise archaeologically (Tchalenko comments on this, 1953 I, 19). Given the often very large and topographically varied space inhabited by *laura* complexes, enclosure walls are often difficult to identify, and indeed may not have existed much at all. Hirschfeld



comments on the use of towers to define the territory of the *laura*, although it is unclear whether these were actually used as cells or not in Palestine (1992, 20). It seems at least plausible that such complexes were very similar in layout and intention to those identified in Group B.

What of the other groups where densely located monastic sites occur? What do these distinct groups of sites suggest of monastic activity? Were the sites just described in Group B, for example, performing a genuinely different role within society to those distributed elsewhere? Do we, in fact, have a ‘patchwork’ of very different ecclesiastical sites, the roles of which were numerous and different, and which we are today erroneously referring to under the collective term ‘monastery’? This line of investigation will now be pursued with regard to the morphology of monastic sites.

### 5.10 Monastery morphology and site types

Chapter 4 explored the different elements characteristic of monastic sites in northern Syria. As explained, Tchalenko and subsequent authors have tended to describe these elements according to Antiochene and Apamean monastic types. However, *within the context of* Antiochene sites (the focus of this present study), how were these various elements differently built, used and distributed? Patlagean observes that differences of size and location of monastic ‘ensemble’ may reveal contrasting economic and social intentions (1977, 322-4). Working on this basis, the database produced by this thesis has been used to attempt a tentative identification of different types of monastery, according to their morphological characteristics. The different architectural elements recorded by Tchalenko, Peña et al and myself were entered into the database on the basis of presence or absence. The elements recorded in this way are as follows:

Feature	No. of monasteries where present	No. of monasteries where absent	No. of monasteries where not known or not clear
Church	35	25	1
Reliquary or martyrion	23	32	6
Baptistery	6	50	5
Cemetery	27	32	2
Communal building	27	26	8
Tower	40	20	1
External walls	25	32	4
Agricultural press	23	32	6
Water cistern	17	50	4

Table 29: Summary of morphological features and their presence on monastic sites



These elements are, by necessity, rather clumsily accounted for. I have not, for example, accounted for the subtlety of different forms of church, enclosure walls etc, nor differences of scale or date (where possible). This is partly due to the immensely time-consuming nature of entering such subtlety into the database, and partly due to problems of lack of adequate information at the present time. It is hoped that such information, where it exists, can be added at a later stage. The problems introduced by the high quantity of 'Not known' categories will be discussed further below.

Given that each of these different features (assuming they have been correctly identified) derived from and shaped distinct, specific activities (as outlined in Chapter 4), combinations of different types of activity are assumed to indicate distinctly different kinds of monastery. It is assumed, for example, that a complex with external walls, a church and a communal building hosted and influenced different kinds of monastic activity, to a complex which was open with a tower and a press. Identifying distinct groups of similar monasteries presents a problem, however, as no clear groups or types are obviously apparent. There are 9 variables used and a total of 61 sites considered, so this is hardly surprising. It was decided therefore to attempt some simple statistical methods to identify types.

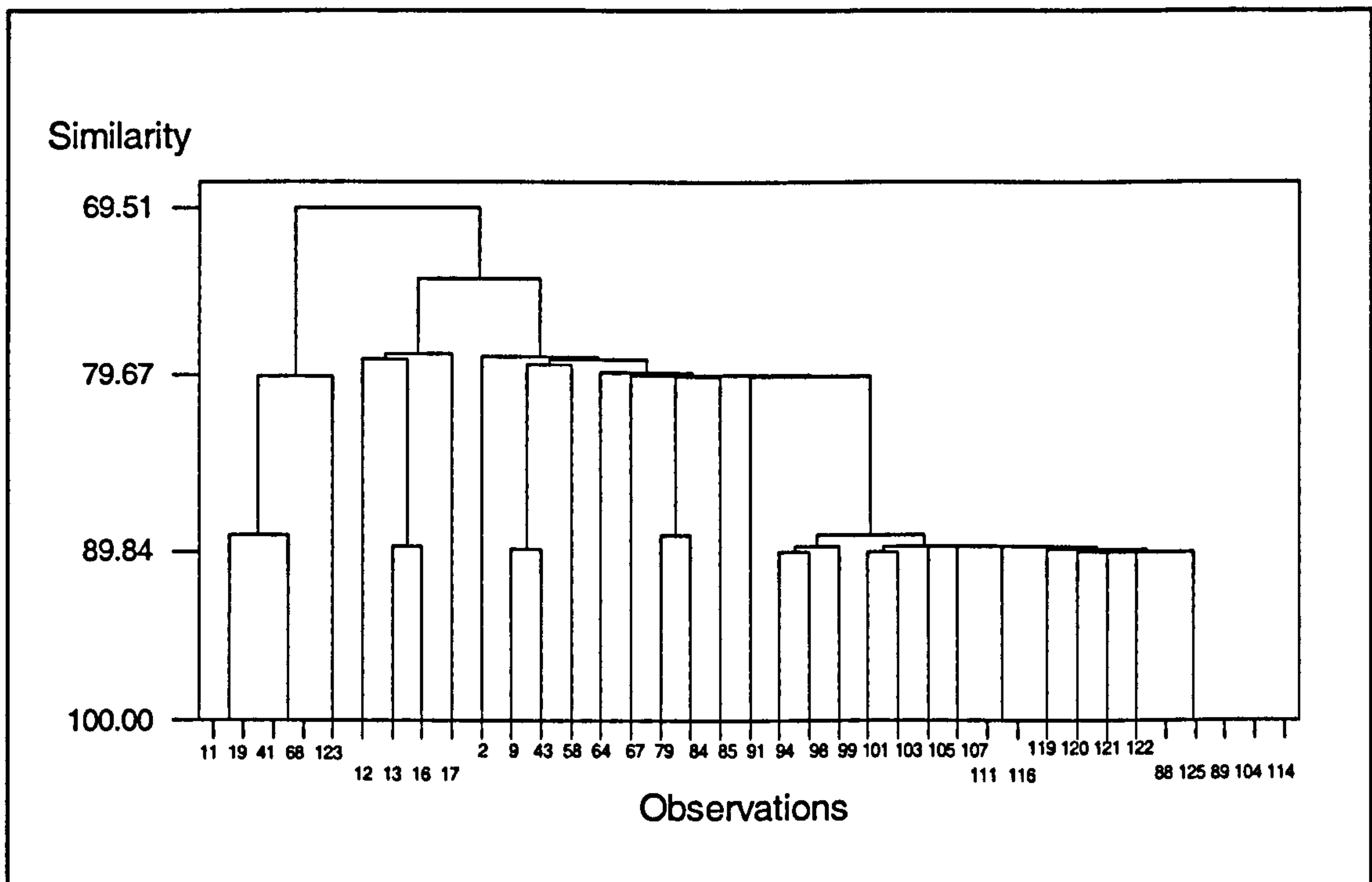
A number of methods could be used to identify groups (as summarised by Orton 1980). The most commonly used is principal components analysis (PCA), which seeks to identify which components contribute most to variability among the data. Correspondence analysis (or CA) and factor analysis (FA) seek instead to identify some measure of correspondence between data that is assembled in rows and columns by examining its structure. All of these techniques have been used widely on archaeological material, but rely primarily on numerical data, rather than more simple presence/absence identifications.

Cluster analysis can use presence/absence data, and works by assembling a 'dendrogram' in which similar objects are placed on close 'branches' of the tree, and dissimilar ones on distant branches (Orton 1980, 47-8). This technique is usually used on artefact assemblages rather than site types. For example, one of its earliest uses in archaeology was to identify different types of brooch from cemetery data at Münsingen (Hodson et al 1966).

Cluster analysis does not function well with unknown variables, as the potential exists for many varied records to be considered similar if they all contain an 'unknown' category somewhere. Because there are a large number of sites where the presence or absence of particular features is either 'not known' or 'not clear', such sites have been removed from



the analysis. This leaves a total of thirty-seven sites. The problems inherent in doing this will be addressed below. Running this method on the thirty-seven sites produced the following graph<sup>13</sup>:



*Figure 76: Cluster plot of monastic sites according to their morphological characteristics*

It can be seen that 3 groups are identifiable with around 80% confidence. The first of these is a relatively 'tight' group of five sites on the left of the graph (identified here as numbers 11, 19, 41, 68 & 123). The second also represents a coherent collection of sites with very similar traits (12, 13, 16 & 17). The third group, on the right of the graph, is more diverse, and can best be described as 'the rest' (from 2, and further to the right). A final group of four - to the far right - could not be considered part of any of the preceding groups since only one element (a simple tower) was evident, manifesting in an absence of linkage with other sites on the graph. However, these sites can tentatively be considered as part of Type 3, since towers are a strong element of this type. Furthermore, there is a strong degree of spatial collocation between many Type 3 sites and these four 'outlying' sites.

So if three approximate groups can be distilled from this exercise, these can be summarised as follows:

<sup>13</sup> The specific kind of cluster analysis used here was applied through the programme Minitab, employing a single linkage method, standardising the variables and using the 'Manhattan' technique for accounting for dissimilarity.



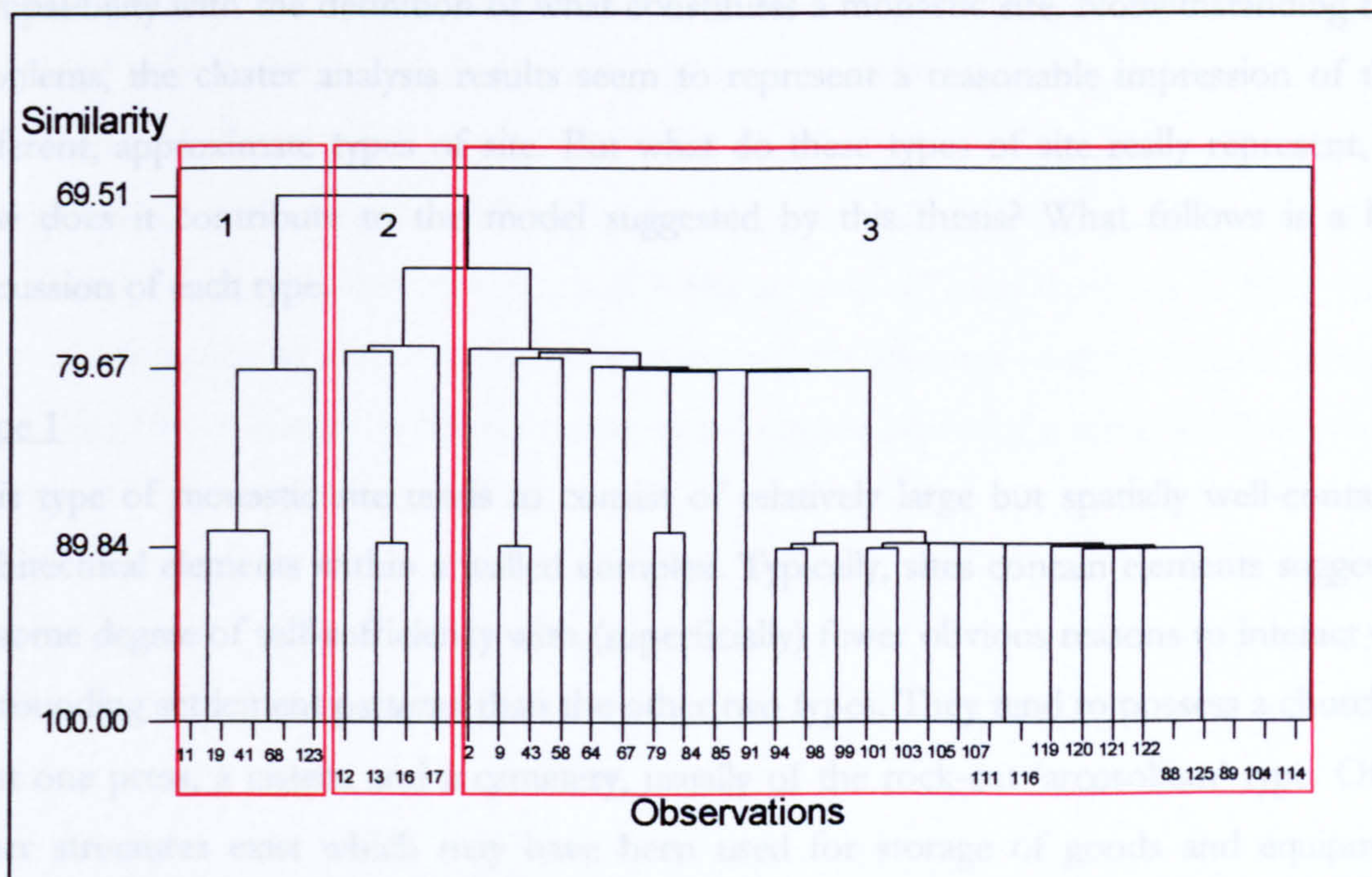


Figure 77: Cluster plot of monastic sites according to their morphological characteristics, highlighting three approximate types in red (original in colour)

The various characteristics of these three groups are as follows (with more site-specific details available in Appendices E & F):

Type	Count	Site IDs	Characteristics
1	5	11, 19, 41, 68, 123	Always have external walls, a church, a press, a cistern and a cemetery. Almost always have a <i>martyrion</i> , and a large, communal building. Occasionally have a tower. Never have a baptistery.
2	4	12, 13, 16, 17	Always have a baptistery, a church and a <i>martyrion</i> . Sometimes have a tower. Occasionally have external walls, a cemetery and a cistern. Never have a press.
3	28	2, 9, 43, 58, 64, 67, 79, 84, 85, 88, 89, 91, 94, 98, 99, 101, 103, 104, 105, 107, 111, 114, 116, 119, 120, 121, 122, 125	Never have a baptistery. Usually have a tower. Sometimes have a press, a church or some form of communal, domestic structure. Occasionally have a cistern.

Table 30: Summary of the characteristics of each monastery type

It is difficult to be sure how representative of the actual situation in fifth to seventh century Syria these types really are. Indeed, it should be borne in mind that the count of thirty-seven sites subjected to cluster analysis are only 60.6% of the overall sixty-one sites. It may well be that features such as external walls are more easily susceptible to subsequent dismantling and reuse, so this type of site is likely to be artificially under-represented in the final analysis. Furthermore, even these sixty-one include sites of category '6' and above regarding their



compatibility with the definition of what constitutes a monastic site. Notwithstanding these problems, the cluster analysis results seem to represent a reasonable impression of three different, approximate types of site. But what do these types of site really represent, and how does it contribute to the model suggested by this thesis? What follows is a brief discussion of each type.

### Type 1

This type of monastic site tends to consist of relatively large but spatially well-contained architectural elements within a walled complex. Typically, sites contain elements suggestive of some degree of self-sufficiency with (superficially) fewer obvious reasons to interact with surrounding settlement patterns than the other two types. They tend to possess a church, at least one press, a cistern and a cemetery, usually of the rock-cut 'arcosolium' type. Often, other structures exist which may have been used for storage of goods and equipment. Complexes of this type appear inwardly focused, with a *martyrion* either within the church or close by, and a large communal structure.



*Figure 78: The monastic site of Sarjibla (south), showing the press in the foreground, the church behind and an accommodation block to the right.*

As was noted in Chapter 4, surrounding enclosure walls of the northern 'Antiochene' type within the limestone massif almost never appear defensive, and only sometimes appear large enough for the control of goods and people (as far as the often scant surface evidence suggests anyway). At Sarjibla (south), for example, though a clear enclosure wall is recorded



by Baccache & Tchalenko (1980, 149), the architectural remains on the ground are less clear. Elements of an entrance, and perhaps the uprights of a portico, appear to be *in situ*, but the wall that links these elements is of modern origins and for agricultural purposes, making any confident estimate of the height and width of the original wall almost impossible. The same situation exists at Kharab Shams, with a wall being recorded (Tchalenko 1953 II, 129), even though the deposits are unclear. In general, however, the elements that do remain at sites such as Dayr Dehes and Dayr Sim'an (south-west) suggest primarily a symbolic delineation of space, rather than a physical barrier.

The churches within Type 1 sites tend to be somewhat smaller than those of Type 2 sites (below), suggesting that the present category were likely to have been used by the monastic community alone.

So what *are* Type 1 sites? The most reasonable explanation would seem to be that they represent forms of coenobitic monastic sites, with relatively self-contained, spatially concentrated activity taking place. That is not to say that they are distant and entirely distinct from secular settlement, since they are in general less than half a kilometre away from their nearest village. Indeed, their compact spatial arrangement yet generally large architecture and clear, symbolic surrounding walls, in fact makes these sites prominent in the landscape, and may thus have meant that their 'presence' in terms of visual awareness for surrounding villages was more than evident.

### Type 2

Type 2 monastic sites are similar in many ways to Type 1. They always have a church and, in common with the majority of ecclesiastical sites in north-west Syria, they have a *martyrion*. Like the Type 1 sites, they have a communal building. However, they differ in four important ways. First and foremost, they always have a baptistery. Secondly, they never have a press, and only occasionally a cistern. Thirdly, they only occasionally have external walls and are, in general, positioned closer to secular settlement areas than the Type 1 sites above. An additional point is that their churches are generally somewhat larger than those of either of the other types.

It may have been the case that if Type 2 sites should indeed be regarded as monastic, they only later developed as such. They are certainly collective institutions, with a strong central focus and provision of communal areas and accommodation. However, in the case of Qal'at Sim'an, it would seem that the associated monastic complex (described by Butler 1920, 281-



284 and Tchalenko 1953 I, 235-7) only developed after the majority of the basilica architecture was constructed. Brief observation of the standing stratigraphy confirms that the extant monastic site to the south-east was indeed added later (though further discussion of this awaits publication of the architectural detail of the site by Sodini et al). At Baqirha, a debate exists as to whether this is a monastic site at all (as discussed in Chapter 4). Certainly, a case can be made on the basis of later development at the site, and in particular the insertion of a surrounding wall and additions to the east end of the church.



*Figure 79: General view of Qal'at Sim'an, with the baptistery complex to the right*

Whether Type 2 sites can be firmly identified as monastic, or whether they are perhaps collegiate parish churches, is ambiguous. However, this debate itself illustrates the very close relationship held by such sites with their congregation. So what are they? It could be argued that these sites fulfil at least one of the roles of a village church, and that they may therefore have had a strongly pastoral role. Certainly, baptism played a part in this. The importance of baptismal sites in Christianisation processes in northern Syria has been discussed by Trombley (2004, 71-2), who points out that large numbers of adult baptisms took place throughout the region well into the fifth century. The baptistery at Qal'at Sim'an probably played a particularly prominent role in such processes by combining large-scale baptism with pilgrimage to the pillar of St. Simeon the Elder. Constructed sometime between 473 and 490 (Biscop & Sodini 1984, 267), the baptistery is placed in a highly visible position on the *via sacra* between the main town of Dayr Sim'an and the pillar and basilica complex in Qal'at



Sim'an itself. Indeed, a hostelry is positioned immediately to the north-east of the baptistery. While other baptism sites may not have played quite as prominent a role as Qal'at Sim'an, they would certainly have provided a focal meeting point for secular society and monastic communities.

### Type 3

This type of monastic site is rather more difficult to define than the other two, and represents a more diverse collection. They are defined by their differences to the other two types, perhaps more than having clear unifying characteristics of their own. They never, for example, possess a baptistery. Furthermore, they only rarely have a communal building as part of their complex. Churches are rare but do exist, and external walls likewise. They appear neither as uniform and self-contained as Type 1, nor as clear in purpose and tied to their community as Type 2. Having said this, there are certain characteristics which define this type, and suggest something of a common role linking all of them. The sites within this category are suggestive of more open interaction with the landscape around, and they are usually small and unenclosed. They are, in general, *not* suggestive of communal activity within the confines of the monastic complex. Generally, for example, they do not include a church, they almost never possess a building large enough to be used communally, and there is never a baptistery present. They sometimes possess a cistern or an agricultural press. If there is one characteristic which does define Type 3 sites, it is that they almost always include a tower. Some, in fact, consist of little more than a tower, and it is worth pausing now to consider the function of these structures. Importantly, if sites consist of only a tower, should we really regard them as monasteries?

These towers usually consist of a stone structure constructed of ashlar blocks, usually square or rectangular in plan and only ever have one entrance. They are multi-storeyed, with usually three or four in total, though some, such as Qasr al-Brad, may have five, or Qasr al-Banat six. There are rarely any subdivisions within any of these floors, so that they comprise essentially a series of units ranged vertically. Furthermore, these units, with the exception of the ground floor which is often very plain, often contain very similar stone-cut features within them, implying a similar if not identical function to each room. Such features include aumbries, lamp niches and windows of a similar dimension and position.

Towers of late antique or early medieval date have been assigned a number of dates and functions. The third century mosaic of Oceanus and Thetis in the Antakya museum depicts a tower in the background, for example (Rüstemoglu 1997). Towers of the Roman *limes* in



Syria are generally assumed to be third century in date. Yet a tower at the site of Dayr Tell 'Ada is dated by inscription to 941/2.



*Figure 80: Detail from the Oceanus & Thetis mosaic in the Antakya Museum: a cherub hauls in a fishing net while in the background stands a stone tower*

In terms of purpose, towers are united only in their lack of a coherent interpretation. In Almo had Spain, Meulemeester argues through comparison with later towers in Morocco, that such structures are 'granary-refuges', used to store grain for the village in case of famine, but also usable as fortresses and watchtowers (2005). By contrast, those within the aforementioned *limes* indicate a changing function, with many implying surveillance and the housing of a military garrison, but then experiencing reuse or conversion as elements within an expanded monastic complex, as Dayr al-Nasrani in the Hauran and Dayr Mar Musa in the Qalamun. Alternatively, monastic towers could be reused in themselves, as appears to have been the case at Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi. Alternatively, some towers appear not to have had a monastic function at all, as posited by Tate and others for the structures at Qirqbiza, Jarada (or Gerade) and Dalluza, where he suggests a combination of watchtower and storage. Much the same conclusion was reached by Lassus who made the first dedicated study of these structures (1947, 237). Finally, the largely first century funerary towers at Palmyra suggest that that function has always served them, and that reuse never took place.



Peña et al have made the point that whereas such towers may have been constructed for a range of purposes throughout the Mediterranean region and even within Syria, for the limestone massif of the north-west, towers were primarily and usually monastic in use (1980, 50). Here, they argue, it was a local tradition which can be traced to at least the fourth century through a detailed account by Theodoret of the holy man Peter living within a tower, associated with concepts of seclusion as well as isolation (*HR IX*, Peña et al 1980, 75). But how do we know they were monastic, given the range of uses discussed above? It could be argued that in this region they are never genuinely defensive or fortified, given that many examples possess large windows on the ground floor, with no evidence for bars or mullions (as at, for example, Burj Jalahah, Burj Nasr and Dayr Dehes), though all share the attributes of very thick walls and small doorways. Surveillance or signalling may have played a role in some cases, as some examples have an external walkway (as at Jarada) and some fenestrated bartisans to allow maximum vision (as at Burj Jalahah). However, this cannot have been their function in all cases either, since some examples are situated in rather awkward, low-lying locations (as at Qasr al-Banat). Most examples do display some evidence for long term occupation, either in the form of domestic features set within the walls (as discussed above) or latrines (as at Sarjibla). Furthermore, many of the isolated examples display evidence for either a religious function, or at the very least a strong desire to assert Christian identity by the occupant. This is very often evidenced in the form of crosses or other incised decoration in relief, or the mention of ecclesiastical titles in a dedicatory inscription (as in the case of 'the Priest Simon' at Zarzita, or 'the Deacon Thomas' at Ruwayda; Peña et al 1980, 55). There are a number of instances of towers being attached subsequently to churches (as at the south-east church at Dar Qita). Some towers were clearly used as baptisteries (as at Dar Qita and Baqirha), though admittedly, these are of a slightly different construction. A number of sites the attribution of which as monasteries cannot be doubted (either due to an exceptionally clearly attested layout or associated contextual evidence provided by documentary sources), which possess a tower very similar to free standing examples (as at Dayr Dehes, Qasr al-Banat or Dayr Sim'an NW). Some of these examples have subsequently had tombs cut into the ground floor, perhaps for the original occupant(s) (as at Brayj).





*Figure 81: A monastic tower at the site of Dayr Sim'an (north-west; to the right of the picture)*

Many towers are directly associated with features suggesting agricultural infrastructure (as in the case of adjacent presses at Burj Jalahah, Qasr al-Brad or Dayr Dehes). Some examples appear to be situated on the edges of fertile agricultural land, of which they afford good access and surveillance (as in the series of towers around Burj Nasr, Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi etc, and also Tell 'Aqibrin). They may well have been associated with agricultural production and storage therefore (perhaps suggesting a use for their ground floor), with long-term accommodation *and* a religious function.

This interpretation is strengthened by Peña et al who use documentary references for monastic rules like those of Rabbula and others, to suggest that periods of isolation recommended for probationary monastics within solitary buildings may have taken place within towers (1980, 90-1). They also argue that towers are the direct successor to the notion of a stylite's column, combining isolation, exhibitionism and 'une prédilection pour les hauteurs' (1980, 70). At least one site (Qasr al-Brad) juxtaposes both column and tower within close proximity. While some sites have been dated by inscription to as late as the tenth century (as at Dayr Tell Ada), and a number to the seventh century (as at Ma'n, Ruwayda and Burj al-Saba'), a number of sites suggest that the tower was the earliest element (as argued in Chapter 4 for Bray).



So the interpretation adopted here is that the towers of the limestone massif were on balance linked to monastic practice during Late Antiquity, and that they were constructed as such *in the first place*. This conclusion cannot be extended to all towers without reservation, as it is still necessary to apply the series of criteria set out in section 5.2 (for example, in cases where the tower is attached to a secular, domestic house fully within the confines of a village and displaying no religious function or imagery at all, a monastic link can be discounted). However, where clear contextual evidence to the contrary does *not* exist, towers were probably used in a monastic sense. Often these buildings seem to have housed more than one individual and it has been suggested by Peña et al that other floors could have been occupied by followers of an original occupant (1980, 59). However, it may be that religious contemplation was associated with surveillance, agricultural production and storage, as well as ideological statements emphasising the isolation and impregnability of the tower through its size and construction.

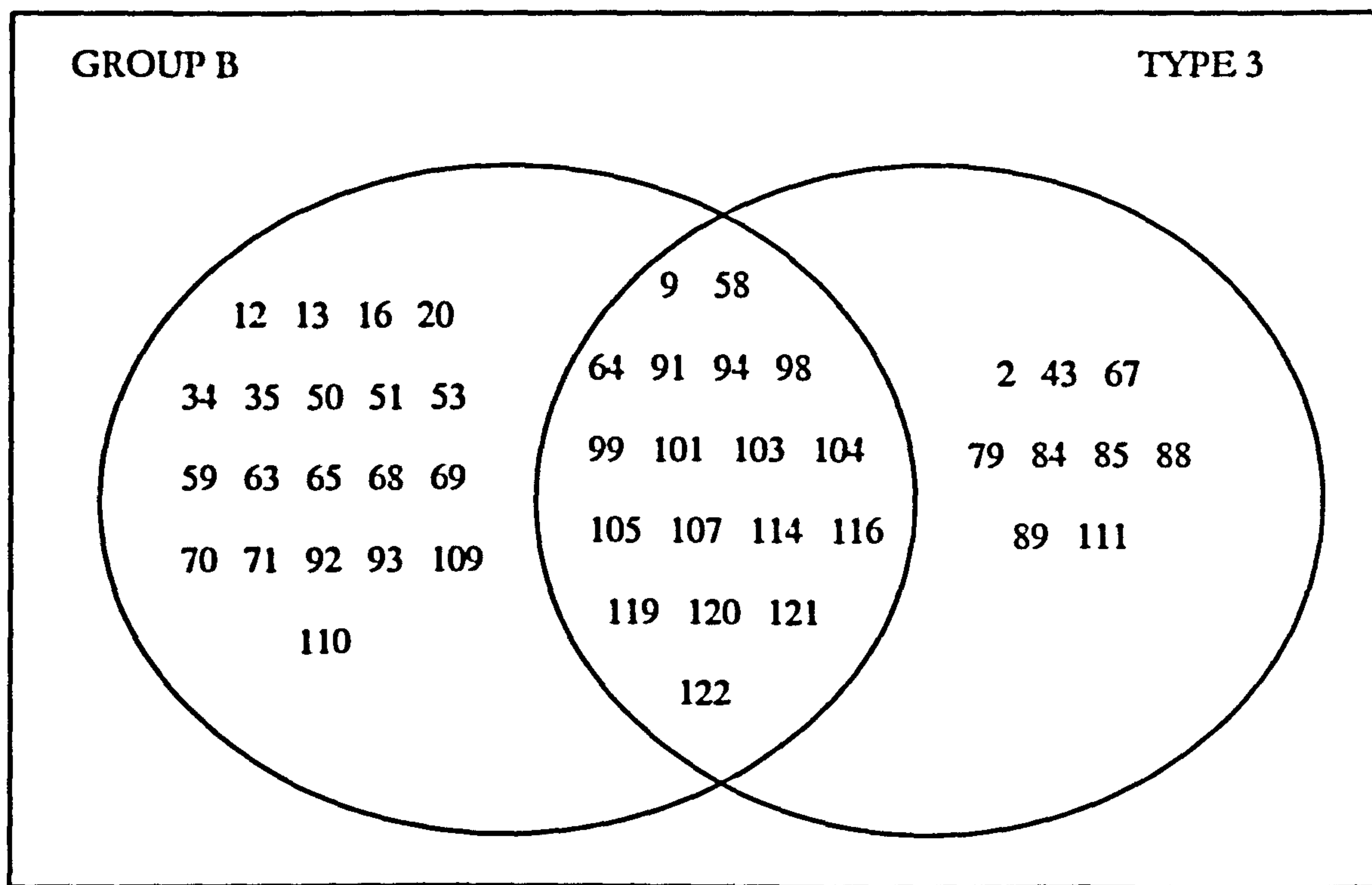
The Type 3 sites of which towers form a major part often seem to be small and apparently isolated sites, but in fact formed elements within broader, *laura*-like networks which centred on larger, communal sites. Burj Jalahah and Burj Nasr, for instance, though they contain very small-scale accommodation, and do not apparently possess a dedicated place of worship, may well have been associated with Qal'at Sirmada 1.5km to the north-west.



Figure 82: The Type 3 site of Burj Nasr



Indeed, it is interesting to look at where Type 3 sites exist, and in what spatial configurations. For example, Type 3 sites spatially correlate strongly with those referred to in section 5.6 as Group B sites. This concentration of sites is located on the northern slopes of Jebel Barisha and the south-eastern slopes of Jebel Halaqa. A Venn diagram of Type 3 and Group 3 sites illustrates this correlation as follows:



*Figure 83: Venn diagram showing the relationship between Type 3 and Group B sites*

Those sites which do occur as part of both Group B *and* Type 3 are precisely those described in section 5.6 as suggestive of dispersed, 'laura' style monastic organisation, with scattered, unenclosed sites taking a role in agricultural practice, with many units related to certain larger, communal sites. Here again is the map of Group B sites shown in section 5.7, with possible associations suggested by their distribution. *All* of the dispersed sites shown here belong to Type 3:





Figure 84: Distribution map showing some Type 3/Group B sites clustered around possible communal centres

A tentative conclusion might be, then, that Type 3 sites are representative of scattered, semi-eremitic monastic activity, but that where collective worship and other communal activities were deemed necessary, these dispersed communities travelled up to a central institution. However, while this may indeed have been the case generally, Type 3 is not a well-defined, 'neat' category of site. It contains, for example, the site of Dayr Tell 'Ada which, *if* the attribution of this site on the ground is indeed correctly that of the site mentioned in the documentary sources, could be suggested as one of the first centres of collective monastic communities (Tchalenko 1953, 147-151; Ruggieri 1992, 160-2; both make use of *HR IV* here). If Ammianus and Eusebius did indeed form one of the earliest coenobitic institutions here, which served as a central focus for a large number of subsequent monasteries around the Plain of Dana, Dayr Tell 'Ada is hardly indicative of the dispersed monastic practice generally suggested by Type 3 sites. Yet it is included in this category by the cluster analysis because of its lack of a church or baptistery. It may be that this site has been misidentified, and that the Dayr Tell 'Ada (or Teleda) mentioned by Theodoret of Cyrrhus in fact lies elsewhere.

A further problem with the categorisation of Type 3 sites is that because they are often smaller, more isolated and often less obviously a former place of worship, sites of this kind



have often been subjected to greater of damage by recent agriculture. Burj Dayr 'Aman, for example, has been heavily truncated on its north and east sides in order to enlarge the potential yield of the agricultural field.

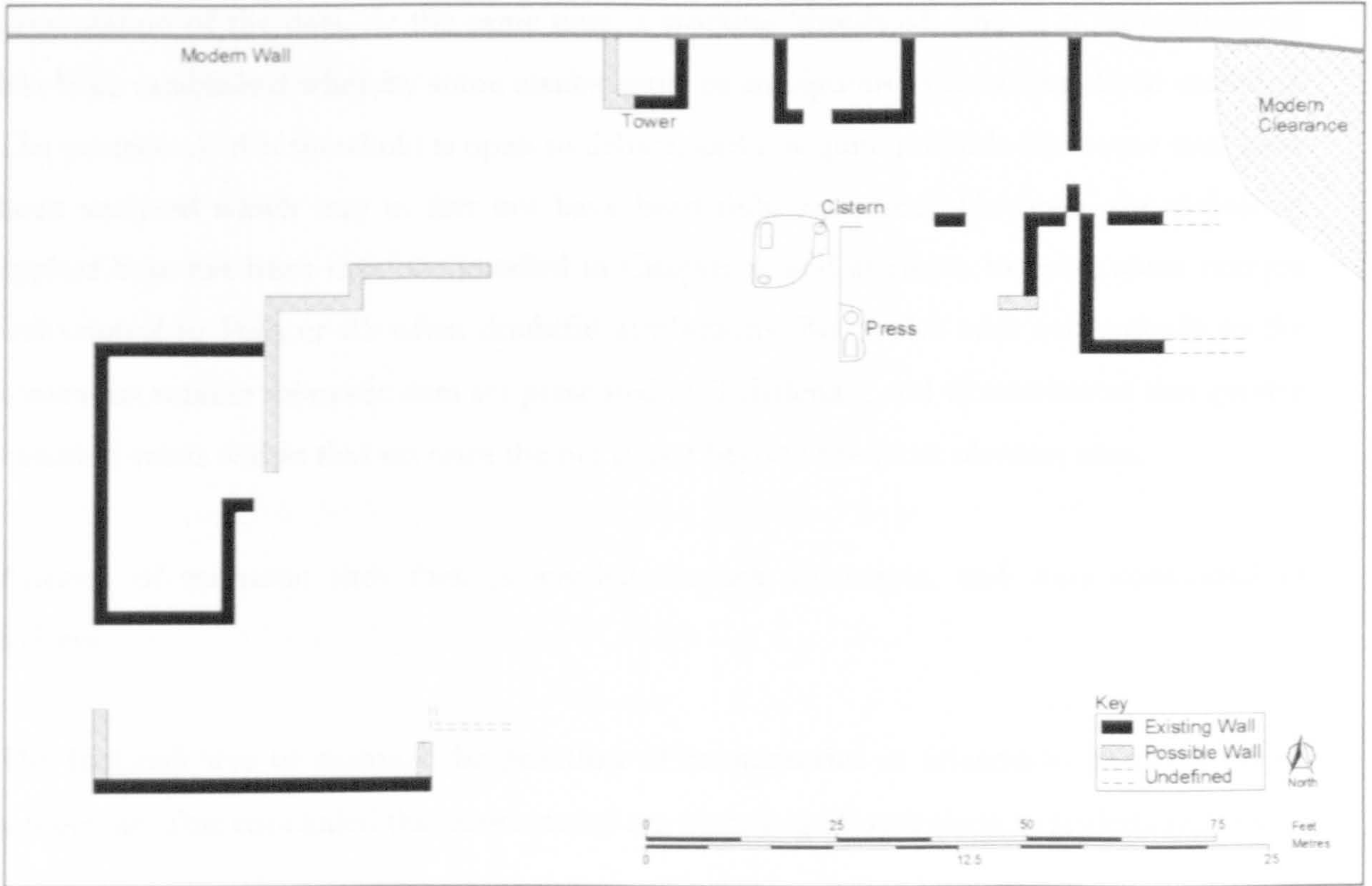


Figure 85: Plan of the site of Burj Dayr 'Aman, showing modern damage to the north-east

Damage of this kind may have obscured greater morphological complexity at sites such as Burj Dayr 'Aman, and thus assigned sites to Type 3 somewhat erroneously. Rather than being simple complexes with few buildings, some of the sites may have possessed more buildings and thus housed more complex activity in antiquity.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the categories applied here, three broad site types have been identified. If these sites did indeed house monastic activity in the fifth to seventh centuries, then these categories may be helpful in indicating three broadly different types of monastic practice: self-contained coenobitic units, baptismal centres and dispersed *laura* sites.

### 5.11 Discussion: the inter-site perspective

This chapter has examined the evidence for monastic sites in northern Syria from an inter-site point of view by asking the questions defined by the methodology of the data set at its broadest level. The conclusions reached are limited by the nature of the evidence, and



caution has been exercised when assessing reliability. I have attempted to include as much critique and reflexivity about the interpretation of what constitutes a monastic site, about the survival and visibility of the evidence, and about the reliability of the position of that evidence as possible. These cautions have been included within the organisation and presentation of the data. At the same time, a working 'threshold' (the '≥ 6' categorisation) has been established whereby some insubstantial or ambiguous evidence has been excluded. The position of this threshold is open to debate, and it is quite possible that some sites have been analysed which may in fact not have been fully 'monastic'. However, the definition applied here has been carefully justified in Chapter 4, and attempts to bring some critique and control to Peña et al's often doubtful attributions. But it also adds substantially to the somewhat smaller monastic data set presented by Tchalenko, and demonstrates that greater variation exists within that set once the net is cast beyond the most obvious sites.

Analysis of monastic sites then proceeded through six stages, and were concluded as follows.

The first task was to examine the position of monasteries in relation to nearby areas of settlement. This concluded that monasteries are placed *significantly* close to settlement sites.

Secondly, a high degree of intervisibility exists between monastery and settlement. Monasteries are usually situated on hill tops or upper slopes (with some important exceptions), and generally overlook areas of settlement.

Thirdly, the relationship between monasteries and communication routes and water courses was examined. With regard to the latter, monasteries do not seem to have been positioned with any significant relationship to water courses (although spring lines and other aspects of natural water provision have not been analysed). This is in partial contrast to communication routes where some collocation can be seen, though the relationship is not simple.

Fourthly, the different scales of monastic site were examined, and compared with the scale of settlement sites in order to investigate whether large or small monasteries became such as a result of the scale of secular activity going on in the nearby village. However, it would seem that the paucity of well planned sites is a genuine problem here (though this could be rectified fairly easily in the future, as the number of published plans increases). Where data *does* exist, the relationship between scale of monastic site and of settlement does suggest



some correlation. Where variation from this general situation exists, it may be that in some cases different monasteries were performing different roles, and that the size of site which developed as a result of that role was not always directly related to the size of the nearest settlement.

The fifth task was to examine the differential density of monastic sites across the region, it was concluded that three groups of particular density existed. These groups are, in part, artificial, since the data set is unlikely to be complete, and spatial analysis is particularly open to bias imposed by missing sites. However, for the time being, these three areas of density have been referred to as Groups A, B and C.

Finally, beyond these conclusions regarding overall distribution, an attempt was made to examine whether differentiation of groups could be discerned. Cluster analysis was employed, but could only be used on those sites the data from which is relatively abundant and well formed. From this, it has been suggested that three types of monastic site are evident. In terms of form, Type 1 consists of sites with large, apparently clearly defined architectural elements within a walled enclosure. Type 2 sites are similar, but never have agricultural facilities and always a baptistery, and are generally closer to areas of settlement and communication routes than the other two types. Type 3 sites are more difficult to define, but suggest more dispersed, eremitic practice, with several dispersed units looking to communal centres in a *laura* fashion. However, there are problems with the definition of all of these types, especially with Type 3, which derive from the way in which cluster analysis assigns groupings. These types, though thought-provoking, should be treated as working hypotheses only.

And what of the distribution of each type? Does this suggest a strong correlation between different *types* of site and different *groups*, thereby suggesting that fairly distinct regional traditions were being created? Beginning with a distribution map of Type 1 sites displayed along with the three groups, it can be seen that no strong correlation exists between Type 1 sites and any particular density group.



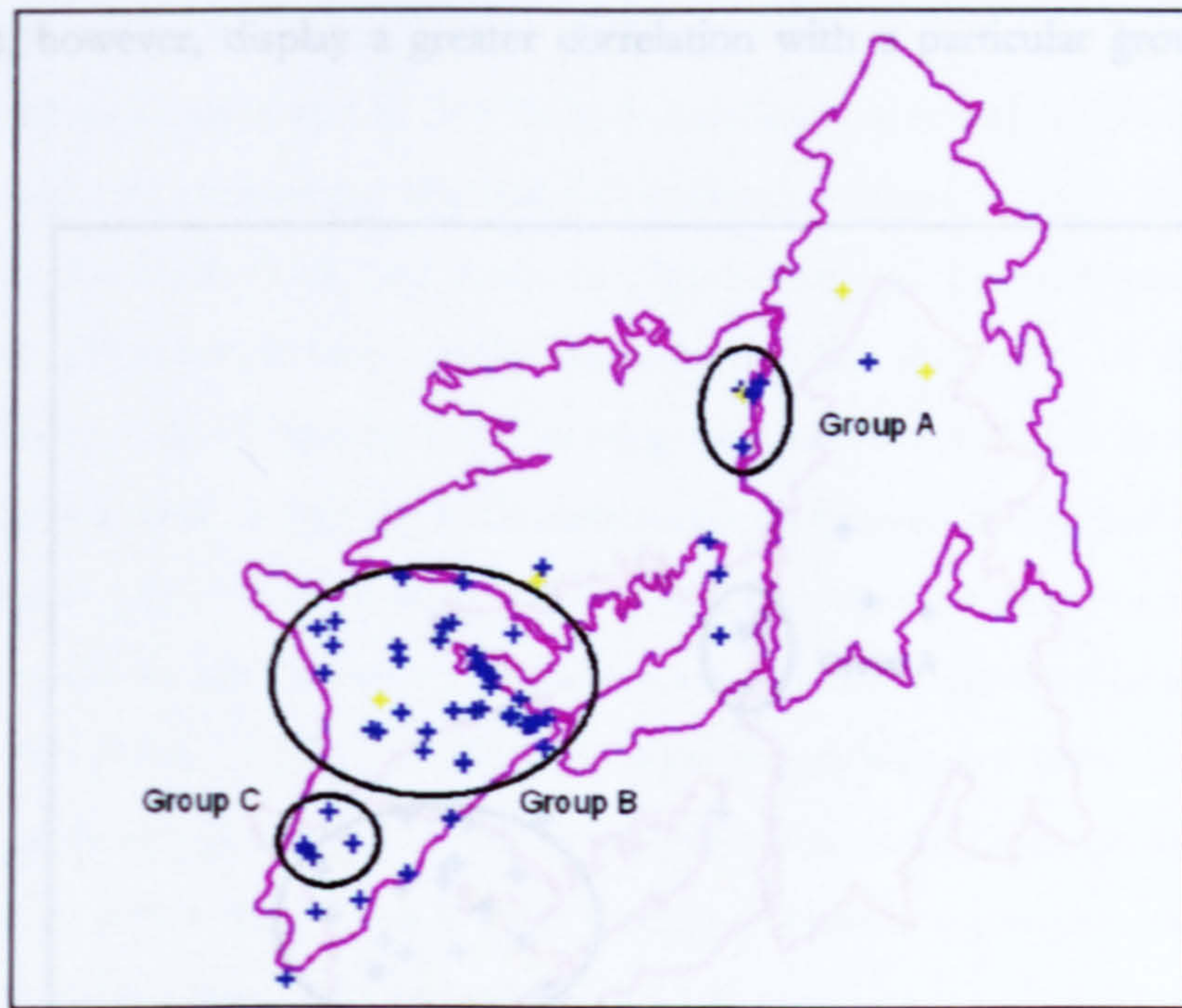


Figure 86: Distribution map of monastic sites showing the lack of correlation between Type 1 sites (in yellow) and any particular density group, whether A, B or C (original in colour)

With regard to Type 2 sites, it can be seen that although three of the four sites approximately cluster around the north end of the Jebel Barisha they also do not correspond directly with any particular sub-region within the data set, and thus cannot be easily aligned with any of the groups defined above.

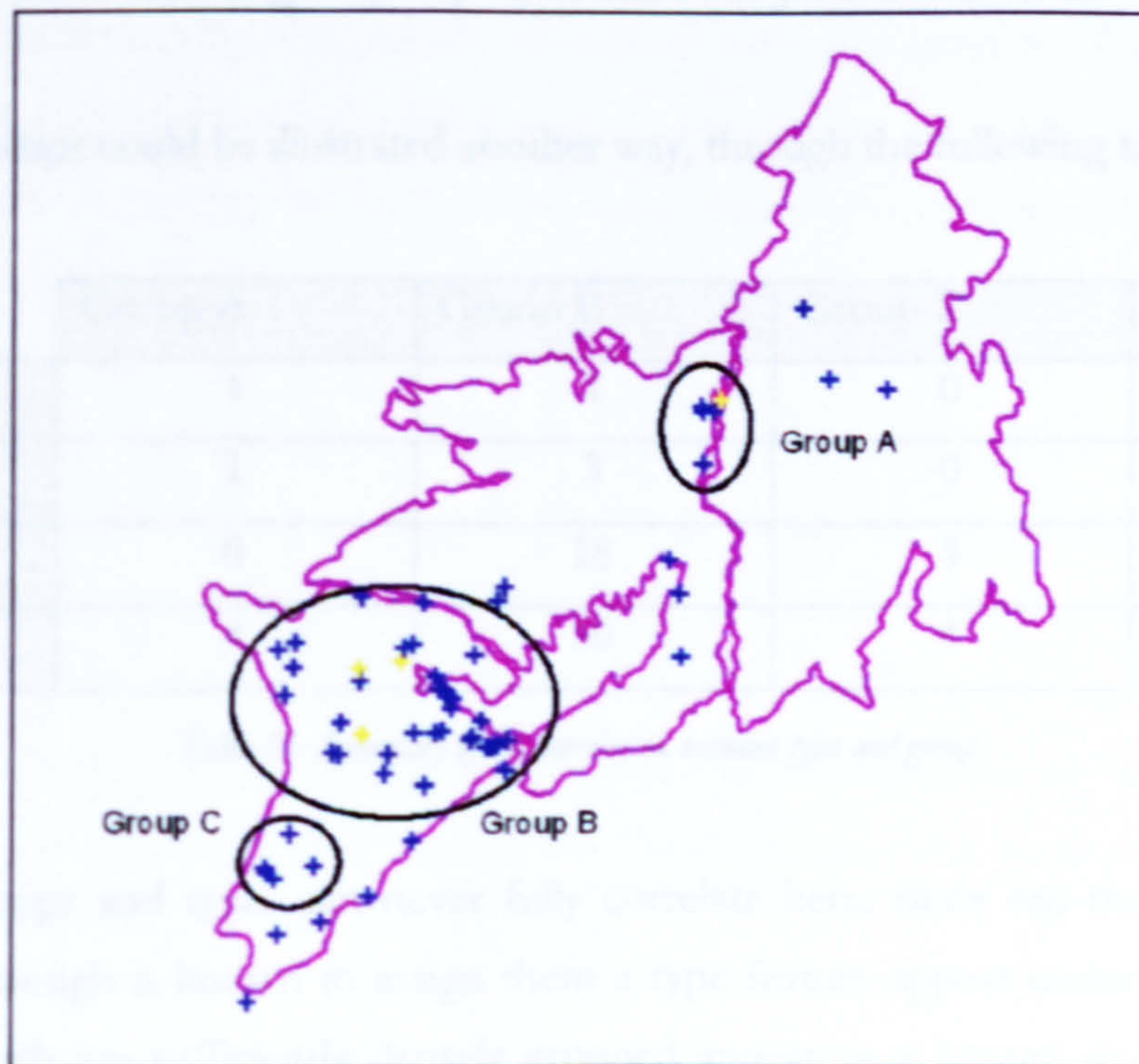


Figure 87: Distribution map of monastic sites showing the lack of correlation between Type 2 sites (in yellow) and any particular density group (original in colour)



Type 3 sites, however, display a greater correlation with a particular group, in this case Group B.

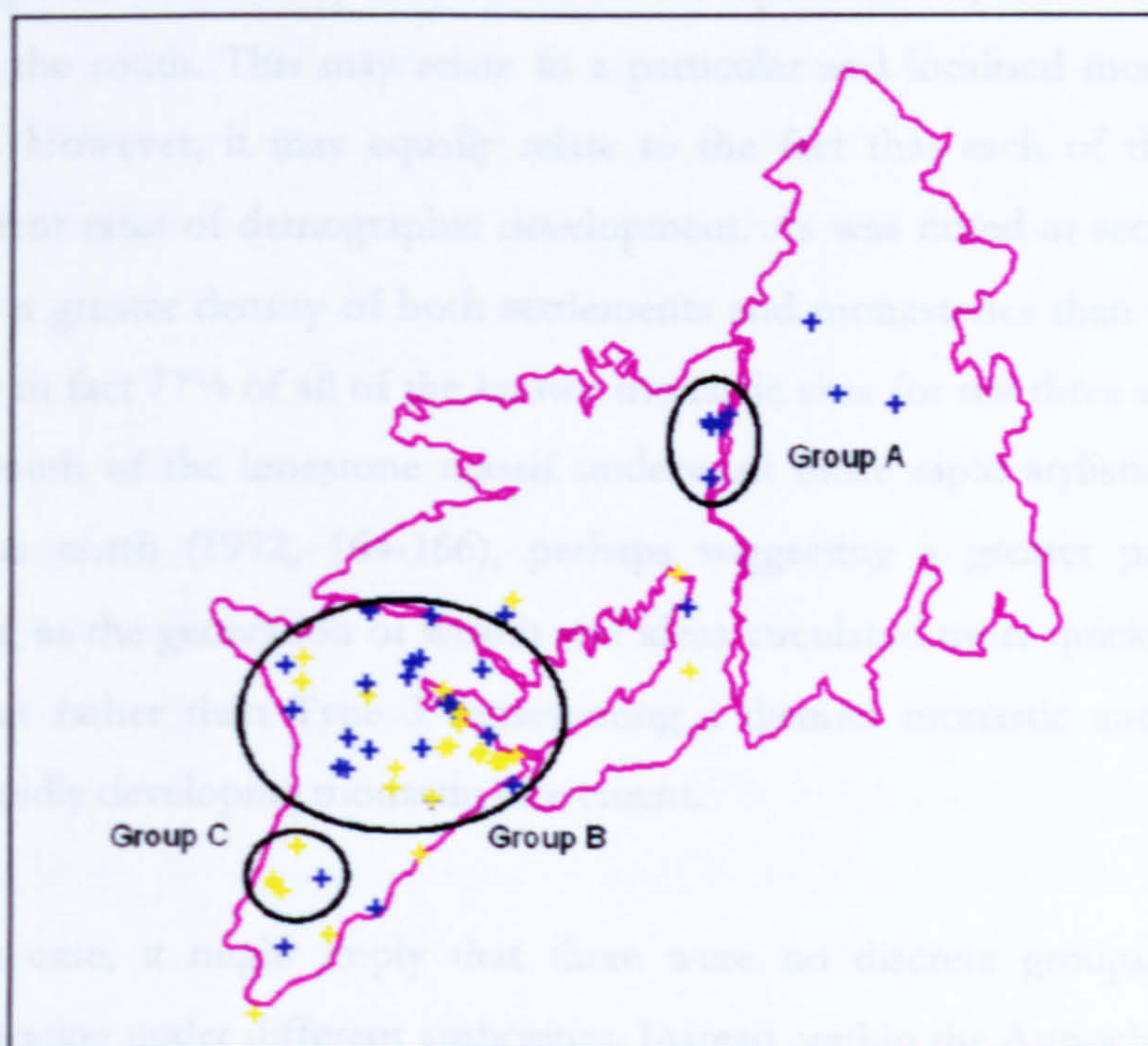


Figure 88: Distribution map of monastic sites showing the partial correlation between Type 3 sites and Groups B & C (original in colour)

The majority of Type 3 sites are distributed within density Group B, and some within Group C, with none occurring in Group A, or indeed in Jebel Sim'an at all.

These relationships could be illustrated another way, through the following table.

	Group A	Group B	Group C	Totals
Type 1	1	1	0	5
Type 2	1	3	0	4
Type 3	0	18	4	28
Totals	4	30	4	

Table 31: Summary of the correlation between type and group

Of course, groups and types can never fully correlate here, since *only* those monasteries about which enough is known to assign them a type feature appear under 'type', and *only* those sites which are sufficiently densely grouped appear as a 'group' (consequently, the 'totals' are almost always greater than the contents of each row or column). However, the general indication here is that while no precise correlations exist, Type 3 and Group B commonly align, and no monasteries of Type 3 exist further north in Group A.



This would seem to suggest that no very distinct, regional types of monastic practice were in place with regard to Types 1 and 2. For Type 3, the situation is rather different since they are largely (though not exclusively) situated within Groups B and C, and within the area of Jebel Barisha to the south. This may relate to a particular and localised monastic practice within this area. However, it may equally relate to the fact that each of the three areas underwent different rates of demographic development. As was noted in section 5.2, Jebel Barisha contains a greater density of both settlements and monasteries than the other two areas. It contains in fact 77% of all of the known monastic sites for the three areas. Tate has noted that the south of the limestone massif underwent more rapid stylistic architectural changes than the north (1992, 164-166), perhaps suggesting a greater pace of socio-economic change, as the generation of wealth and ideas circulated more quickly. It could be argued, then, that rather than Type 3 representing a distinct monastic authority, it was simply a more rapidly developing monastic movement.

If this were the case, it might imply that there were no discrete groups of monastic communities operating under different authorities. Instead, within the Antiochene sphere of influence discussed here, monasticism could be regarded as a universally applied settlement type, perhaps being loosely organised by just one authority rather than many. However, within this widespread and general practice, three different forms of activity were taking place. It is unclear whether these different kinds should be interpreted chronologically (as argued above), hierarchically, with certain complexes acting as centres of authority with smaller units permeating out into marginal areas, or whether we are seeing complexes with different intentions competing within the same atmosphere of experimentation, but with a loosely-defined sense of allegiance to one authority.

It would perhaps be appropriate to conclude that all three options are possible, with different complexes developing at slightly different rates; certain institutions formed coherent and well-defined units of coenobitic practice (Type 1). These institutions played a strong role in agricultural production and storage, often alongside one village settlement in particular, thus drawing on their labour and supplies and playing a role in surplus control. They participated in pilgrimage and perhaps also baptism, but these were not necessarily foremost in their priorities.

Other institutions performed the function of baptism in a more purposeful and coherent fashion and often combined this with a strong pilgrimage role (Type 2). These institutions often formed the centres of large agglomerations and were tightly bound within the fabric



of villages. However, their use was much more widespread and their roles enabled them to interact with very broad numbers of the population from diverse regions, thus enhancing the fame and reputation of monastic practice by spreading their ideological message widely. The pace of development at such sites may have been aided by patronage from wealthy patrons (in the case of Qal'at Sim'an, this may even have meant the Emperor, as suggested by Wickham (2005, 444), among others). These sites were probably somewhat exceptional in this regard, and certainly appear to have been rarer than the other two types.

Further still sites of coenobitic practice began settling monastic personnel out in the surrounding landscape, thus both expanding their jurisdiction and enabling an even stronger role in agricultural production (Type 3). These may have originally been monasteries where the tradition of eremitic practice was particularly strong. By moving diverse yet linked units into areas of fertile land, control and surveillance could be increased. This appears to have taken place especially on the northern slopes of Jebel Barisha, but elsewhere also, perhaps indicating the specific areas which previously were *less* intensively farmed or settled, and were thus available for such expansion. This may also indicate the pace of expansion in all forms of settlement for the southern portion of the study area.

## 5.12 Conclusion

The question that remains for this chapter to confront is to what extent have the conclusions just summarised addressed the viability of the model proposed earlier in this thesis? As a reminder the main issues to resolve are:

1. What is the range and extent of the information resource for monastic sites?
2. Were monastic sites placed in locations which would enable them to take part in activities taking place in settlements, or was interaction rare and sporadic?
3. Did those locations draw settlements into an ideological relationship which made them part of a sacred landscape at the centre of which stood the monastery?

The first two have been examined in some detail, and have concluded that although there are some problems with the data, it is currently legitimate to at least attempt an answer to the questions in hand. It seems that monastic sites were indeed placed in locations which facilitated involvement in the broader secular activities of the region. To this can be added the nuance that Types 1 and 2 would have done this especially, with Type 3 being more focused on specifically monastic networks of settlement which expanded into open areas.



The third question, regarding ideological relationships is more difficult to address through looking at large scale evidence. For now, it could be concluded that monasteries were well placed to be a constant presence in the minds of those living nearby. They often overlooked villages, or were at least sufficiently close-by and accessible to draw secular areas into the spiritual landscape defined by the monastery and its environs. But different monastic sites interacted in different ways, and very broad conclusions would belie the subtlety likely to be inherent in such relations. Consequently, such an issue is best confronted by detailed studies of particular sites. The task for the next chapter is to attempt some depth and context to the large scale, macro-spatial observations made here. Three case studies will therefore be explored in more detail, in order to make some analysis on micro-spatial, intra-site grounds. Chapter 6 will now begin by defining which case studies in particular are to be tackled.



## Chapter 6

### Intra-Site Perspectives: Monastery, Settlement & Landscape

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*The previous chapter looked at the occurrence of monasteries within the landscape at the broadest scale. It reached the conclusion that a wide variety of forms exist within monastic sites, but that within this, certain distinct types are discernible. These types can be understood in approximate terms as those that would appear to have been self-contained, coenobitic complexes often slightly removed from secular settlement, those that acted as specialist centres of pilgrimage and baptism and whose influence thus extended beyond the region, and those that formed elements of dispersed networks playing a strong role in agricultural production. However, the previous chapter also discussed the caveats which must accompany these types. Furthermore, a number of important questions remain unanswered regarding the chronological development of each site, the communication between monastery and settlement in precise terms, and how the differences of scale, distance and presumably function within each type may inform interpretation of the potentially contrasting ways in which monasteries interacted with secular life. Thus what follows in this chapter is more 'qualitative', and is therefore intended to bring greater depth to the breadth discussed thus far. Three case studies are selected and examined in detail. The reasons for their selection, and the forms of evidence used, are considered. This consideration will take particular note of the use of space within and around the sites, and the ways in which that space developed over time.*

#### 6.1 Case study selection

The previous chapter suggested that there were various distinct types of monastic site in use in the fifth to seventh centuries in north-west Syria. This conclusion was based on the visible components and facilities which monastic sites display, as well as their location in relation to nearby settlements. The techniques used were macro-spatial, and could therefore only tackle certain aspects of the theoretical model outlined in Chapter 3. The task for Chapter 6 is to address the research questions which remain unanswered, and these are as follows:

1. If settlements were indeed drawn into an ideological relationship which may be visible in the landscape, what form did such landscapes take?
2. Did monasteries take part in production and if so, how and in what ways?
3. What evidence is there for storage and re-distribution of the resulting products?
4. Does the level of conformity (or otherwise) to all of the questions raised above suggest:
  - a. That site selection for monasteries was occurring in similar ways across the region?
  - b. That there is sufficient variation still to suggest a sense of process, whereby the situation was changing through time?



In methodological terms, these questions will be tackled through the following tasks (mentioned initially at the beginning of Chapter 5):

Q5.1	Using already existing archaeological plans, amended to include improved detail and height data, construct a topographic model for specific case studies.
Q5.2	Add to this topographical model by making close observations of monastic and settlement sites on the ground, to include details not usually included on previous plans, such as the precise 'line of sight' between buildings and stratigraphic relationships in the standing masonry.
Q5.3	On a site-by-site basis, what topographical statement did the monastery make? Is it sited to emphasise prominence and visibility or seclusion and separation?
Q5.4	What was the nature of communication, whether visual or physical, between the monastery and other areas of settlement?
Q5.5	What was the <i>nature</i> of the journey between that monastery and its nearest areas of settlement? Was it structured in a way suggestive of frequent or occasional interaction?
Q5.6	As far as can be ascertained, which elements of the settlement and the monastery were most readily connected in this way? Which were most secluded?
Q5.7	Does our knowledge of the chronology of sites suggest a change in this relationship through time?
Q5.8	Did different types of monastic behaviour, indicated by different forms of monastic site, interact with secular settlement in different ways?

*Table 32: Remaining methodological tasks to be tackled in Chapter 6*

The subtleties of site interpretation required by these tasks necessitates the selection of a series of case studies which will be examined in detail. It would be tempting simply to select a case study from each of the three types identified by the previous chapter. However, thought-provoking though this typological exercise was, in methodological terms this would not seem to be the most productive approach. 'Type 2' sites, specialist baptismal and pilgrimage centres such as Qal'at Sim'an and Baqirha, have already received a great deal of attention in scholarly literature both in terms of specific site analyses (Beyer 1925; Guyer 1934; Écochard 1936; Lassus 1947; Biscop & Sodini 1983, 1984; Bavant et al 1989; Sodini 1993; Kazanski et al 2003, and the forthcoming work by the French team at Qal'at Sim'an), and broader commentaries on the role played by such sites (Hunt 1982, Sivan 1990, Eade & Sallnow 1991, Coleman & Elsner 1994, Caseau 2001, Trombley 2004). Furthermore, there are ambiguities within the other two site types which require greater exploration. For example, there are differences of scale, of distance between the monastery and its nearest village, of degrees of chronological complexity as suggested by stratigraphic evidence, and of the preservation of that evidence. Thus, two rather different sites are selected for study from Type 1. The first is Qasr al-Brad, a generally very well preserved site consisting of two fairly clear phases. The site is relatively separated in terms of distance from its nearest secular settlement, and is a well-defined, large site. The second case study will be Kharab Shams which, although also a 'Type 1' site, is much smaller and is more closely embedded within



the fabric of its nearest village. There are therefore more complex chronological issues to resolve with this site. Lastly, the site of Burj Jalahah will be used to examine the nature of 'Type 3' sites in more detail, since it would appear to be reasonably representative here. Of course, there are subtle differences within 'Type 3' sites also, and a greater number of case studies would have been desirable. However, constraints of time and word space have necessitated the selection of just three case studies overall.

In each case, there are further justifications for selection which should be made clear, and which do not derive directly from their categorisation along typological lines. Firstly, the work carried out by Tchalenko tended to consider only a certain proportion of the sites considered in this thesis to have been monastic (52%). He chose only those sites which are very clearly definable as monastic and whose functions and roles in Late Antiquity, he felt, were straightforward. By contrast, sites are chosen here because they have not been studied in detail previously, so that they may contribute something extra to the body of documentation already extant.

Furthermore, the three case studies explored here, though of variable preservation, are all selected because they are well enough preserved for their investigation to be worthwhile at all, and because they are accessible. These factors relate in large part to the extent to which they are occupied today. Most of the limestone massif was only sparsely populated between the later eighth century and the nineteenth century. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, groups of Kurdish and Turcoman origin have migrated from the uplands of the north and east, and of Arabic origin from the lowlands to the south (Tchalenko 1953). In some cases, this re-settlement has obscured or destroyed archaeological evidence, or at the very least presented problems of access. This is the case, for example, at sites such as Burj Haydar and Kafr Daryan. Finally, the three sites chosen here are geographically dispersed, so as to produce conclusions which are not confined to one specific region of the study area alone. Thus, Qasr al-Brad and Kharab Shams, though both on the Jebel Sim'an, are 7km apart. Burj Jalahah is further to the south-west, on the Jebel Barisha.



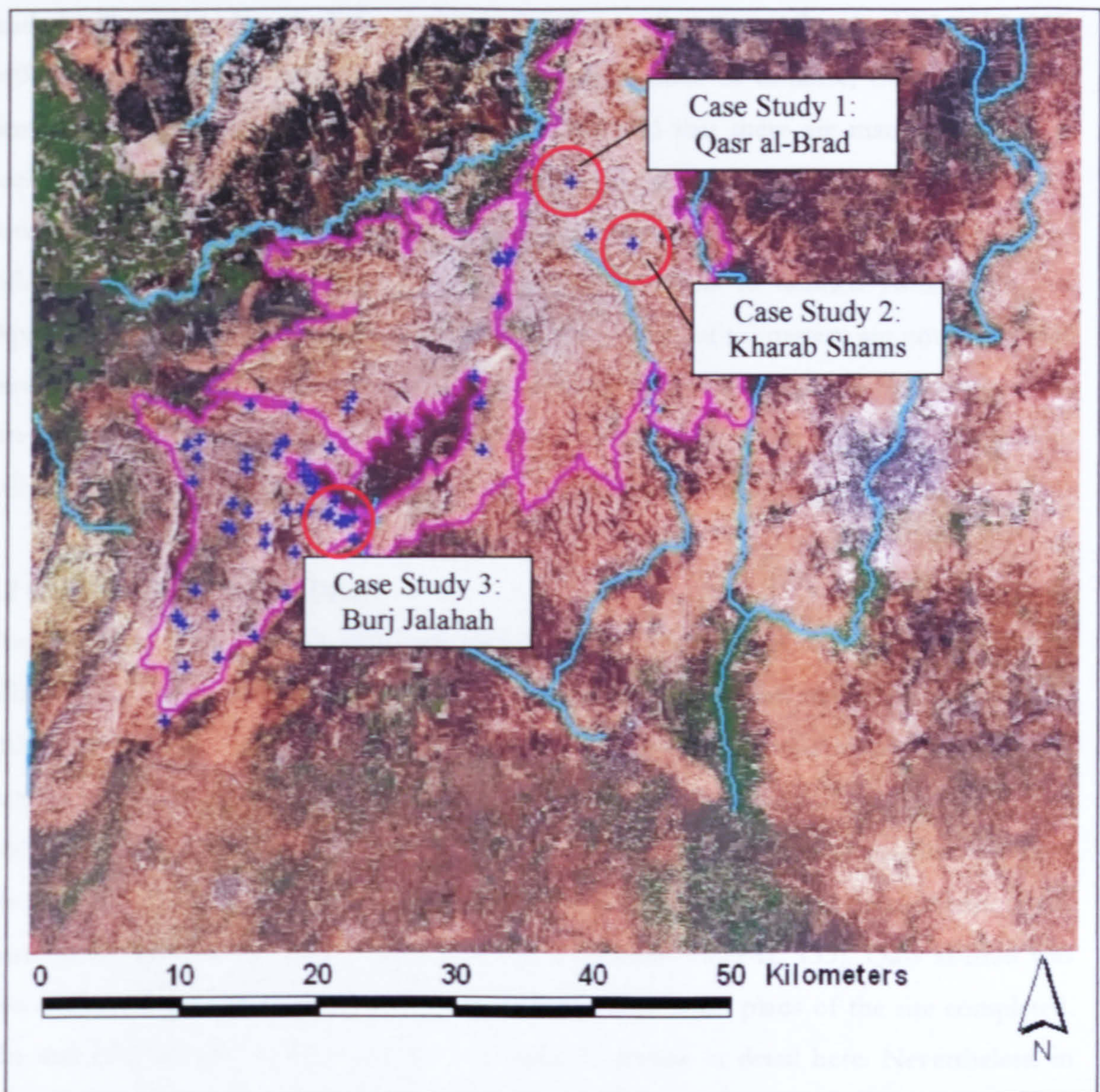


Figure 89: Map showing the location of the three case studies used in this chapter (marked in red; original in colour)

It can be seen then that the three broad categories of monument selected for further comment here do not correspond to the types selected for analysis by other authors. Peña, Castellana and Fernandez selected what they perceived to be different forms of monastic practice in their *Les Stylites Syriens* (1975), *Les Reclus Syriens* (1980) and *Les Cénobites Syriens* (1983). However, the problem here is primarily that the first category, that of monasteries based around a stylite, is not a coherent unit of analysis. Stylitism was one of a number of forms of ascetic practice and one which came to prominence as it was unique to Syria during Late Antiquity, and because of the fame acquired by its leading practitioner, Symeon Stylites the Elder. Yet the complexes within which stylites' pillars later came to be set are varied in their layout and function, and in fact represent diverse forms of monastery with some performing baptismal and pilgrimage roles, and others more separate centres of coenobitic practice. Furthermore, as Chapter 4 pointed out, archaeological evidence for stylitic practice can be ambiguous. Other attempts at classifying different types of monastery have been



made by Tate, who described the category of 'isolé' or 'dans une agglomération' (1992, 339-340). Although he was correct to establish the significance of distance, Chapter 5 in fact demonstrated that this factor is not easily divisible, and that there are many gradations in between. Finally, though Tchalenko discussed the categorisation of monastic sites in some detail, he tended to do so along morphological lines according to the urban sphere of influence within which each monastery was positioned. Thus, he defined 'Antiochène' and 'Apamène' (Tchalenko 1953 I, 162, 178). While these types of monastery are not questioned here, the intention of this current study is somewhat different, aiming to demonstrate and interpret variation within the Antiochene sphere of influence. Thus, Apamean monasteries will be examined once this study is broadened at a later, post-thesis date.

## 6.2 Case Study 1: Qasr al-Brad

The first case study consists of the monastic site of Qasr al-Brad, and the accompanying village of Brad. Brad itself is situated towards the north of Jebel Sim'an, 7.8km north-east of Qal'at Sim'an, 67km north-east of Antioch and 31km north-west of Aleppo. The village is very large, indeed among the largest anywhere on the limestone massif, at 200,900m<sup>2</sup>. Bell took some photographs here before the First World War, but Butler was the first to record the architecture of the town in any detail, while Tchalenko made the first detailed plan of the town (Bell 1919, 287-9; Butler 1909, 299-315; Tchalenko 1953 II, 133). Qasr al-Brad was also examined by both Butler and Tchalenko, and rudimentary plans of the site completed. The standing remains of Brad are too extensive to review in detail here. Nevertheless, in general terms the architectural remains imply that Brad was well settled by the third century, as evidenced by the large bath complex and the mausoleum. The centre of the settlement at this point was to the north-east of the current spread of ruins, where the remains of a bath complex, a mausoleum and other municipal structures are extant. Tchalenko concludes that Brad was truly urban in character, on account of the street layout, a commercial quarter and the diversity of agricultural industries based there (Tchalenko 1953 II, 133; Callot 1984, plate 133). It has also been suggested that the town may have served an administrative function for a district covering the north of Jebel Sim'an (Burns 1999, 59). In the late fourth century, the main municipal focus seems to have moved towards the south-west of Brad, with the construction of the church of Julianos, dated by inscription to between 399 and 404. This church is not only very large, but has a number of associated buildings to the south and east of it. It has been suggested that it represents a 'cathedral'. However, it is clear from the standing stratigraphy that the church was not of this scale from the outset. The structure to the east and south of the church were clearly added after the main church was completed,



though it is not clear when. It may be that this development took place at the same time as the expansion towards the west of the town in the sixth century.

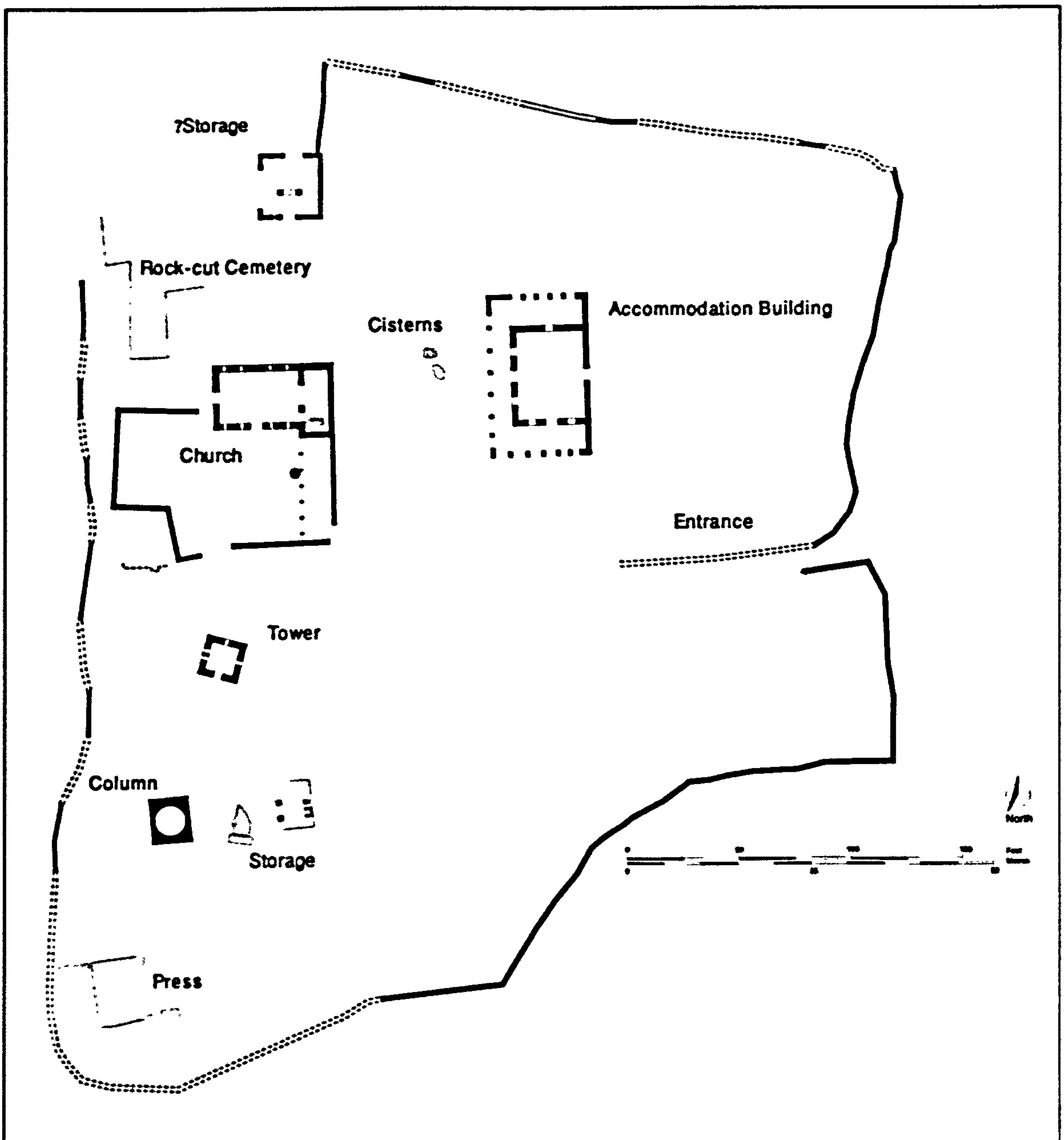


*Figure 90: The late fourth/early fifth century church of Julianos at Brad, with a Muslim cemetery in the foreground*

It is interesting that another church was constructed just 15m north of the church of Julianos in 561. This may reflect simply a growing population and the desire of benefactors to endow a new church, but it may also suggest a growing administrative role for the church of Julianos, necessitating a further structure for open, public use.

0.7km south-west of the central focus of the settlement lies the monastic site of Qasr al-Brad. The analysis of the previous chapter suggested that Qasr al-Brad could be considered a Type 1 site, being a fairly large, enclosed site with a church, press, cistern, cemetery and communal buildings. The site is a well-defined, self-contained complex, standing in a *relatively* separate position on the next hilltop to the west. It consists of a simple, single-cell church with an associated colonnade, an accommodation block, a number of cisterns, a large press, what appears to be a storage facility and a tower.





*Figure 91: Plan of the monastic site of Qasr al-Brad*

What follows is a description of each of these elements, followed by an interpretation of overall site use.

The monastic church was described by Butler as follows:

‘The chapel is small, with an undivided nave and a narrow chancel arch with a doorway on the right of it, both opening into an oblong space which projects slightly to the south and serves the purposes of sanctuary and side chambers. In the projecting part of this structure is a large sarcophagus. In front of the south doorway lie the remains of a bicolunar porch of stone.’ (Butler 1920, 313)



The church is, in contrast to all of the three churches within the settlement of Brad, almost entirely unadorned. A small cross motif is incorporated into the lintel over the south door and the cornice is gently moulded. The rectangular, single-aisle of the nave also seems to represent a deliberately simple layout. The undivided chancel is unusual, though the positioning of a sarcophagus in the south-east room is not. The identity of the individual who was presumably buried in that sarcophagus is not known.



*Figure 92: General view of Qasr al-Brad from the east*

An interesting feature of this church is a length of 11m of enclosure wall extending from the east wall of the church. This wall consists of a portico of upright stones which may have formed part of a cloister. Butler was of the opinion that this wall supported a suite of rooms above, and indeed this seems likely. Whether such a cloister ever formed a complete square with the church at its northern end is not clear, but seems unlikely given the distribution of fallen stone. Significantly, this partial cloister was constructed at the same time as the church, as illustrated by the keyed-in masonry at the south-east corner of the building. It is difficult to interpret the use of this cloister and suite of rooms. Given its position in relation to the church, it may represent accommodation for the monastery's residents.





*Figure 93: Qasr al-Brad church and cloister portico*

Further accommodation is located 17m east of the church. This is a much larger building, consisting of a two-storey rectangular structure, with a portico on three sides. Three doors face towards the church, to the south, and towards Brad on the east side.



*Figure 94: The main accommodation building at Qasr al-Brad*



A number of animal troughs are present within the colonnade, at least one of which appears to be *in situ*. This building may represent a *pandocheion*, or accommodation for pilgrims. This interpretation would be consistent with the presence of animal troughs to cater for the animals of transportation (although Brenk 2004 considers such features to have been for refrigerated food storage). The sarcophagus within the church was probably the focus of such visitors. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that this building was actually for members of the monastery's permanent community.

A further building stands 16m north of the church. This consists of a single-storey, apparently unpartitioned rectangular structure, just 7 x 7m in plan. It has been suggested that this is the monastic accommodation for the site. However, the lack of internal division of space, as well as the size of the entrances at over 2m in width<sup>14</sup>, suggests that this structure was actually meant for storage.



Figure 95: A probable storage structure at Qasr al-Brad

<sup>14</sup> Although the masonry around the entrance has been somewhat disturbed here, the lintel is still present, thus suggesting a width for the doorway.



A rock-cut feature immediately to the west of this structure may also be relevant, as it seems to represent some kind of storage vat or cistern. Quite what was stored on this site cannot be ascertained. There is certainly a large press facility to the south-west of the site. The size of the press, as well as the considerable effort expended in cutting its deep profile into the rock, would suggest the potential for surplus. The nature of such a surplus is difficult to calculate, as the details of the press lie submerged beneath at least 1.5m of fill. It would appear to be a lever press, though a screw mechanism may lie beneath the rubble somewhere.



*Figure 96: The remains of a press, now backfilled, at Qasr al-Brad*

Through approximate comparison with the eastern press at Dayr Dehes, we may speculate that it produced around 21,200 litres of oil per season. We cannot be sure of the total population of the monastery, partly because this may have fluctuated in line with pilgrim traffic. Nevertheless, whether the surplus was large or only modest, the produce of the press would have required administration and storage. The building to the north of the church may have fulfilled this function.



One of the most prominent features at this site is a tower, which stands at the south-west edge of the monastic space. It is a substantial structure, built of blocks typically 1.6 x 0.7 x 0.6m in size. The tower shows evidence for four floors, with use of the first to third floors clearly domestic, as indicated by windows and aumbries repeated in a similar fashion on each floor. The ground floor may also have been used for storage. No internal divisions within each floor are apparent. Since the three occupied floors display identical features, it could be suggested that they were each for use as domestic cells for monks, with one individual using each floor (as discussed in the previous chapter).



*Figure 97: The tower at Qasr al-Brad*

Dating is difficult to ascertain for any of these structural remains, since no inscriptions exist at the site. Previous scholars have concluded, on the basis of the architectural style of the church, that the whole complex was completed in the sixth century. However, observation of the layout of the site suggests that it may not have been constructed in one phase. All of the buildings are aligned in a similar fashion, except for the tower and associated gateway. This fact is not apparent on Butler's plan which presents every building on the same orthogonal alignment, though there is in fact a clear difference of around fifteen degrees.



Furthermore, the masonry blocks used to build the tower are noticeably larger than the other three structures. The surface area of the stones used is as follows:

Structure	Average surface area (cm <sup>2</sup> )
Church	9045
Accommodation	7399
Storage	8646
Tower	10928

*Table 33: The external surface area of masonry blocks used at Qasr al-Brad*

Thus, the blocks used for the church, accommodation and storage building are all of similar size, whereas the tower masonry is much larger. Though in architectural terms one might expect a taller structure to be built using larger stones, these are in fact 31% larger overall. It could be suggested then that given these differences of angle and block size, the tower was constructed first and the rest of the complex together at a later stage. Since all of these buildings are spatially separated, there is no way of verifying this suggestion stratigraphically. Nevertheless, the presence of a tower as a first installation and the expansion of the monastery thereafter is known at other sites. At the northern monastery at Sarjibla, the tower is stratigraphically earlier than the associated complex to its north. At Brayj also, both the east and the west towers preceded the majority of the complex which was then built around them.

Baccache and Tchalenko show the position of a stylite's column on their plan of the site, positioned close to the tower (Baccache & Tchalenko 1980). This feature is ambiguous, since so little now remains. It consists of a very large, roughly circular stone block 1.7m in diameter which rests on a level stone plinth. This plinth has a circular hole cut in it, into which the circular block - presumably the remains of the column - once fitted. Within the plinth, there are several incisions made for a wooden structure surrounding the base of the column. It seems likely that Baccache and Tchalenko's identification is correct, since the fittings of the plinth on which the base of the column now sits are similar to those at Qal'at Sim'an. There are no further features which suggest that the column was ever part of a more complex structure. It may be the case then that the individual who once used this column served as the focus for what then became a monastic tower, and then later developed into a large, communal institution. The singular grave within the *martyrion* of the church may have belonged to one of these founding members.





*Figure 98: The remains of the column at Qasr al-Brad, with the tower behind*

Having described some of the features present at Qasr al-Brad, it would be useful to comment on how these affected interaction between the monastery and the nearby settlement of Brad. The monastic site is clearly visible from Brad. The tower to the southwest of the monastic complex is particularly prominent. It stands over 9m in height, and is visible both everywhere within the monastic space, as well as from Brad and much of the surrounding countryside. If the chronological development of the site as suggested here is correct, then it would seem that such a tower is a structural realisation of the stylic pillar (a suggestion also made in Peña et al 1980). The tower may be partially defensive, yet it could not realistically function as a fortification within a siege situation. It seems more likely that it is deliberately designed to reach upwards, and thus in visual terms, to reach outwards. Indeed, comparison has been made between such towers and the role to be played later by minarets (Lassus 1947, 236).

A pilgrimage element to this site appears likely. Whether the building to the east is a *pandocheion* or not is unclear, but use of the sarcophagus as a focus is very likely.

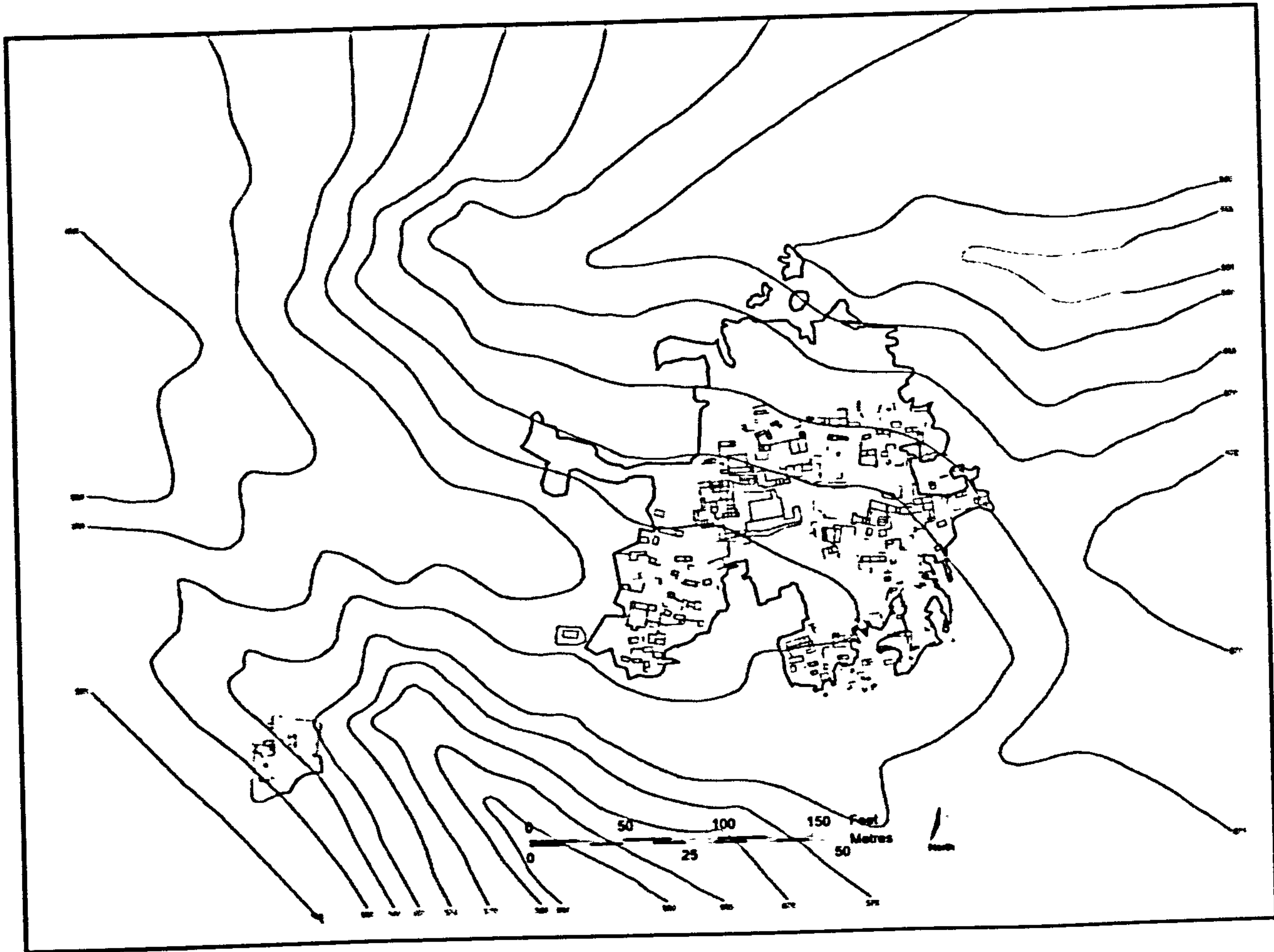




*Figure 99: Position of a sarcophagus within a small martyrium in the monastic church*

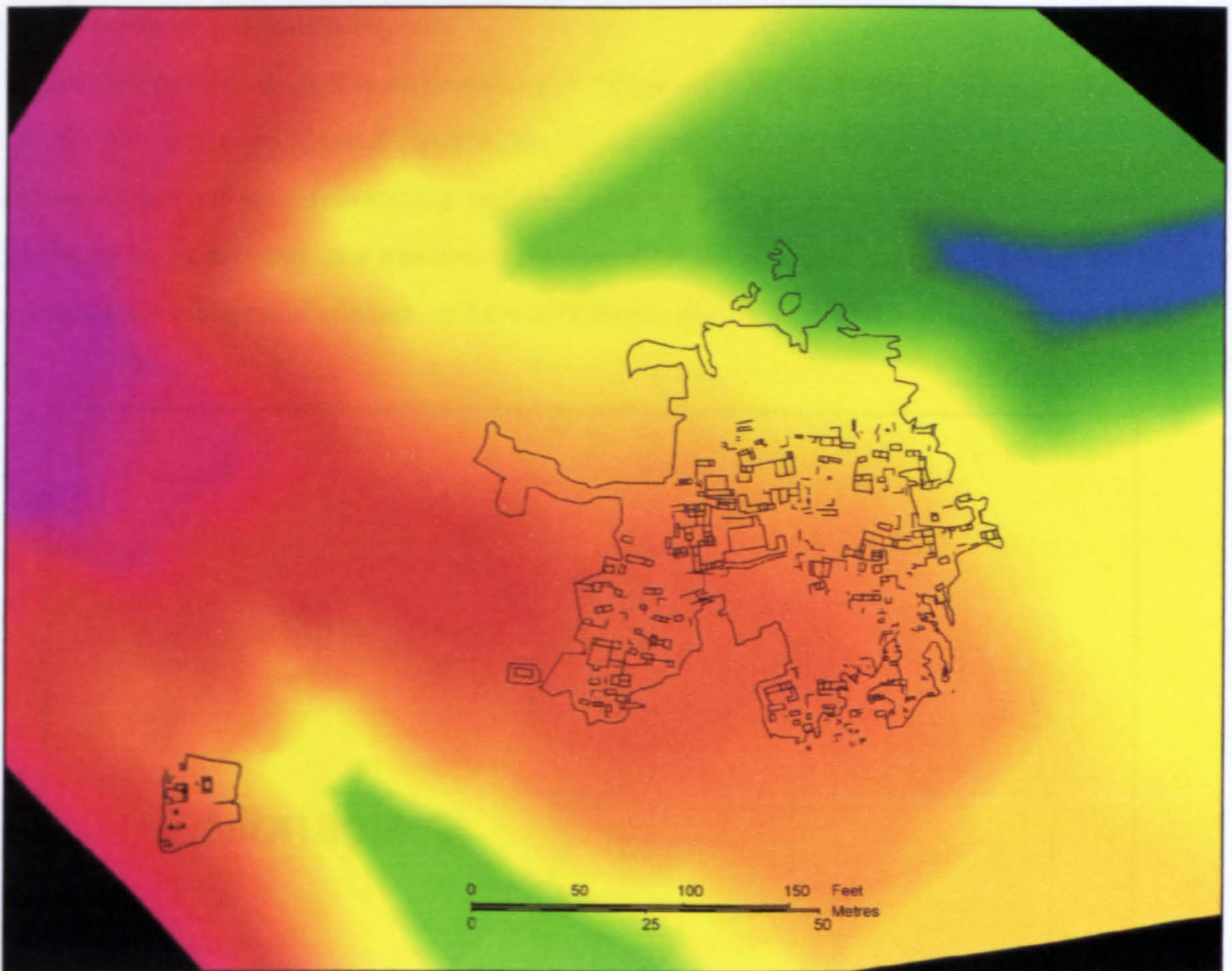
Given the proximity of Brad, the ease with which visitors can pass the 0.7km between the monastic site and the settlement, and the importance of Brad itself as an administrative and industrial centre, the flow of traffic between the two would have been frequent. The wall which encloses Qasr al-Brad rarely displays evidence for the kind of large blocks of ashlar common elsewhere on the site, and so would never have been genuinely defensive. However, its route (if assumptions based on its current position are reliable) suggests that the careful control of traffic in and out of the complex would have been controlled, and would have flowed from the direction of Brad.





*Figure 100: Plan of the Brad region, showing the distance and nature of the topography between the main settlement and Qasr al-Brad to the south-west*





*Figure 101: Digital Elevation Model of the Brad region, showing the relative topographic positions of Qasr al-Brad (to the bottom left) and Brad. The monastery is slightly higher than the town (pink represents the highest, blue the lowest; original in colour)*

Qasr al-Brad occupies a very large space on the hillside, and its deliberately dispersed layout can be read as a clear statement of presence and permanence. The scale of the accommodation and church, though of simple form and decoration, is also large. Qasr al-Brad is likely, therefore, to have commanded a very great symbolic presence on the landscape, proportionate to - and possibly owing to - the corresponding scale and importance of the settlement of Brad itself.

Furthermore, the presence of a large press, at least two cisterns and both above and below ground storage facilities indicates a gathering and production of resources beyond the likely size of its permanent population. If Callot's identification of commercial facilities within Brad at which exchange of agricultural produce took place is correct, the proximity and prominence of Qasr al-Brad makes a persuasive argument that the monastery took part in such exchange networks. Given this situation, it seems likely that Qasr al-Brad undertook an administrative and economic, as well as a spiritual function, within the community at large.



### 6.3 Case Study 2: Kharab Shams

The second case study is the monastery and village of Kharab Shams. Although this site is superficially similar to Qasr al-Brad in the sense that it displays evidence for a church, an enclosure wall, an accommodation building and a press, it in fact differs in a number of significant ways; it occupies a much smaller area than the previous case study, is much closer to the nearest village and appears to have a different chronological development.

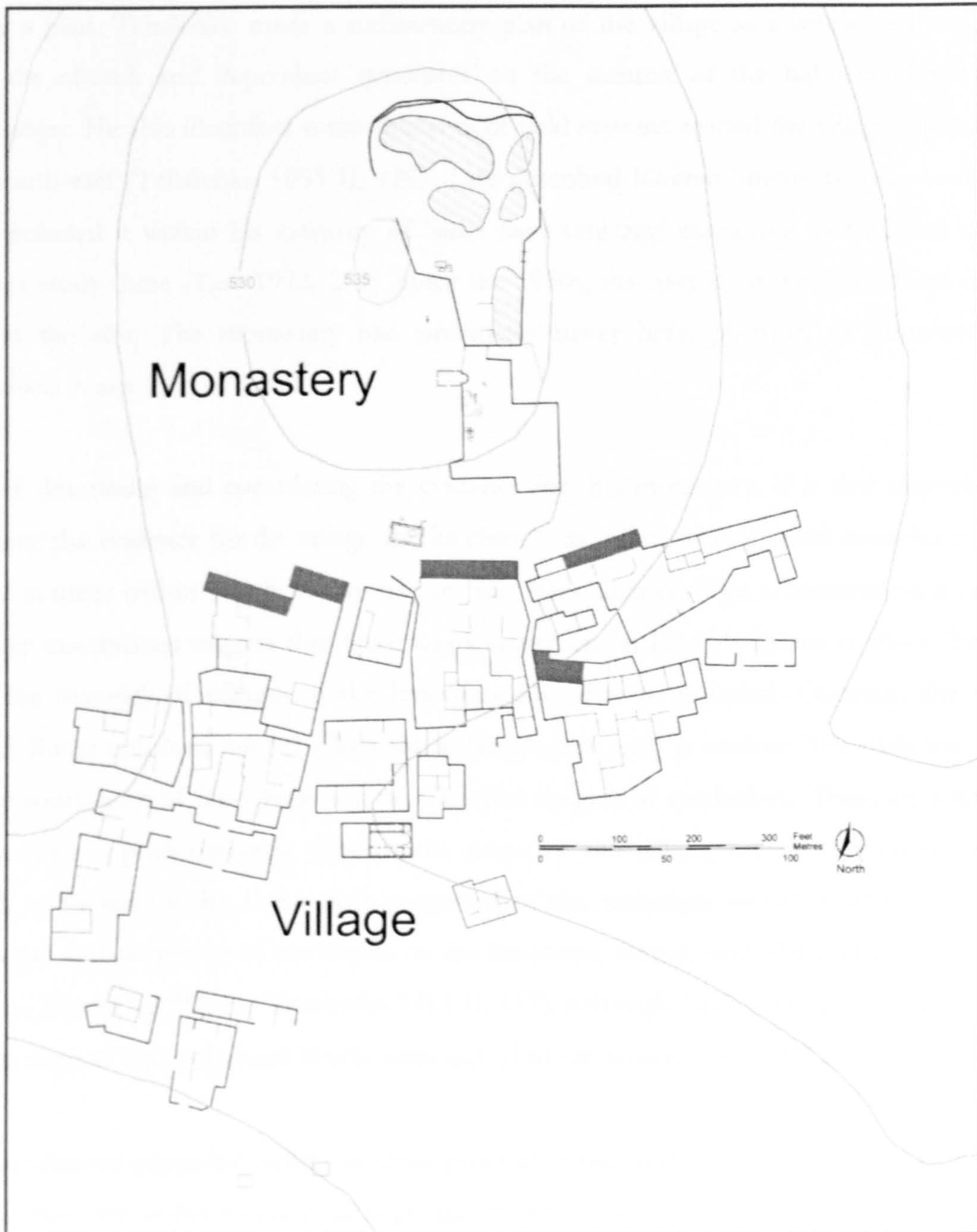


Figure 102: Plan of Kharab Shams, with the main village to the south and the monastery to the north. The structures in polygonal masonry (thus, older) are shaded grey

Kharab Shams is located towards the east of Jebel Sim'an, 9km due east of Qal'at Sim'an, 70km east-north-east of Antioch and 25km north-west of Aleppo. The village itself is situated on the northern side of a shallow valley, at an altitude of 530m. The surface area



covered by the village is typical of smaller villages of Jebel Sim'an, at around 36,800m<sup>2</sup>. Though not previously identified as a monastic site with any certainty, nevertheless a probable monastery is located just 0.15km from the centre of the village, on the summit of a hill at an altitude of 545m. The site has attracted some attention from scholars on previous occasions. Bell photographed the two churches, as well as a tomb carving (Bell 1919, 282-5). Butler drew some pre-Christian carvings on the site, and described the village church in some detail (1907). He also commented very briefly on the monastic 'chapel', of which he made a plan. Tchalenko made a rudimentary plan of the village as a whole and suggested that the church and dependent structures on the summit of the hill were 'perhaps' a monastery. He also identified some elements of field systems around the village especially to the south-east (Tchalenko 1953 II, 129). Tate described Kharab Shams as a monastic site, and included it within his category of 'situé dans une agglomération', but carried out no further study there (Tate 1992, 339). Since the 1950s, no significant work has been carried out at the site. The monastery had previously never been planned, or examined and described in any kind of detail.

Before describing and considering the evidence for this monastery, it is first important to examine the evidence for the village and its church, in order to understand something of the social context within which the monastery was later situated. The aforementioned second century inscriptions suggest that there was a settlement at Kharab Shams at about the time that the majority of villages in the limestone massif were founded. Certainly, the reliefs which Butler recorded are pre-Christian, although how early is unclear. The rock-cut tombs to the south-west of the village bear no Christian insignia or symbolism. There are a number of structures, predominantly towards the north of the village, which are constructed of small, polygonal blocks. It has been suggested of this technique elsewhere that it was used from the earliest period of settlement in the limestone massif, until the middle of the fifth century (Butler 1909, 157; Tchalenko 1953 II, 177), although Tate more recently has refined this to suggest that polygonal blocks went out of use in around 380 (1992, 22).

The settlement expanded rapidly at some point after the second century, as most of the rest of the masonry of the village is of large, quadrated blocks, and has been cut and assembled in a similar fashion. This expansion may have been contemporary with the more general increase in building activity across the region from 330 to 550, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Tate 1992, 167-171).





Figure 103: Kharab Shams: the village church on the right and the monastic church on top of the hill

An important indicator of this expansion is the village church. Indeed, it is this structure which has received the majority of attention from scholars thus far, partly because it is a high status Christian structure, and partly because it is well preserved. The church is of ashlar construction, and is a basilica in plan, with a long, central nave and two lateral aisles. Butler was the first to suggest a date for this church, believing the window frames, constructed from a single block of stone, to be 'very early', and thus analogous to the church at Fafertin, dated by inscription to AD 372, 6km to the south-east (1920, 323). Tchalenko suggested that this church was in fact rebuilt in the fifth century, a suggestion corroborated by the abrupt finish of the easternmost window on the southern façade (1953 II, 129; Hadjar 2003, 110). Burns suggests that the church can be compared on stylistic grounds to the late fifth century church at Mshabbak, 11km away to the south-east (1999, 141).

The church is certainly of two major phases. However the *stratigraphic* evidence for the difference between the two sets of clerestory windows does not make sense. They seem to be both of the same phase, or at the very least we cannot tell which was earlier and which later. Thus, the assumption that the five window clerestory is necessarily earlier than the 11 window clerestory because the former is more 'primitive' cannot be verified. The north and south aisle outer walls have both been added later, but the central aisle pillars are consistent within themselves, and suggest that the central nave of the church was built at one time. The



outer aisles were also built during this first phase, but have been either rebuilt, or more likely have been completed at a later stage. The most likely outcome of this evidence seems to suggest that the church was begun in the late fourth century and left unfinished, perhaps due to problems of resources. It was then completed a century or so later.



*Figure 104: Kharab Shams church showing added south aisle (scale: 1 m)*

The village as a whole then seems to have been first constructed in major terms in the second century, began to expand at some point during the fourth century, and then expanded again in the late fifth century. Now that a broad backdrop has been established, how does the monastic site fit into this context?

The complex constructed on the summit of the hill, just 150m north of the village church, was almost certainly a monastery, though no previous authors have been confident enough to regard it unequivocally as such. The site consists of a small, simple, though well constructed church, a further building 10m to the north-east, two small fruit presses, two cisterns, a large quern stone, a single grave, and what appears to be a small threshing floor. The church is markedly different from the village church in terms of external appearance, internal use of space and decorative motifs. It consists of a small, rectangular structure with a projecting apse at the east end. It has, unusually, three entrances: one in the middle of the



west wall, one in the middle of the south, and one to the north-east. The church is constructed of well-hewn, quadrated masonry blocks which form a smooth finish. These stones have clearly been quarried from the immediately available bedrock, as revealed by cuts made visible by a recent robber trench to the north. The east end contains a curved apse and a half dome roof, with a small, arched window. This window displays evidence for a grill having been in place. Either side of the apse are aumbries. The surrounds for each of these are simply decorated. To the south-west of the nave some robbing has revealed a rock-cut grave beneath the level of the church floor.

The simplicity of the church is reminiscent of Qasr al-Brad, though it is possible that this church is in fact a remodelled version of an earlier structure, since the banded decoration either side of the apse on the inside seems somehow interrupted. It may have been the case that a previous structure occupied this hilltop, and that a large amount of the masonry used in the church derived from such a structure. However, there is no further evidence to suggest this, and it is raised here only as a slight possibility.



*Figure 105: East end of monastic church, with possible reuse of masonry shown in the aumbries to left and right*

There is no clear dating evidence, as no inscription exists, but Butler comments that 'the excellent construction and the profiles of the mouldings of this building would seem to represent work of the sixth century' (1920, 323). Tate concurs with this stylistic dating, and also assigns it to the sixth century on the grounds that its builders used simple orthogonal



blocks, and the decoration consists of bold banding, apparently a trait confined to the period 500 to 550 (1992, 157-159, 336).



*Figure 106: Kharab Shams monastic church from the north-east*

A further structure stands 20m to the north-east of the church. It is also difficult to date, as no inscriptions have ever been recorded. Indeed, all previous writers on Kharab Shams have apparently ignored the existence of this building altogether. Yet its plan is reasonably clear, suggesting a single storey building (on the basis of the quantity of disarranged stone and the width of the ground floor walls) which developed from a simple rectangular suite of two rooms to become a more complex five-roomed building. Its construction is simple, of small, poorly-shaped masonry blocks, and neither this factor nor its plan suggest that it may have belonged to a pre-Christian temple complex. Furthermore, a pre-monastery domestic structure seems unlikely, given that all other secular accommodation is at the foot of the hill. Though simple, the style of construction does not seem to suggest later reuse of the site. In terms of the spatial arrangement of the site as a whole, the two main entrances to the building open to the south and face the church directly, suggesting a linkage of use. Given its plan, position and probable date, it would seem likely, therefore, that this structure was built and used as domestic accommodation as part of the monastic complex, and that this structure developed through time.



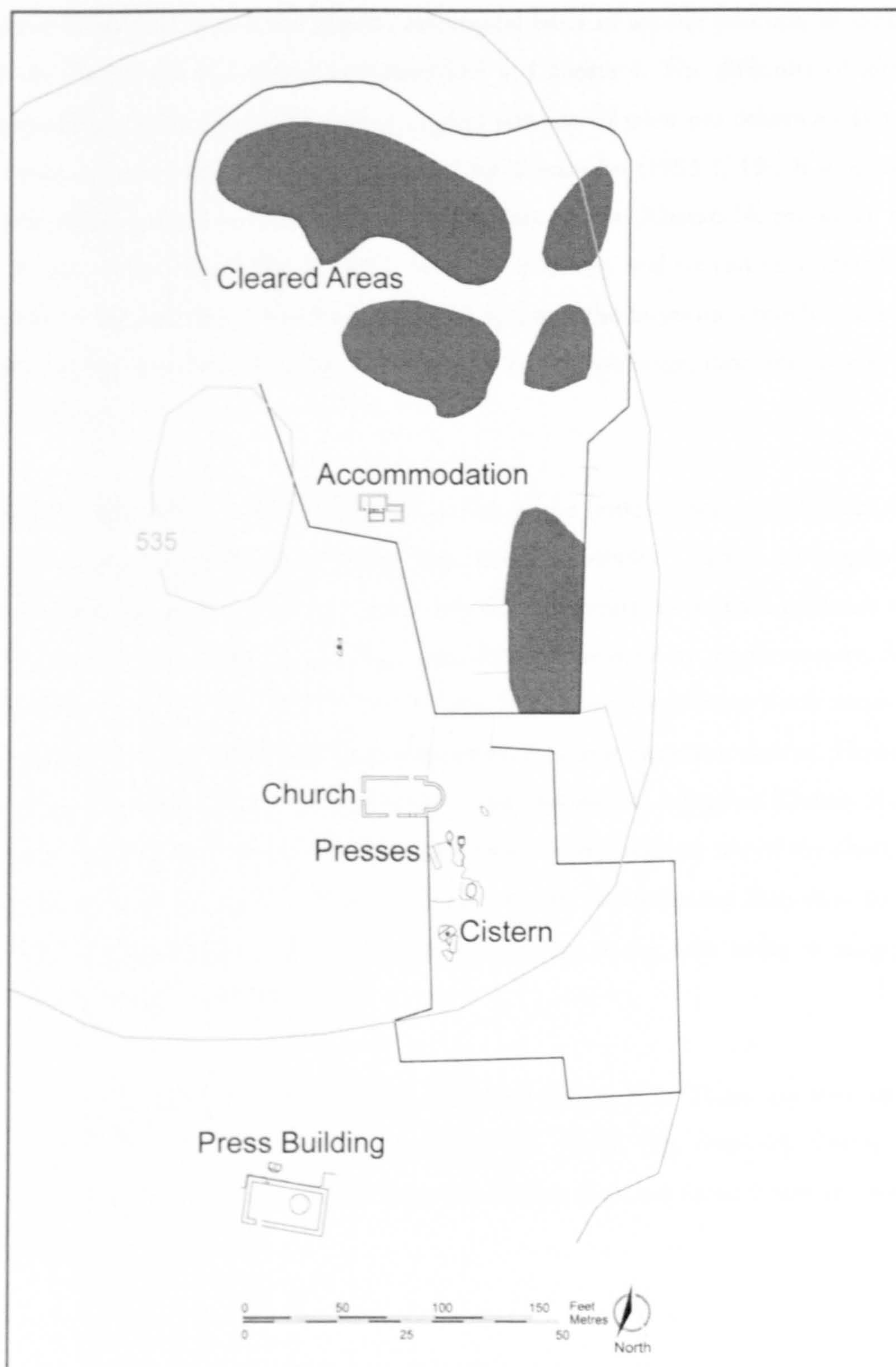


Figure 107: Plan of the monastic site, showing a probable accommodation building to the north

The small size of this building raises the possibility that accommodation for the monastic community may also have been elsewhere. Kharab Shams may have represented a semi-*laura* institution, with church, limited accommodation and other facilities assembled in a central place, and more isolated accommodation dispersed more distantly. The exact position of dispersed and possibly temporary monastic dwellings is, by definition, difficult to pinpoint. They may have been built of insubstantial, degradable material. Flimsy, poorly built housing



may have fitted well within the general ideological basis of ascetic practice, as outlined so vividly by Theodoret of Cyrrhus and described in Chapter 4. The difficulty of identifying accommodation areas within the archaeological remains of what are otherwise assumed to have been monastic sites has been discussed by Tchalenko (1953 I, 19). It is conceivable then that additional accommodation was used at sites such as Kharab Shams which we have little chance of detecting archaeologically with any certainty, and we can only speculate as to its nature or whereabouts. However, given the fact that the monastic church is assumed to be sixth century in date, it may have been that at such a late stage, itinerant, ascetic practice was in decline.

In addition, beyond the summit of the hill, c.55m to the north of the monastic church, four irregularly shaped areas of ground have been cleared of stones. There is no suggestion that such clearance took place in order to make way for a structure, as no such evidence exists. It may be then that such areas represent an agricultural zone used by the monastery. A similar cleared area is present immediately east of the five-roomed structure. Such zones are, of course, difficult to date, and *could* represent relatively recent clearance activity. However, no other areas of a similar character are present in the vicinity, the village of Kharab Shams has never been reoccupied since its abandonment (besides brief military use of the church in the tenth century), and the modern field systems are mostly located some 2km away to the east and south-east. Certainly, none of the modern activity in the area today is suggestive of anything other than shepherding.

Two presses were observed very close to the monastic church. These are very small, and were probably used for domestic consumption (see figure 108, overleaf). Furthermore, a quern stone and what appears to have been a threshing floor are located east and south-east of the church.





*Figure 108: One of the small 'domestic' presses located close to the monastic church*

This evidence, along with two cisterns and associated small, rock-cut water channels, combines to suggest domestic activity and the careful storage and control of resources within the area of the monastery.

The complex of which these features form a part is bounded by an enclosure wall. This wall – if it is contemporary with the church and other buildings which it encloses – was probably never substantial, being just 0.4m thick and standing now to just 1m in height.



*Figure 109: The flimsy enclosure wall which surrounds the monastic site*



However, insubstantial though it is, it seems to delineate an area of land around 700m<sup>2</sup>. The delineation of space in this way appears nominal and symbolic, rather than genuinely defensive or agriculturally functional. The enclosure wall may have been used to control the flow of people and resources, but seems too insubstantial to have done so in any strict sense. A greater priority may have been that the wall, as it stands, assigns a clear space to the monastery, and divides it from the secular space of the village.

Earlier commentators have been reluctant to assign monastic status to this hilltop complex, probably on the grounds that it is not as large and finely constructed as such monasteries as Qasr al-Brad, Dayr Turmanin, Sarjibla (south) and others. In this sense, it does not conform to expectations of what a monastic site should be, even though there has been, thus far, very little discussion of what forms and definitions monasteries took in this area in the late Roman period (as argued in Chapter 4). Furthermore, the site is not identified in any of the 'Four Letters' signed and sent by Monophysite monastic institutions to Constantinople between 565 and 567. However, it is a clearly delineated area, with its own church, accommodation and some attempt at subsistence in the form of cisterns and presses and thus conforms to the definition of late antique monastic practice for this region as outlined in Chapter 4. Furthermore, a grave with a slab similar to those found at other (more securely identifiable) monastic sites, is present (such as Qasr al-Brad and Sarjibla [S]). If the overall population of the village at its height, based on the number of housing blocks present, can be estimated at no more than thirty to forty households, one wonders why a further church exists if not for specifically monastic use. Peña et al speculate that multiple churches within villages suggests the existence of multiple sects, like Monophysite and Chalcedonian (1987, 89). This belief probably reveals more about the authors' interdenominational intentions for the present day than the harsh realities of sixth century religious tensions, and it seems very unlikely given the small size of the village that two separate communities could have existed. Furthermore, this church is simply built, and similar in form to other examples at more securely identifiable monasteries such as Dayruna, Qasr al-Brad, Sarjibla (S) and elsewhere.

The problem of the absence of Kharab Shams from the 'Four Letters' does not preclude its identification as a monastery. Of the 117 monastic sites which Tchalenko identified throughout the Limestone Massif, at least seventy-three could not be directly equated with a place name in the 'Four Letters', and only seven have been convincingly 'matched' to a site on the ground. The modern name of Kharab Shams almost certainly does not relate to an ancient form, since it derives from the Arabic *kharab* (plural of *khirba*, 'ruin') and *shams* ('sun'). Furthermore, there are various reasons why the site may not have been included in



the 'Four Letters' in any case. It may have been constructed too late, for example, or have been excluded for more specifically political reasons. The conclusion reached here, therefore, is that the hilltop complex at Kharab Shams should certainly be regarded as a monastic site.

Having proposed that Kharab Shams was indeed a monastery, and described some of its functional aspects, how should its relationship with the nearby settlement be viewed? A crucial element in this discussion is a building located precisely between the monastery and the village. It stands on the lower slope of the hill, and is a large rectangular structure of 30 x 12m.

The building appears to be a press, as its ground floor contains no partitions, and it has a sunken depression in the middle which probably represents a pressing floor. A channel leads from here into a rock-cut vat outside the building to the north. On top of this vat is a cut stone, which would seem to be the fitting for a narrow screw press. There is at least one other press in the village of Kharab Shams, a subterranean complex which is probably an earlier construction given that it lies immediately south-west of a structure of polygonal masonry. However, this complex is somewhat smaller than the aforementioned press building. There are two particularly interesting aspects to this building which suggest that it is significant. The first factor is that it is of two storeys. While many of the structures of Kharab Shams were also of two storeys, with the upper floor for domestic accommodation, in the case of this building it seems to represent a sizeable storage facility, plus providing access to maintain the wooden press mechanism. There is no visible evidence for partitions on the second floor, and no steps leading from the ground floor. A large doorway on the south side of the structure connects with the outside, probably via a ladder, and was probably for the loading of goods. Yet this is not just a simple structure for the pressing of olives on the ground floor, and storage of agricultural produce above, because there is access directly to the upper floor of the building via an opening on its north-east corner, at the same level as the bedrock. This would have provided easy access from the monastery side of the building. A second point is that the position of this building is significant. The size of the blocks used would suggest a fairly late structure, yet it is squeezed in between buildings of earlier, polygonal masonry, and the monastic complex. If it was meant to take advantage of the sloping bedrock of the hillside in purely functional terms, other positions on the hillside present easier access and more abundant space. Yet it is clearly reachable, and indeed was apparently accessed, *directly* from the monastic complex. Furthermore, it is a very large facility, with the potential to produce and store large amounts of produce, being much larger



in terms of surface area than either of the two presses at Dayr Dehes (although this is difficult to be sure of as what remains of the press bed lies beneath rubble). If the monastic accommodation housed a maximum of five to seven people, clearly such a facility is intended for the creation and management of a large surplus.



*Figure 110: Kharab Shams press building from the south*

Whether this management was undertaken directly by the monastery is not certain. The enclosure wall which surrounds part of the monastery does not survive well enough in this part of the site to ascertain whether the press building was within or without the monastic complex. Indeed, the wall may never have been complete, as it was apparently a nominal feature anyway. Yet the location of the building, and its apparently deliberate juxtaposition between the village and the monastery, suggests it may have been intended to be used as a direct part of the monastery's affairs. The cleared areas within the monastic complex are too small to have provided sufficient olives for the very large press. It may have been the case, therefore, that the monastery was directly involved in the economic affairs of the village as a whole, by building a facility which was intended to press olives from a much wider area. Provision for, and administration of, this process would surely have been a major undertaking, necessitating involvement in production at all stages.





*Figure 111: Access to the second storey of the press building from the monastic site*

Evidence for economic management is not the only way in which the monastery is likely to have played a role in the village life of Kharab Shams. The monastic complex could not be more prominently sited, and certainly does not represent a desire to withdraw, in spatial and social terms, from secular society. There are many more opportune spaces within the immediate area which have not been cleared of stones, and were thus presumably not cultivated. Such spaces, especially apparent to the west and north of the hilltop, could have been used had separation from society been the primary objective. Yet it clearly was not.

The monastic complex maintains strong visual contact and communication with the village below. This is especially evident throughout the southern area of the enclosure, where all of the surviving facilities are located. This visibility is noticeably mutual, with the monastic church forming a striking edifice on the summit of the hill, clearly visible from the village, and all of the surrounding areas.





*Figure 112: View from the monastic church down into the village*



*Figure 113: View from the centre of the village towards the monastic site on the hill above*



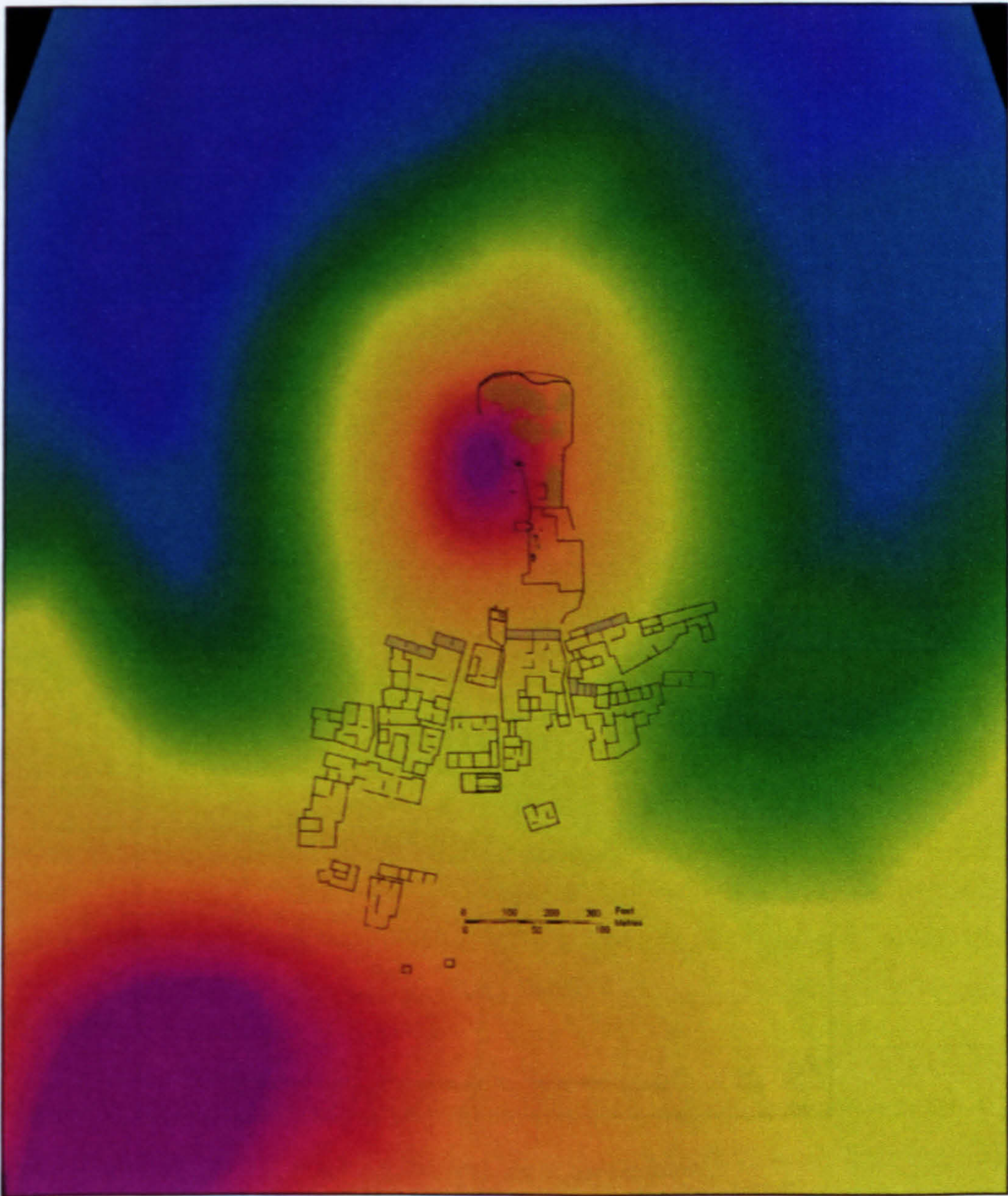
If Tchalenko's description of a routeway running through the village is correct, then this would also have formed mutual visibility with the monastery also. Furthermore, the monastery is easily reached from the village by a pathway which extends directly south of the monastic church over the bedrock, then divides either south-west or south-east into the village. Indeed, the south-west route is provided with rock-cut steps.



*Figure 114: Rock-cut steps facilitating access between monastery and village*

There is a clear difference between the juxtaposition of village and monastery at Kharab Shams and the situation at Qasr al-Brad, where there are open fields, with no settlement evidence, between town and monastery. There is a tension created at Kharab Shams therefore by the opposing factors of separation (evidenced by the nominal enclosure wall and topographic distinction), yet clear accessibility (evidenced by visual, transport and presumably aural contact). It is clear that this siting was deliberate and significant. The creation of a tension between accessibility and separation fits well with the view that sacred space could be deliberately blurred, to form an impression of ever-present holiness, as outlined in Chapter 2. Omnipresent sacredness reinforces an impression of duty and unity to a central focus. The *physical* position of the Kharab Shams complex within the landscape thus contributed directly to its *ideological* position.





*Figure 115: Digital Elevation Model of Kharab Shams showing the topographic position of the monastery above, and the village below (pink represents the highest point, blue the lowest; original in colour)*

### 6.4 Case study 3: Burj Jalahah

The third case study presented here is that of Burj Jalahah. Burj, as referred to in the glossary, means 'tower' in modern Arabic usage. This site is located on the lower slopes of the Jebel Barisha, on the southern side of the Plain of Sarmada, 49km from Antioch and 40km from Aleppo.



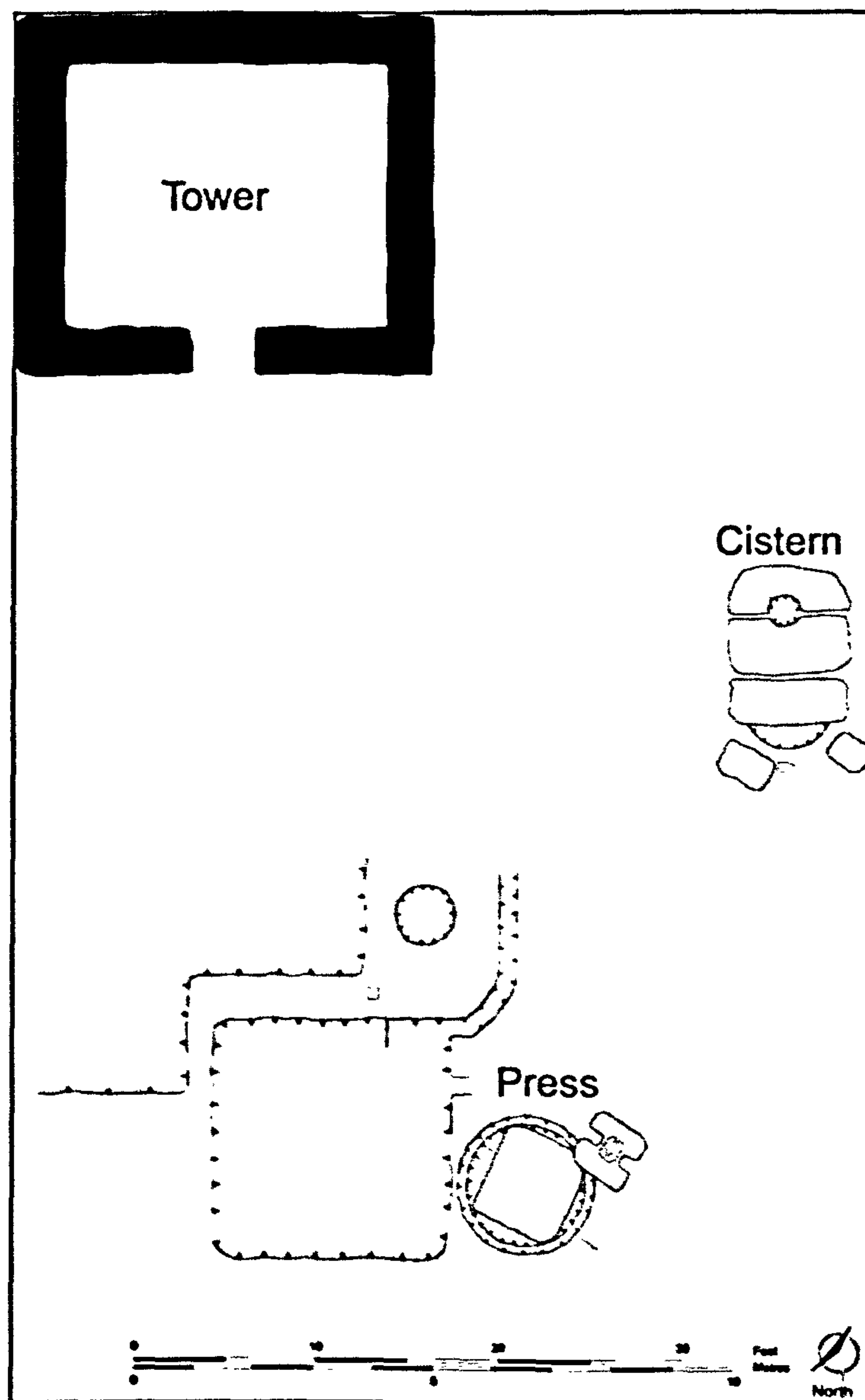


Figure 116: Plan of the site of Burj Jalahah

Previous studies of this site have been scant indeed. The only published description of Burj Jalahah consists of 86 words by Peña et al, following their survey of the Jebel Barisha in the early 1980s (although they use the name Burj Abdullah, it is undoubtedly the same site, and the members of the modern local community whom I spoke to unanimously called it Burj Jalahah; *contra* Peña et al 1987, 179). No plan or further description appears to have been carried out before now, in spite of the excellent state of preservation of the site, and the variety of the features described below. In part, this situation is symptomatic of the history of scholarly enquiry as outlined in Chapter 1, monastic sites of this area being generally defined with the pre-conception of large, coenobitic institutions, thereby conforming to expectations of the successful flowering of Syrian Christian society in Late Antiquity. Chapter 5 argued that smaller sites in fact form an important part of the corpus of monastic sites.

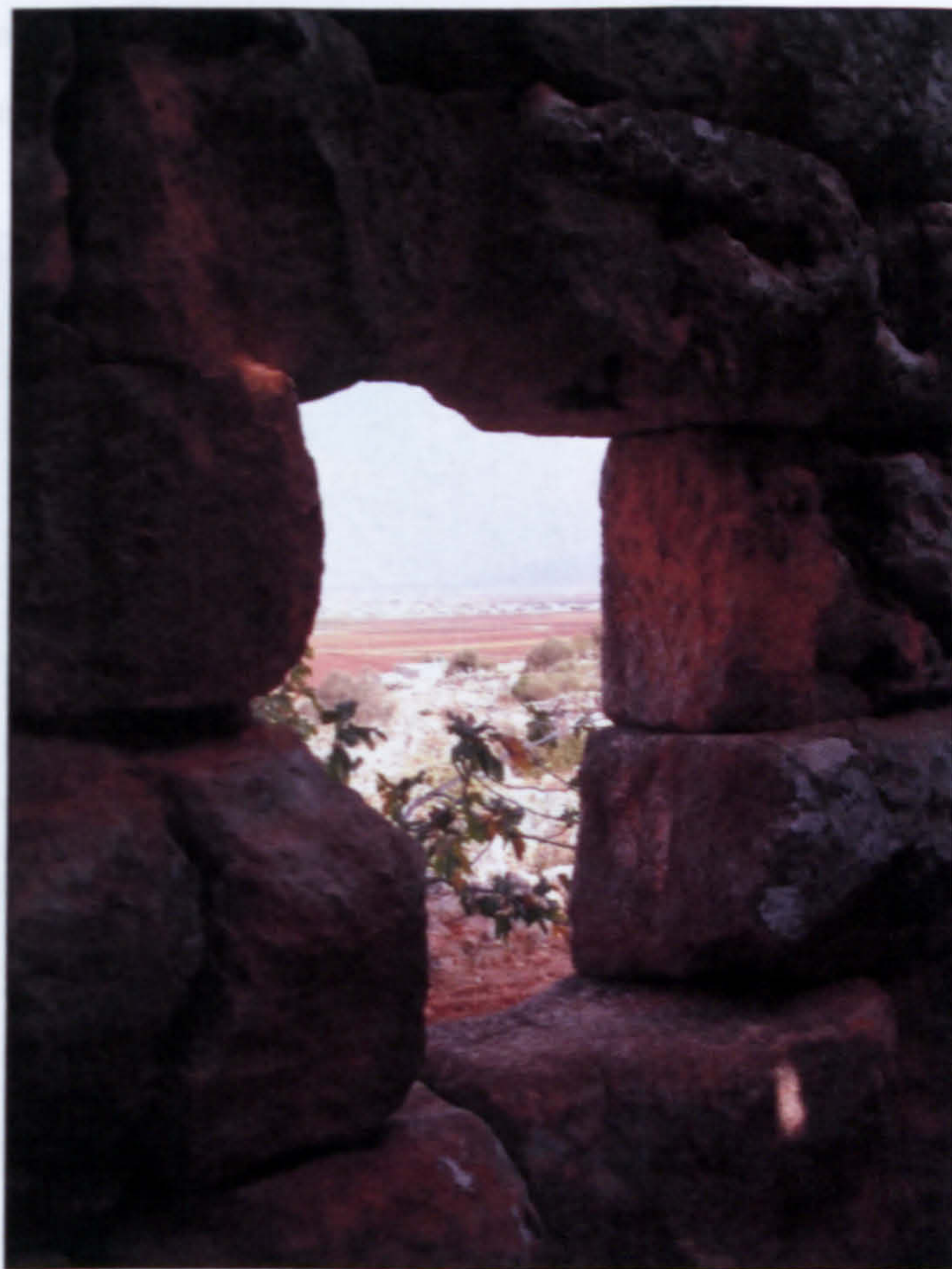




*Figure 117: Burj Jalahah: the tower from the south-east*

Burj Jalahah consists of a masonry tower, a press and a small cistern immediately to the south-east. The tower survives to its full height of fourteen courses (just under 8m in all), is square in plan and measures 7 x 6m. It had three storeys, the upper two of which display evidence for domestic use in the form of aumbries and windows. The ground floor has no aumbries. The tower is entered through a door to the south and has a machicolation feature extending from the uppermost storey at the north-west corner. The outward appearance of the tower would seem defensive, and indeed Peña et al suggest it may have been refortified and used briefly by Renaud de Mazoir during the Crusades (1987, 179; Cahen 1940). However, this impression is in fact deceptive. If any refortification took place, it could only have taken the form of the piling of stones around the door, since the rest of the tower is undoubtedly of one stratigraphic phase. Furthermore, a large window is present on the ground floor of the north side of the tower, which is 1.06m high by 0.75m wide, and displays no evidence for bars or mullions.





*Figure 118: The large window on the ground floor of the tower of Burj Jalahah*

The machicolation feature is also deceptive, as the only aperture facing the ground has been cut later, perhaps during the twelfth century (this feature - and its probable purpose - is discussed again, below).

The tower is not primarily defensive therefore. If the upper floors were for domestic use, the ground floor was probably used for storage. This idea is reinforced by a press basin just 10m south-east of the door of the tower. This basin seems very large if it served exclusively for the residents of the tower (which can have been no more than two). It measures 4 by 4m, and is 0.7m deep, with a channel leading to an accompanying rock-cut vat. To the east of the basin stands a grinding stone and further east stands a fitting for a wooden screw, very similar to that analysed by Biscop at Dayr Dehes (1997, plate 61). This would seem to be a fairly sophisticated screw press therefore, probably standing open on four sides but with a covered roof, similar to the example at Dayr Mishmish (Callot 1984, plate 105). The full Burj Jalahah pivot length for the pressing arm would be 6.8m, thus 20% larger than the eastern press at Dayr Dehes. If a very approximate comparison is made then using Biscop's estimate of 20,000l of oil from the double press there, then around 12,000l could have been



pressed at Burj Jalahah. Even if two individuals lived in the tower year round, this would represent a surplus of around 97%, or 93% if pressing only occurred bi-annually.



*Figure 119: Burj Jalahah: press with the tower behind. The fitting for the screw of the press is visible to the right of the picture*

A further series of features, c.100m further up the hill to the south, are also of interest here. Peña et al refer to this area as Dayr Burj Abdallah (in fact Dayr Burj Jalahah). These consist of a very large cistern, further production facilities and two accompanying structures. The cistern is 4m deep and 5 by 6.5m in plan, with a well constructed roof of long stone slabs supported by four pillars.





*Figure 120: The interior of the cistern at Dayr Burj Jalahab, showing the plastered walls and finely carved pillars*

There is evidence for a lime plaster lining within the cistern. The two associated structures are difficult to interpret as they are obscured by large amounts of disarranged masonry. However, they seem to represent two rectangular structures, around 80m and 60m in area. Ceramic roof tile is present around both buildings. Peña et al interpret these remains very clearly as a 'complexe monastique', but we must be cautious with their interpretation (1987, 181). Of particular concern is the dating of this complex, since no inscriptions are present, no ceramics have ever been collected and studied and the simple architectural form leaves little for us to interpret on stylistic grounds. In terms of construction, they consist of double rows of small, drystone blocks with a rubble infill, a technique which Tate suggests dates from 220 to 390 (1992). These buildings could, therefore, be much earlier, or have been reused. They are far from conclusively associated with the tower 100m to the north then, and should not automatically be regarded as monastic. If they are, then the site as a whole must be regarded as a large, genuinely production-centred monastic site, with sufficient infrastructure to produce large amounts of surplus. However, if Dayr Burj Jalahab is not monastic, it seems likely that the large cistern, at the very least, would have been reused. Either way, the tower of Burj Jalahab and its associated features demonstrates the active participation of such sites in the agricultural economy, and thus represent far more than a



location for social withdrawal and seclusion. In fact, by examining the broader spatial context of the tower, it can be seen that seclusion was hardly a factor at all.

The previous chapter discussed the fact that Burj Jalahah forms part of a large group of similar tower sites distributed in a tight group within a 13.4km<sup>2</sup> triangle from Sarfud in the north to Sirmada in the east and Mi'az in the south. Twelve sites are known within this area. They appear similar in architectural form, and at least three are known to bear Christian symbolism (the others have not been checked). On the basis of the above discussion regarding the monastic status of Burj Jalahah, it is assumed that the majority - if not all - are monastery sites. The density of this distribution is interesting as it would imply that tower sites are well dispersed throughout the field system, and thus a prominent presence within the agricultural regime.

Tower site	Distance to nearest neighbour (km)
Aranta	0.2
Burj Jaber	0.6
Burj Jamur	0.3
Burj Jalahah	0.4
Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi	0.4
Burj Nahas	0.9
Burj Nasr	0.4
Burj Nimra	1.4
Burj Sarakhta	0.2
Burj Suwayd A	0.4
Burj Suwayd B	0.2
Burj Yahya	0.3
Dayr Sakhur	0.3

*Table 34: Tower sites around Burj Jalahah and distance to nearest neighbour*

The intervisibility of such sites is also striking, and all display features which positively enable this to take place. Although superficially defensive, all the examples which were looked at large windows somewhere in their external walls, often on multiple sides. Of course, these windows would also provide light for those inside. However, at Burj Jalahah, what would at first glance appear to be a machicolation feature is in fact arguably more suited to surveillance. The aperture cut into its base seems to be a later feature and this would also disqualify Peña et al's suggestion (1987, 179) that such features are latrines, a fact



also denied by the presence of similar features over doorways (as at Dayr Qita and Burj al-Mu'allaq, for example). The feature at Burj Jalahah, through its purpose-built windows, affords extensive views across the fields towards Burj Nasr and Burj Mahdum al-Sharqi to the west and Burj Jaber to the east.



*Figure 121: Burj Jalahah, looking across the plain of Sirmada to the north*

It is also noteworthy that this density of monastic tower sites occurs in one of the most agriculturally viable areas of the limestone massif. Recognition of this may take us beyond explanations of such a density that simply rely on strength of Christian belief, either within the monastic communities themselves, or within those who now observe their archaeological legacy:

*'Aux alentours de Me'ez régnait une vie monastique très fervente ainsi qu'en témoignent les monastères et les ermitages qui s'élèvent dans la plaine aussi bien que sur les hauteurs.'* (Peña et al 1987 171)

None of these tower sites, with the possible exception of the tiny example at Burj Suwayd A, has a church directly associated with them. As argued in Chapter 5, this does not disqualify their identification as monastic sites, but it does prompt the question of how their inhabitants may have taken communion. Given the similarity, proximity and intervisibility of the tower sites in this group, it may be that they represent a network of smaller units



attached to a central laura institution. The presence of laura monasticism, though given much attention in Palestine (such as Hirschfeld 1992), has been mostly ignored for north-west Syria. Yet this possibility seems likely here on Jebel Barisha. An ambiguous question, however, is precisely where a central monastic church may have been. In spatial terms, Qal'at Sarmada would seem a likely candidate, given that it stands high on top of a promontory at the north of the group, roughly in the middle in east-west terms. Survey work on this site has been scant. The site has been heavily remodelled in the medieval period, but the majority of the outline of a church is evident, bearing carved decoration typical of the early sixth century. Furthermore, though the layout has changed, there is sufficient reused stone to suggest a number of subsidiary buildings to the church. Peña et al consider that this site equates to 'Beth Mar Stepn of Srmd' of the Four Monophysite Letters of 565-7, though this is far from certain (1987, 179). Other possibilities among the known monastic sites could be Kafr Daryan to the west, or Brayj to the north-east, though these both seem rather far away. None of the tower sites themselves, with the possible exceptions of Burj Nimra and Dayr Sakhur, display any evidence for larger, communal buildings. It could be the case, then, that this group of sites represents a single community of dispersed sites, linked by their use of - and perhaps management by - a central institution at Qal'at Sarmada.

An examination of the broader setting of Burj Jalahah suggests not only that it was linked, along with six others, to a larger communal centre, but that such a spatial arrangement is typical of the whole region. Chapter 5 discussed this distribution, and suggested that three sites may have acted as centres for various, smaller, sites which often have a single, free-standing tower as part of their construction.

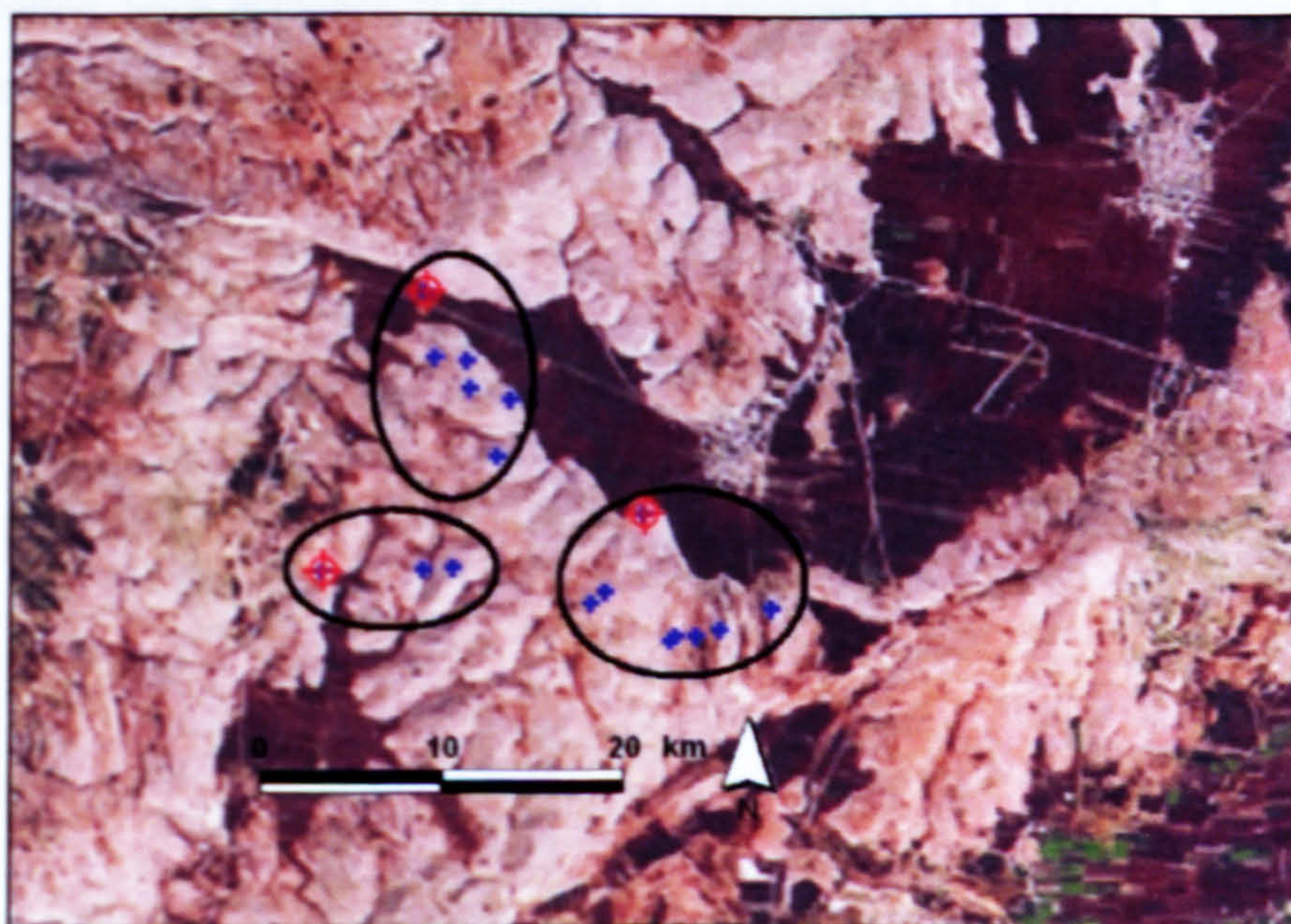


Figure 122: Distribution map of the Group B, Type 3 sites shown in Chapter 5. The red circles denote likely communal centres



The previous chapter discussed the interpretation of such towers, and concluded that although in other areas of Syria their role is ambiguous, for the limestone massif, unless compelling evidence to the contrary existed, they can reasonably be interpreted as housing monastic activity. None of these towers are more than 2.1km from a secular settlement, but it could be suggested that the network of which they form a part is in fact less concerned with placing itself close to specific villages, but rather with establishing zones under specifically monastic control. Referring once again back to the analyses of the previous chapter, monastic zones of this kind are not exclusive to the region around Burj Jalahah (which approximately corresponds to Group B), but is also evident further south in Group C.

An additional difference can be suggested through further analysis of the broader context of Burj Jalahah using Corona satellite imagery of the late 1960s. This would appear to show (though verification on the ground is still required), that Burj Jalahah is located within a series of rectilinear field systems extending from the edge of the plain of Sirmada and further south. Interestingly, the site stands on the very edge of one of the fields, rather than in the middle, perhaps suggesting either that it respected the integrity of the agricultural infrastructure, or that it was actually established at the same time as part of a reorganisation of the fields in this area. It is possible that these field boundaries are in fact evidence of earlier cadastration, though typically such divisions tend to divide the landscape into larger, more regular units. It seems more likely that the rectilinear fields shown on the Corona image could be interpreted as showing that not only was Burj Jalahah established as part of a broader network of small, monastic units, but that it formed an active part of a new agricultural regime. Such evidence, if it could be confirmed on the ground, would suggest a clear difference in intent to either Qasr al-Brad or Kharab Shams.





Figure 123: A Corona satellite image showing the position of Burj Jalahah (centre) and Qal'at Sirmada (top)

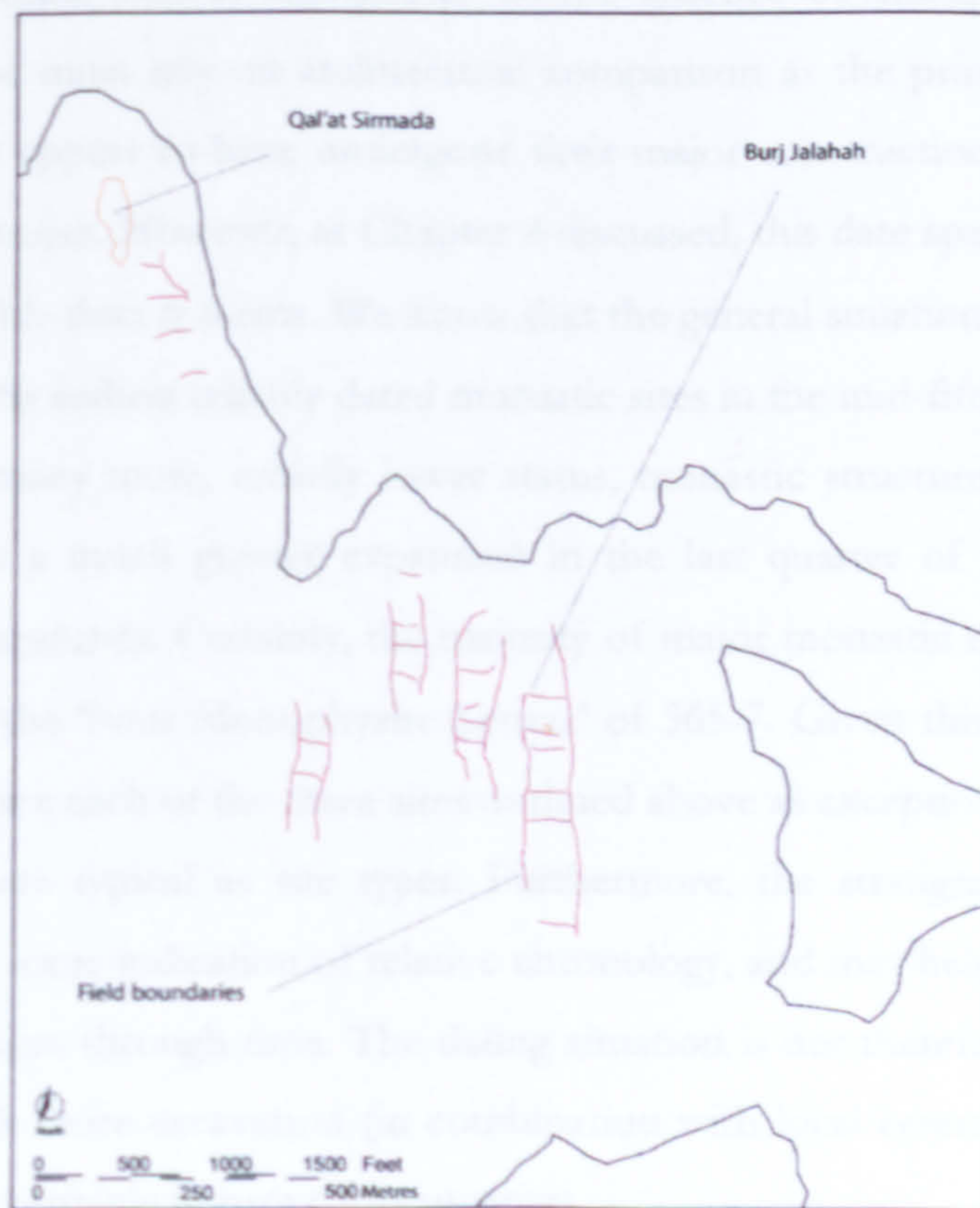


Figure 124: An interpretation plot of the Corona satellite image, showing the position of field boundaries (scale and north arrow are approximate only; original in colour)



## 6.5 Discussion: monasticism and ideological expression in the landscape

The three case studies presented above are not absolutely definitive as representative examples, since a considerable degree of variation exists within each of the three broad types of monastic site identified. The coenobitic institution at Qasr al-Brad, for example, differs in some respects from others like Dayr Turmanin, Sarjibla (south) or Sitt al-Rum. The site of Kharab Shams is more difficult to find direct parallels with, since sites of this size seem to vary in layout more often than the larger sites, perhaps suggesting that they represent *ad hoc* sites adapted to specific situations. Nevertheless, it seems similar in some ways to sites such as Dayruna, (though here the immediate juxtaposition of a village is less marked), or 'adapted' collegiate churches like Dar Qita or Baqirha (though at these the site morphology is somewhat different). The small, individual site of Burj Jalahah is one of a group of very similar sites within its immediate area, though monastic towers across the region vary in scale and placement. Nonetheless, these three case studies have been selected because they do, in some ways, seem to be examples of the two most ambiguous yet common types of site identified by the larger-scale analysis of Chapter 5, those of 'coenobitic' (Type 1) and those of 'dispersed' (Type 3) layout. The detailed evidence presented in each case has added to what have previously been very brief descriptions and ambiguous plans.

The chronology of these sites is ambiguous. In the absence of inscriptions and reliable excavation results, we must rely on architectural comparison as the primary guide. In this regard, all three sites appear to have undergone their major construction phase during the late fifth or sixth centuries. However, as Chapter 4 discussed, this date span - though vague - is perhaps more reliable than it seems. We know that the general situation in this region was of an emergence of the earliest reliably dated monastic sites in the mid-fifth century, but that there were perhaps many more, initially lower status, monastic structures emerging earlier than this. There was a much greater expansion in the last quarter of the fifth and first quarter of the sixth centuries. Certainly, the majority of major monastic institutions were in place by the time of the 'Four Monophysite Letters' of 565-7. Given this overall picture, it would be difficult to see each of the three sites outlined above as exceptional to the norm, as in many ways they are typical as site types. Furthermore, the stratigraphic observations described above give some indication of relative chronology, and may help in understanding the development of sites through time. The dating situation is not therefore as desperate as it may appear, though more excavation (in combination with local ceramic typologies) and surface survey would certainly improve this situation.



The following points can be emphasised of each of the three sites discussed in this chapter. Large institutions like Qasr al-Brad were not necessarily founded *de novo*, and may have had a previous monastic component as a basis. Once it developed, this site seems to have done so not in a series of stages, but as one event. This is also largely the case at Sarjibla (south), for example. It also has a partial pilgrimage component, evident in the size of the accommodation and also the presence of a single sarcophagus. Indeed, at Sarjibla the east end of the church seems to have been modified to emphasise the importance of this grave. The churches at sites like Qasr al-Brad are often fairly large, but not elaborately adorned. At such sites, production facilities large enough to generate surplus – though perhaps not a very great surplus given the size of the monastic community – were a part of the monastic complex. These sites were laid out in order to occupy a large amount of space yet in a carefully enclosed, self-contained fashion, dominating a large portion of the landscape, to ensure visibility and presence for their communities.

At sites such as Kharab Shams, scale is less of a factor. The church is smaller than at Qasr al-Brad, though similarly unadorned. Pilgrimage would appear not to have been a factor, however, as although graves are present, none of them are prominently positioned or housed. On-site accommodation is also much smaller, and may have gone hand-in-hand with more dispersed, temporary and now archaeologically invisible forms. In spite of this smaller scale, production is still a feature of the complex at Kharab Shams. This is certainly the case in domestic terms, but may well also be the case in surplus terms also, with large storage facilities and a press evident. At the comparable site of Dayruna, such features are again present. Kharab Shams also dominates the landscape in which it is situated, but less with scale and more with position. It has been deliberately placed to use the topography to provide prominence.

Finally, in sites like Burj Jalahah we have evidence for what would appear to be very small complexes indeed, but which in fact link with others to form large networks in a *laura* fashion, centred around major nearby complexes like Qal'at Sirmada. There is no church and, arguably, there are no associated buildings either. The community would have consisted of just one or two members. Tower sites like Burj Jalahah are spaced frequently and relatively evenly throughout some of the most potentially fertile areas of the limestone massif. Towers again dominate the landscape of this region, both in terms of height and also distribution. Again, production is clearly associated with the site's use, but in this case it is arguably more concerted and organised, with a whole network laid out in a way which not just interacts with, but actively dominates and controls production across a region.



There are therefore a number of apparent similarities between these three case studies. They all have either very simple churches, or none at all. This simplicity seems appropriate to the impression of poverty common in monastic ideology. All of the sites are situated in prominent positions. In spite of the clear differences in scale between each site, all three have large press facilities.

These generalisations prompt the conclusion that in some ways the role played by these three sites within secular society was similarly played out throughout the limestone massif, with each site simply differing according to scale. This role was undoubtedly spiritual, but it was also economic and more broadly ideological. Beyond this, a more nuanced picture of monastic sites is now possible, through a drawing together of some of the theoretical themes explored in Chapters 2 and 3. In particular, the varied ways in which monastic sites link with settlement in spatial terms suggests a strongly social derivation for such variation, and cannot be accounted for in spiritual, liturgical or functional terms alone. It is not merely that a general strength of religious belief or even the doctrinal upheavals of the fifth century created a surge in monastic practice, since such an explanation would not suggest reasons for the difference in layout and form evidenced in this chapter. Instead, social practice within monastic sites displays a symbiotic relationship with the space in which it takes place. Sites are laid out, but develop and enlarge in various ways as that practice changes. It is interesting to note that such changes are made necessary through a changed relationship with the secular domain: monasteries enlarge as settlements do, churches and accommodation blocks are expanded to account for increasing pilgrim traffic, storage and press facilities are added to obtain more surplus. The shaped landscapes within which these changes occur are also highly variable.

However, common themes recur. These themes centre around issues of visibility, communication and access. As Chapter 2 discussed, although landscape can be interpreted in many different ways according to the circumstances of the individual, recurring themes bind together the actors present because 'those who interact in a particular setting can become aware of each others' subjective intentions by identifying the references they make in the course of communicating' (Layton & Ucko 1999, 7). These references are structured around the sacredness of a monastic site, with the church at its centre, and are even more focused on the *martyrion* where one exists. However, the monasteries discussed in this section rarely display a stark division between such sacredness and the profane activities of the nearby settlement. Instead, the broader community are drawn into successive layers of sacredness through a constant awareness of the monastic community. As channels of



communication are regularised, saints' days and other festivals fixed and repeated, thus increasingly complex forms of social cohesion were fostered through the monastery. As Caseau points out, 'time and space were made sacred through the idea that the saints are particularly available when and where they are honored' (Caseau 2001, 43).

This increasingly complex social interaction, structured around layers of sacredness pervading beyond the bounds of the monastic sites and into the surrounding landscape is, it could be argued, directly linked with a strong economic role. This economic role is evidenced by the active participation of monastic sites in generating, administering and storing surplus. Rough estimates as to the size of monastic communities at each of the sites discussed thus far suggests that such communities could never have carried out such activities alone, and must therefore have managed substantial numbers of people and resources beyond their immediate domains, from secular society. This participation, and the powerful management position which it implies, was ensured through the careful selection and structuring of space. This structuring occurred both at the micro-level, with regard to how the internal space of monastic sites was laid out and the architectural forms selected, and also at the macro-level, in relation to the sites chosen and their relationship to pre-existing areas of secular settlement. It could be argued then that the maintenance and development of social interaction between monasteries and the broader community contributed to the ideological position of fifth and sixth century monasticism in the north-west to ensure not just an active participation within society as a whole, but also an increasingly powerful role in controlling the political terrain of that society. However, concluding the three case studies examined in this chapter cannot end here because there are also important differences between each of the sites which suggest a certain complexity to this overall picture.

## **6.6 Contrasting notions of monasticism**

In order to frame discussion of this variation, let us return to the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. First of all,

- 1. If settlements were indeed drawn into an ideological relationship which may be visible in the landscape, what form did such landscapes take?**
- 2. Did monasteries take part in production and if so, how and in what ways?**
- 3. What evidence is there for storage and re-distribution?**
- 4. Does the level of conformity (or otherwise) to all of the questions raised above suggest (see over):**



- a. That site selection for monasteries was occurring in similar ways across the region?
- b. That there is sufficient variation still to suggest a sense of process, whereby the situation was changing through time?

These questions cannot be answered in the same way for each of the case studies. First of all, Qasr al-Brad seems to have performed a dual role, being both relatively self-contained, yet certainly producing a surplus also. The production of this surplus would almost certainly have required participation by the population of Brad and perhaps other surrounding settlements, but could also have included those staying at the monastery for reasons of pilgrimage. There is some evidence for storage, implying that production was sufficient to generate a large surplus, though the size of this is difficult to estimate. Because Qasr al-Brad performed a pilgrimage role, its ideological 'draw' would have extended beyond its immediate region. However, it also would have had a clear ideological relationship locally with the population of Brad itself, since the two sites are inter-visible. The monastery is easily reached from the town in four minutes by foot, but this journey is a significant one given that it descends then rises and represents a clear division of space. The fact that Qasr al-Brad is 'lightly' enclosed implies that this division was a very deliberate one, even if it could easily have been breached. Although a form of ideological relationship is evident, a division of roles is certainly implied by the two main church complexes in the centre of Brad and the monastery at Qasr al-Brad, as the former are morphologically quite different even though they were either built or enlarged at around the same time as the monastery was constructed. It is difficult to be sure about whether such differences of 'message' could be interpreted as merely a difference of role for the population as a whole, or whether a genuine tension existed between ecclesiastical and monastic authorities (this point is discussed further in the following chapter).

At Kharab Shams, there is greater link between monastery and village, expressed both in terms of visibility and access. Communication between the two takes less than a minute, and is not only possible but actively facilitated via steps and paths. Enclosure of the monastery is yet more nominal here. Production is facilitated both on a minor scale linked to provision for the monastery, but also in major terms through the large press building situated between monastery and village. This facility would not merely have necessitated participation by the non-monastic community, but is of a size and form which indicates organisation by the monastery of surplus production through management of processing on a fairly large scale. This would seem to suggest that production was being actively organised and controlled by the monastery.



Burj Jalahah displays evidence which is different again, suggesting participation of a different kind in the agronomic infrastructure. Not only is surplus production implied through storage and a press, but the site is situated within the field system in general, and linked to the central site of Qal'at Sirmada in particular, in a way which suggests not just control over the *processing* of olive oil, but organisation of the growth and harvesting of the crops also. This level of organisation is matched by the fairly sophisticated screw press at the site and a small associated cistern, as well as the probable reuse of a large plastered cistern capable of providing large amounts of the water necessary for the pressing and subsequent cleaning process. If the approximate estimate of the press output is correct, around 93-97% surplus could have been produced by this press if around 12,000l of oil per season was produced. It is clear that Burj Jalahah and the broader network of sites within which it is situated suggests that monasticism was being developed in new areas in a way which established landscapes which were entirely monastic, and that links with secular communities though still possible were in this case not the central priority. Burj Jalahah also suggests that as well as physical expansion, the *idea* of monasticism was being developed to encompass different forms of activity.

Unfortunately, dating resolution is just not sufficient here to establish whether these three different sites represent three stages in a chronological development, or whether they are merely three different versions of the monastic idea which were all founded at the same time. In stylistic terms, using the churches at Kharab Shams and Qasr al-Brad and the tower at Burj Jalahah, all three sites would appear to be sixth century in date. However, the chronological development at each site tells a different story. Qasr al-Brad gives the impression of having been developed in a deliberate and organised fashion from an earlier core, so that a coenobitic complex developed from a site of smaller-scale eremitic practice. In this sense, Qasr al-Brad is similar to the development of Dayr Dehes, as interpreted by Biscop (1997). The chronological link between this development and that of Brad in general is difficult to establish. Kharab Shams by contrast appears to have been more opportunistic in its origins, making use of a hilltop space above the village, but developing through investment in the processing of surplus. Burj Jalahah, though similarly opportunistic in making use of the older site of Dayr Burj Jalahah, was probably laid out in a more expansive fashion along with at least six other units. It cannot yet be established with certainty that this was carried out after the establishment of the communal centre at Qal'at Sirmada, but this would also seem likely.



Previous authors have tended to regard the majority of the complexes at Kharab Shams and Qasr al-Brad as sixth century on stylistic grounds, and have not commented on Burj Jalahah at all (see above). A closer look at the incised motif and lintel styling for each site suggests some very approximate dating. At Qasr al-Brad, the only visible motif is on a lintel which would seem to be similar to Tate's 'type 1' lintel style, and thus fifth century in date (1992, 105). At Kharab Shams, an incised motif over the west door of the monastic church, though difficult to find direct parallels for, is similar to Tate's 'médallion complexe', and thus early sixth century in date (1992, 109). At Burj Jalahah, the right hand motif over the door of the tower is similar to an example at Dayr Qita dated to 462 by inscription (though the latter has lintel banding, which is not present at Burj Jalahah).



*Figure 125: Incised lintel motifs from the three case study sites: Qasr al-Brad (top), Kharab Shams monastic church (middle) and Burj Jalahah tower (bottom). Not to equal scales*



It must be born in mind, however, that in spite of the work of Naccache (1992), dating architectural motif styles in the limestone massif cannot be ascertained with any greater resolution than around half a century. The only other dating evidence may derive from the fact that all three complexes are built of large, orthogonal blocks with no rubble infill which, according to Tate would suggest a date range of around 445 to 550 (1992). According to the Tate scheme, the simple, bold banded decoration all suggests an early sixth century date also. For all three complexes then, the best evidence we have is from vague stylistic comparison of the motifs and even vaguer architectural styles, all suggesting a date range of the mid-fifth to the mid-sixth centuries.

Type 2 sites, described in the previous chapter as specialist baptismal centres with a stronger pilgrimage element than Types 1 or 3, seem to conform to this date range also. Peña et al conclude that the church and baptistery complex at Bafettin are fifth century due to the layout of the doors (1987, 47). Qal'at Sim'an was certainly constructed after Simeon's death in 459, and probably between 476 and 491 (Tchalenko I, 223-276). The monastic complex seems stratigraphically to have been later than the main church complex, but it is not known how much later (until the publication of more intensive work by an IFAPO [now IFPO] project shortly). At Baqirha, the site was enclosed and an inscription erected in 501, though the baptistery here is certainly earlier than the enclosure. These examples suggest a date range in the latter half of the fifth century. However, these sites did not take part in the changing circumstances of agricultural production at this time. They are likely to have received a higher level of patronage than non-baptismal centres, facilitated in part by their strong pilgrimage role. This enabled them to reach well beyond the immediate region and, in the case of Qal'at Sim'an, to receive imperial patronage from Constantinople. These factors mean that Type 2 sites were exceptional in a number of respects, for they are unlikely to have participated in the socio-economy of the limestone massif in quite the same ways as Types 1 and 3.

## 6.7 Conclusion

Although we cannot date the three case study sites with any great reliability, it is tempting to at least posit the idea that Type 1 sites like Qasr al-Brad represent both the earliest form of monasticism in the region and also the subsequent development of this from a smaller, eremitic presence into established, though still partially self-sufficient, complexes. This development probably occurred towards the end of the fifth century. Once control of surplus throughout the region had begun to be established and the role of permanent monastic complexes had been evolved, some Type 1 sites, like Kharab Shams, may have



begun to develop the idea of surplus production and a stronger participation in secular communities by establishing monastic sites in areas beneficial to such a project. As ideological control within the countryside grew and the influence of monasticism strengthened across the region, helped in part by control of surplus, monastic communities were then in a position to expand their sites out into the fields where networks of smaller, Type 3 units like Burj Jalahah, equipped with efficient press facilities, could be established. Such sites are usually centred around a tower, and are suggestive of dispersed *laura* complexes, combining domestic behaviour with surveillance, processing and the storage of agricultural produce. They flourished in particular in the southern part of the study area. This may have occurred from the early sixth century.

This notion of a chronological development within the data set of monastic sites, which could correspond to development of the very *idea* of monasticism in Late Antiquity, relies heavily on assumptions made on admittedly questionable grounds. Nevertheless, these conclusions, it is hoped, can act as the basis for a reformed model to be examined in greater depth and with the aid of further fieldwork at later date. The final chapter will now expand this model and suggest how that fieldwork should take place.



## Chapter 7

### Conclusion: Monastic Authority in Late Antique Syria

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*Previous scholars have tended to regard monasteries as 'special', isolated and essentially cultural phenomena, and therefore have tended to under-emphasise their socio-economic, and ultimately political, roles. In order to try to confront this model, this thesis has explored theoretical approaches more familiarly applied to interpretation of late Roman and early medieval settlement outside Syria, but set very much within the specific archaeological and historical context of the region. Exploration of these approaches has resulted in the model proposed in Chapter 3, which suggested that a shift from a predominantly tax paying free peasantry in the countryside to systems of tribute and then rent was led initially by ascetic holy figures and then by institutional monastic complexes. Chapter 4 argued that the concept of a 'monastery' for contemporaries of late antique Syria has been insufficiently explored in the past, and that a re-examination of this issue in fact produces a more varied set of site types than just the obvious 'coenobia' previously supposed. Analysis across the range of these sites in Chapter 5 suggested that monastic complexes were deliberately sited in locations which suited their role as emerging landlords, and that they did this in sometimes contrasting ways. Chapter 6 examined the specifics of day-to-day interaction, producing the conclusion that monastic and village communities frequently communicated in physical and visual terms, especially through joint production enterprises.*

*It is the task of this chapter to assess the broader significance of these conclusions: to what extent did monasteries represent a new authority within the post-Roman countryside? Did tension exist between church and monastery? Within the context of the changes suggested by Chapters 5 and 6, how was this tension resolved and how was the social and economic role of monasteries maintained amid the ongoing theological controversies from the mid-fifth century? What happened in the later sixth and seventh centuries which may be suggestive of 'decline', and what was the impact, if any, of the Muslim invasions on the rural communities of the north-west? Finally, where does the study of early monasticism go now? This conclusion will carry forward the arguments raised so far in this thesis to their furthest possible extent, and a refined model is then proposed in section 7.9. In places, this may stretch the evidence beyond its credible limits for now. However, it is meant to be a thought-provoking discussion in order to serve as the basis for further research.*

#### 7.1 Summary

This thesis has sought to argue from the outset that monasteries of Late Antiquity should be regarded as having been active, living settlements, with full potential to participate in, influence and control their place in the socio-economy. Chapter 1 argued that previous texts have tended not to give monasteries such an active role, and have instead treated the archaeological remains of such sites with a particular reverence common to Orientalist constructions which regard 'Eastern' material as the source, inspiration and origins for the 'dynamism' which later developed in Europe (Said 1978). 'Eastern' monasticism, in common with most aspects of 'Eastern' culture as depicted by European and American scholars, has tended to be afforded 'special' techniques of analysis which have divorced it from theoretical developments occurring in the disciplines of archaeology and history elsewhere in the world. Chapter 1 therefore sought to deconstruct early attempts to study the archaeology of Syria. In particular it attempted to discover the ways in which such studies were enterprises tied up with colonial, Mandate and subsequent political systems. These ties have rendered accounts of early Christianity and its archaeological remains problematic, seeing monasteries as



idiosyncratic, spiritual phenomena producing architecture of enormous cultural significance today, but which was cut down by the arrival of Islam and its disruptive effects on the market system of the Mediterranean. The last three decades have seen greater nuance brought to these debates, particularly through improved excavation and recording techniques, statistical analyses on a broad scale and a greater understanding of the complexities of settlement changes under early Islam. Yet even these new approaches have tended not to see monasteries as anything other than religious communities, striving in isolation to support themselves from the land. Rarely connected with society at large, monasteries appear as isolated *loci* of early Christian thought, in ways somewhat analogous to academia itself, and certainly research projects in the 'Near East'. In order to do justice to the complex and often remarkably well-preserved material record of monasteries in Syria, it is necessary instead to seek explanations of all of its varied facets, morphology and landscape settings.

Following this, Chapter 2 proposed that a more interesting and useful way of viewing the role of religious establishments in society is to see their ideological constructions as socially – rather than divinely – derived. It is perfectly possible to suggest that those producing carefully assembled sets of ideas were inspired by great belief themselves, but the resulting ideologies can still be viewed as social constructions, and thus useful in betraying the tensions and transitions within society in general. The ways in which archaeological evidence has been underplayed in such debates was highlighted. It was concluded that through the construction of a well-developed interpretive framework, both archaeological and historical perspectives can make a contribution, each bringing nuances of different kinds to the 'debating table'.

Discussion then centred on previous attempts to apply archaeological theory to monasteries, and especially on processualist and Marxist viewpoints. It was concluded that Wickham's notion of 'modes of production' was a useful set of tools with which to analyse the major changes of the late fourth to seventh centuries (1984). Yet Wickham did not examine the archaeological evidence for such changes either on a site-by-site basis, or indeed throughout whole rural landscapes. Such a focus could take into account not just changes in the way *economic* production was organised, but also *ideological* production. This could include the form of the deliberate construction of landscapes meant to draw secular settlements into a sense of there being new zones of sacredness, at the centre of which stood monastic complexes. Such layering can be seen as a common element in the ideology of many world religions, and is an integral part of the ways in which both 'guides' and 'believers' can be



bound within the same sense of identity. A brief analysis of documentary sources concluded that such notions are not necessarily alien concepts created by modern theorists, but were actually a part of how contemporaries saw the world around them. It was suggested that conventional accounts of the landscape setting of monasteries as being guided by economic factors alone, are inadequate (such as Tchalenko 1953 I, 177), and that a thorough study of the landscape setting of monasteries was necessary.

These theoretical perspectives were then developed into a 'model' in Chapter 3, to account for the role played by monasteries in the social and economic changes of the late fourth to seventh centuries. It was suggested that a largely tax-based (or 'ancient') mode of production led to a predominantly feudal mode in the countryside, with rural patrons 'protecting' villagers from the burdens of taxation, and instead becoming landlords taking rent from the population (Wickham 1984). Using refinements deriving from Amin, it was suggested that such a process might in fact have been more complex, with tribute first being paid, then rent-taking developing once social control and participation by rural landlords in the organisation of economic production had increased (1976). Modes of production could be reflected in the rural landscape. Studying distribution and use of space within rural settlement patterns has been shown to demonstrate how these can be examined (Saunders 1992). Using Brown's notion of the 'holy man as patron' (1971, 1982a), it was suggested that monastic establishments emerged initially from the position of influence as arbitrators and intercessors held by itinerant holy men. Such establishments became established authorities in the countryside capable of taking tribute and then rent. This process, of an 'internalisation' of the rural economy of northern Syria, is not necessarily incompatible with traditional views of Mediterranean economic exchange increasing in the fifth and sixth centuries (most recently purported by Decker 2001). But recent work casts doubt on the *extent* to which the limestone massif, for example, participated in this trade. It can also be seen that not only did the olive and grape presses of the limestone massif produce a large surplus, but that monasteries were participating in this production by the fifth century. By the mid-sixth century, inscriptional evidence suggests that very little new secular architecture was being assembled, and that the only parties capable of doing so were ecclesiastical estates.

Chapter 4 asserted that in order to examine the model proposed in Chapter 3 more closely, we must be clear in terms of precisely what we understand a monastic site to be. It was emphasised that the spread of Christian authority occurred somewhat later than traditionally supposed, and at a time when that authority struggled to establish a clear ideological message. Into the theological disputes of the established (and largely urban) church emerged



a large number of holy figures who were the very antithesis of centralised authority. The origins of this movement were discussed, and their eventual influence over the rural population among whom they lived was concluded to have been profound. Far from being distant and remote figures, their 'other-worldliness' prompted the population to believe that they were sufficiently removed from their own day-to-day affairs, and of course sufficiently close to understanding divine power, that they could carry out acts of exorcism, curses, the suppression of violence and arbitration of disputes, as well as being money lenders, financial negotiators with the authorities and leaders of popular uprisings. The ways in which such a role, facilitated by the 'separateness' of such figures, became its very antithesis in becoming settled, established and attached to particular settlements is not straightforward, though documentary sources do provide some insight.

It was then suggested that archaeological evidence for the very earliest monastic structures has generally been missed, as previous authors have tended only to examine the most obvious, coenobitic complexes. In fact, if the documentary evidence for monasteries is examined more closely for suggestions as to what constituted monastic activity in the fourth to sixth centuries, a monastic site can be defined as a structure or complex of structures used for the sustained contemplation of God under a Christian belief system. This activity necessitated residential accommodation, and often - but not necessarily - the generation of subsistence materials. Such a complex may have involved the use of a church, but this was not always 'on-site'. Such a complex was referred to in late Roman Syria as *dayro* (Syriac) or *monasterion* (Greek). Within the bounds of this definition, variation is likely to have existed in how the idea of monasticism was expressed, with coenobitic, eremitic and *laura* enterprises all overlapping. Monastic 'rules' of the kind familiar to commentators in western Europe may not have existed in quite the same way in Syria. It is not surprising then that no easy and obvious 'template' or 'check-list' exists for the identification of a monastic site, and that we can only really interpret whether each set of material remains in the field played a role in monastic practice by assessing sites on a case-by-case basis. Having said this, in spite of the many and varied interpretations of the monastic idea occurring at around the same time, it is also possible to discern broadly comparable changes taking place to that monastic idea which transcended individual differences between complexes, since the phenomenon of monasticism existed and developed within similar social, economic and political circumstances across the region.

By employing 61 sites which conformed to the careful definition of monastic practice defined above, along with data for secular settlements, water courses, communication routes



and topography, an inter-site analysis was begun in Chapter 5. Did this evidence suggest that monastic sites were placed in isolated locations, or locations which enabled them to take part in activities going on within settlements, as well as to draw settlements into an ideological relationship? The proximity between monasteries and their nearest secular settlements was analysed, and it would seem that these early foundations were indeed not seeking seclusion, but deliberate proximity to settlement. Why was this? An examination of the siting of monasteries and villages suggests that a remarkable degree of intervisibility existed between the two. Indeed, monasteries tended to be sited on hilltops and the upper slopes, in positions of marked prominence. In some areas, such as the Jebel Sim'an, this can certainly be concluded as a deliberate decision, rather than just a by-product of siting for the sake of proximity to resources. Although the relationship between monastic sites and Roman roads is not straightforward, some collocation is noteworthy. Of course, this may reflect the fact that they were founded close to settlements, which in turn were positioned in relation to the roads. However, there is no doubt that some monastic communities were extremely well positioned to have frequent and easy access to road traffic and the means to travel. With regard to water resources, caution must be exercised since the information does not yet exist to observe proximity to spring lines and there may have been higher degrees of monastic activity along the line of the 'Afrin and the Quwayq rivers than is now evident. These issues notwithstanding, there is very little significant collocation between *wadis* and monasteries, indicating that such resources were not the priority for emergent monastic communities. The fact that their priorities were otherwise is all the more noteworthy given the marginal nature of the environment in the limestone massif, where water was not as abundant as in the Amuq Valley or on the coast.

Analysis then turned to differentiation *within* these overall trends. By looking at the density of monastic sites, three distinct groups emerged. The first (Group A) is clustered around the site of Qal'at Sim'an, and undoubtedly did so in order to play a role in the pilgrimage traffic deriving from veneration of St. Simeon Stylites. Such sites developed activities associated with this traffic, such as baptism, accommodation for pilgrims, trade in relics and perhaps educational meetings, and sometimes had a developed agricultural infrastructure also. The second group (B) is the largest, and is situated within a set of 38 sites on the northern slopes of Jebel Barisha. An obvious conclusion would be that proximity to the main Antioch-Beroea road facilitated access to resources, but in fact the picture is more complex than this. Many sites within this group are in fact relatively isolated within agricultural field systems, and it seems more likely that networks of *laura* institutions were being established from central, coenobitic institutions, which sought to move into and control large areas of



agricultural land. The third group (C), at the very southern end of Jebel Barisha, probably represents similar activity.

Examination of the characteristics of these sites on the ground allows them to be divided into three types on the basis of their morphological characteristics. The first (Type 1) is represented by a type which may be broadly termed a self-contained *coenobium*, with some evidence for pilgrimage, some for the processing and storage of goods, communal accommodation, a church and some form of enclosure. These sites vary in size and position, but can be somewhat further away from settlement than the second type. Type 2 always have a baptistery, have access to a larger church and are always somewhat more embedded within a dense area of settlement. Such sites are rare in never displaying evidence for agricultural involvement or storage, and performed a specialist baptismal role. Type 3 are simple accommodation units, often associated with a tower, a cistern and a press. Observation of the distribution of such units suggests that they cluster particularly in Jebel Barisha, and are positioned around particular communal centres such as Qal'at Sirmada, Brayj and Kafr Daryan, though there may have been others.

The delineation of these types was a useful exercise in determining that different kinds of monastic site existed, which may be suggestive of different intentions and behaviour in Late Antiquity. However, rather than simply investigate an example of each 'type' in turn, Chapter 6 sought instead to clarify certain ambiguous aspects of these broad types through a series of intensive intra-site case studies. Since Type 2 are fairly obviously sites which combined mass baptism with pilgrimage traffic, and given the degree of commentary already in existence on such sites, they were not treated to intensive analysis. Instead, two case studies were selected from the apparently uniform self-contained *coenobium* – Type 1 – which in fact suggest variations of scale and proximity that do not immediately make sense. In addition, a Type 3 site was examined to determine what these small, dispersed units really represented on the ground.

These case studies reveal important similarities in the ways in which monastic sites were positioned in a landscape sense. Using notions of inter-subjectivity discussed both by Layton and Ucko (1999) as well as Barrett (1988) and Graves (1989), it would seem that villages were bound both together and to particular monasteries, through a sense of shared discourse. Monastic sites acted as prominent *foci* for secular communities. Such a focus was not obviously and easily achieved, since the monasteries did not sit in the very centre of villages but on their outskirts. However, the monastic communities structured the landscape



in order to reinforce their presence, and to structure careful layers of sacredness. This was facilitated by proximity, paths, intervisibility and a blurring of the conceptual boundaries which created a sense that monastic communities were not just there as detached devotional centres, but as an authority and an intercessor.

Monastic complexes solidified the role developed by the holy men of the fourth century and earlier by creating a landscape which revolved around them. The development of this strong ideological position developed hand-in-hand with an economic role, with monasteries building facilities for resource provision which went clearly beyond subsistence. In particular, presses, storage and cisterns suggest that the processing of agricultural goods was a priority. It is difficult to be sure with the current state of knowledge, but sites such as Qasr al-Banat suggest that in some cases the crop to be processed derived from specifically monastic domains. At others, where only a small domain appears to be directly attached to the monastery (as at Dayr Dehes, for example), crops may have been harvested and brought for processing from farther afield.

The interactions between monastery and settlement can be seen to have been complex and multifarious. Labour must have been drawn from beyond the monastic community, creating situations where secular and monastic populations mixed for long periods of time. As will be discussed below, we cannot be absolutely clear about how lay labour was employed by individual monastic sites. It may have been simply that surplus was awarded to monasteries *after* production had taken place, post-harvest but prior to processing, or that all labour was in lieu of rent. The specific arrangement would almost certainly have varied from site-to-site. The process by which tribute or rent was exchanged, processes of land exchange, the administration of surplus, the construction of new buildings all would have created relationships which bound communities to the monastery. Instances of other forms of everyday interaction can be hinted at through documentary sources and nineteenth century travel literature; education of children, meetings of village elders, advice in times of personal dispute, arbitration in matters of land and goods all would have woven a complex social fabric (Parry 2001, Festugière 1959). This is coupled with the major events of the ecclesiastical calendar such as festivals on saints' days which, as they became standardised, fostered regular and fixed links between monastery and village. Loosley has commented that disuse of the *bema* platform throughout the later fifth and sixth centuries imply that control over the liturgy became increasingly the responsibility of monastic communities rather than a village clergy (1999, 2001). This implies that parochial command also fell within the remit of the monastery.



This picture of increasingly complex interaction does not automatically point to control of secular matters by monastic communities. Indeed, current debates about 'eastern' monasticism in Late Antiquity tend to revolve around discussions of whether they were patronised or self-sufficient (for example, Bell 1982, Brenck 2004), both suggesting an entirely passive role for the monastery: they apparently received but did not command or control in any active sense. However, such debates do not take into account the increasing position of hegemonic dominance held by monasteries. Documentary sources suggest they were certainly in receipt of tribute, and that they were in an ideological position to do so on a regular basis. In theological and moral terms, receiving tribute would seem awkward for those whose very life force was poverty and the denial of resources. But as Brown has argued, if monastics could persuade their audience that they were the most appropriate guardians of agricultural wealth and of the prosperity of the village in general through their access to divine understanding, then this awkwardness could be dissipated (2000). So if active monastic control of resources through their ideological position can be conceived of, what archaeological evidence is there that it *actually* took place?

If a new and refined theoretical framework is to be constructed as a result of the work carried out in this thesis, it is necessary to address a number of unresolved issues. First of all, section 7.2 will look directly at the issue of what the material evidence would be for a full transition to feudal relations. Secondly, 7.3 discusses the ways in which such a transition affected the relationship between monasteries and broader ecclesiastical authority. This is followed by consideration of how these broad changes in social relations from the fourth to the seventh centuries played a role in the formation of a Monophysite, Syriac identity in northern Syria. These circumstances are then developed to include an examination of the later sixth and early seventh centuries in particular: if monasteries had by this time become the predominant political authority for rural communities, how was it that both village and monastery began to decline?

Having taken the discussion as far as it can reasonably go given the current state of our information resource for northern Syria, sections 7.6 and 7.7 broaden the scope in order to explore how this new model for social change compares with other areas of the Roman East, as well as with other regions where monasticism began to develop in the early Medieval period. Can meaningful comparisons be drawn between the role of monasteries in Palestine, Italy and Ireland? Attention is then returned to Syria, where the impact of Islam on monasteries is surmised. This thesis then concludes in section 7.9 with an attempt to draw together the various refinements and limitations to the initial model. A new



interpretive framework is then laid out in section 7.10 which, though conceivably flawed, is used to highlight areas of research which require further attention.

## 7.2 A model for hegemonic change in the Syrian countryside?

It is very difficult to prove archaeologically that anything resembling a feudal situation developed whereby labour or rent was given in a standardised manner to a monastic authority, instead of a tribute-giving or 'votive' arrangement where surplus was given on an *ad hoc* basis to the monastery in order to obtain guidance, intercession or arbitration. It is possible to imagine a lengthy overlap, whereby surplus was awarded on a regular basis in order to ensure guidance and salvation for an individual, a family or the village as a whole, but for that giving not to be an actual obligation for some time. Ceasing awards to and interaction with the monastery might seem risky if divine disfavour might then befall, but an openly regularised payment system might not actually be in place for decades or even a generation.

However, it is clear that some form of fixing of a loose, tribute-giving arrangement did occur in the long term. As Kennedy and Liebeschuetz have pointed out, inscriptions cease for secular architecture after around 550, and inscriptions dedicating new buildings only occur on ecclesiastical structures (1988). They interpret this in terms of 'the economic organisation which had previously been in the hands of urban magnates had partly passed into the hands of men living in villages, and especially to monasteries' (1988, 87). It may be that not only was wealth 'in the hands of' monasteries, but that they were actually responsible for a prevention of settlement expansion. For instance, it could be suggested that as arrangements regarding land and crops became standardised, so the ability of most villagers to expand became restricted, and thus a fixing of wealth occurred. There was no way for most secular villages to expand, and no way to broaden or improve production if the power to do so was no longer in their hands. Tate has suggested that a stagnation set in by the mid-sixth century which resulted from a clash between a growing population whose resources could not 'keep up', and whose technological basis did not change (1992, 341). This model could be taken somewhat further by suggesting that the *reason why* this technological basis could not change was that villagers were mostly divorced from their means of production, unable to put in motion the arrangements necessary to reform field systems, to intensify the processing of agricultural goods or seek different or additional external markets for themselves. The fluidity of land and property and the ability for families to expand which is so evident in the increase in buildings from around 380 to around 470 (Tate 1992, 184) was thus checked once land ownership and control of surplus became



fixed. While the payment of taxation became intermittent or actually waned, local tribute giving could be controlled by individuals or whole villages themselves, surplus could be channelled towards the creation of new buildings, the expansion of field systems and the construction of presses. From the late fifth century, this expansion began to slow down as resources were more strictly controlled. It is precisely from this time that the majority of monastic sites were either created or expanded from a modest core. Dating evidence is ambiguous at present, but the scheme assigned by Tate to construction techniques and decorative motifs would suggest that the later fifth to the mid-sixth century was a period of major development for monasteries.

A crucial question therefore is *when* did expansion of villages and field systems cease? Was it indeed in the later fifth to mid-sixth century as monasteries began to exert genuine control? Further investigation of this issue could be carried out through carefully targeted fieldwalking, geophysics and excavation, guided initially by the position of features observable on Corona satellite imagery and aerial photographs. This could clarify when the villages stopped expanding and what the stratigraphic relationship is between the latest buildings in the villages and the fields systems which lie beyond. This will be discussed at greater length in the final section of this chapter.

The three case studies have demonstrated that monasteries interacted with surplus production in different ways. At Qasr al-Brad, some pressing and storage took place, but this was by no means a major enterprise, and some pilgrimage revenue may well have been forthcoming. At Kharab Shams, production took place in two ways: on a minor scale and probably for immediate monastic consumption, but on a larger scale through the organisation of a major press facility which combined processing and storage. This suggests that production was being actively organised by the monastery. In a third case, Burj Jalahah displays evidence for a fairly sophisticated screw press at the site, complete with a large cistern capable of providing large amounts of the water necessary for pressing and the subsequent cleaning process. These features are set within a field system and some distance away from the monastic centre, implying not just control over the processing of oil (and perhaps wine also), but also organisation of the growth and harvesting of crops.

Chronologically speaking, it would be tempting to suggest a progression here from coenobitic complexes which had themselves developed from an eremitic core, to opportunistic expansion into large-scale production and then domination over not just the processing stage but the very land itself. However, caution must be exercised until greater



dating resolution is achievable, so for now it seems wise to regard all three as broadly contemporary complexes, each interacting with production in different ways. Chapter 4 stressed the need to expect variation in the interpretation of the monastic idea, and it would be realistic to conclude for now that the three case studies represent exactly that.

In sum, by combining historical accounts like the holy man Abraham receiving land and buildings from villagers in Lebanon (*HR XVII:2-4*), Theodore of Sykeon receiving a whole vineyard (*Theodore CXXLI*) and Theodosius going even further and actually organising a workforce (*HR X:2-3*), with archaeological evidence for the apparatus of production and storage, social relations can be seen to have developed to the stage where produce was grown, processed and stored under the jurisdiction of monastic communities. Although taking this situation further to suggest developed feudal relations is not absolutely provable by archaeological means, this is at least plausible and even probable. Evelyn Patlagean feels confident enough to conclude that monasteries were taking rent and taking part in full feudal relations by as early as the late fifth century (1977, 320). However, her survey of monasticism is a rapid one, and draws generalised comparisons between diverse areas of Syria and Palestine on the basis of documentary evidence alone. The view adopted here is that because full feudal relations cannot be demonstrated unequivocally for the whole study area, it would be more cautious to use the term 'proto-feudal', with some more advanced interaction in the production process, but some continuation of a more simple tributary arrangement.

Clearly this arrangement did not work on a neat 'one monastery per village' basis, with monasteries acting as feudal 'manors' for a set of villages in a neat, repeated pattern across the countryside – such an idea would be to draw comparisons too directly with Europe from the ninth century (as expressed, for example, by Hodges 1993). If local processes of socio-economic change were gradual, acting at different rates in different areas depending on both the pre-existing social context and slightly different concepts of the monastic idea, then it seems likely that we might see a palimpsest of incomplete situations across the countryside. In cases such as Kharab Shams, one village is clearly attached to one monastery. Contrastingly, several villages may have been connected to the monastery of Dayr 'Aman. At village sites like Mashad Ruhin, the nearest reliable evidence we have for a monastic site is 4.6km away.

Tate (1992; in common with Patlagean 1977) discusses the idea that monasteries may have been responsible for appropriating surplus during the sixth century, but himself dismisses



the idea on the grounds that there are insufficient examples of large monastic estates for this to be plausible. The smaller monasteries, he suggests, were simply acting in a self-sufficient manner, and cannot be considered as part of such an equation. But the evidence presented here suggests that he does not explore this model fully enough, and there are two reasons for this. Firstly, smaller monasteries could be shown to be capable of extracting surplus if their fabric and morphology is examined carefully, as suggested by Kharab Shams, Dayruna and other sites. Secondly, such potential is especially viable if monasteries worked together as part of a series of networks, with some acting as central points of organisation and land ownership for other smaller sites carrying out tasks like the processing, storage and redistribution of goods on a more local level. This may have happened especially on the far northern and the far southern slopes of Jebel Barisha.

As already mentioned, many authors have sought to emphasise the issue of high-status patronage when discussing monasteries of this period. It is certainly possible that monastic sites in northern Syria may have combined receiving some degree of high-status patronage with tribute and the generation of surplus. This is suggested by hagiographical evidence which often narrates the early life of a saint as one involving their 'donation' as a child oblate to a monastery at a young age by his parents, and the family subsequently giving gifts to that monastery in order to safeguard the well-being of their child. Indeed, Daniel the Stylite was given to a monastery by his parents when he was as young as twelve (*Daniel* IV-V). Some monks were undoubtedly from wealthy, urban backgrounds, and may have brought resources and influence with them to the monastery. Domnina, for example, persuades her mother and brothers to spend money on improving a local shrine and on supporting her lifestyle in general (*HR* XXX). The monks Aphrahat, Theodosius and Zeno were also of relatively high birth and could have commanded substantial resources and connections in implementing their monastic projects. However, the evidence on the whole does *not* suggest that patronage was the primary source of income for all monasteries. The diversity of class and ethnic group from which Theodoret's holy figures derived is striking, and there are plenty of examples of local holy men deriving from a poor Syriac-speaking background. Maesymas, for instance, 'had had a rustic upbringing' (*HR* XIV 2). There are very few inscriptions at monastic sites suggestive of dedications to, or donations by, wealthy patrons, although there is the chance that further excavation may reveal some in the form of mosaics (as in the case of the monastery at Beth-Shan, for example, Fitzgerald 1939).

So having proposed that the model suggested in Chapter 3 is broadly credible, though with the conditions that chronological resolution remains somewhat ambiguous and the qualified



term 'proto-feudal' may be more applicable than 'feudal', let us now develop that model further by turning to the broader political context of such changes. There are two issues in particular which require further discussion. First of all, if it can be established that monasteries developed a position of authority in the countryside of northern Syria, how did such authority relate to ecclesiastical authority in general? Did monasteries co-exist alongside or within the Church as a whole, or did they become synonymous with that broader Church?

The second issue which remains to be resolved is that within the context of a change from taxation to local tributary and proto-feudal relations, how was the authority of monastic sites maintained? It has already been suggested that on a local, site-by-site basis, an ideological connection was constructed between monastery and village which bound the two together, and created systems of personal interaction which facilitated the articulation of surplus giving, and that this may perhaps be understood as tribute. But at a much broader level, once stagnation had begun to set in from the later fifth century, how were such relations maintained, and why did the population at large not rebel? It is these issues which are the subject of the next two sections.

### **7.3 Monastery versus church? Monastic authority and ecclesiastical power in Syria**

It *could* be assumed from the archaeological evidence that central churches and monastic sites represented two opposing authorities in village life. Monastic complexes are often equipped with a small church of their own and one might imagine that they remained separate from the affairs of the central church. However, this conclusion would be a misjudgement of the chronological depth of such a situation. The majority of central village churches in fact pre-date the time when monastic sites began to be developed and consolidated in earnest. Kharab Shams is a good example of this, since the earliest evidence within the village church suggests the late fourth century, whereas the monastic church is probably early sixth. Similar situations can be deduced in a wide variety of cases.

Chapter 4 outlined the early development of Christian authority within the countryside and of monastic practice. During the late fourth century, as churches began to be established within villages and an accompanying liturgy was developed, monastic practice was still in a largely ascetic phase with holy men rarely settled in one location, and even fewer gathered into collective organisations. There is some documentary evidence which suggests that during this formative period for monasticism, church leaders tried to embrace their wilder, rebellious counterparts by meeting them and beckoning them into the structured fold.



Theodoret was clearly proud of the links he had built up with holy figures like Salamanes, Marana and Cyrz, who permitted him to break down physical and personal barriers in order to visit them (HR XXIX:5). On some occasions, these distant and disorganised figures were forcibly ordained, and even made into bishops (as was the case with James of Nisibis, Macedonius and Salamanes). This would suggest some degree of tension between the Byzantine Church and individual or groups of monks, with the former trying to rein in the latter either peacefully or against their will. This is hardly surprising given the role of monks in inciting popular uprisings like that against Ibas in Edessa. Furthermore, Rousseau has argued that ascetics saw real philosophical merit in remaining distinct from the organised church (1998).

However, the catalyst for a reconciliation between rural monasteries and the Church came with the religious controversies of the mid-fifth century. Throughout the 440s and especially following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the formal condemnation of Monophysitism, tensions within Antioch increased, and Butcher (2003, 388) has suggested that many fled the city either to join monasteries or simply to find safety in the countryside. It seems likely that most of Syria Prima remained Monophysite thereafter, and that Syria Secunda stayed loyal to Chalcedon. Within this context, it is clear that monastic authority became synonymous with church authority and that they began to control the priesthood, liturgy and other church affairs (Frend 1973). Although non-monastic churches are still built in the sixth century (such as the example at Baqirha and elsewhere), the last large examples are of the fifth century, like Ruweiha. It is at this time also that the *bema* falls out of use, suggesting liturgical changes which may be indicative of a change of authority. This situation was consolidated from the early sixth century, when historical evidence points to the gradual development of an established Monophysite church hierarchy, first with Severus, then John of Tella and Jacob Baradaeus (Frend 1973). This seems to have been rurally-based, with an itinerant leadership centred first on the monastery of Barsauma on the Euphrates (according to Honigmann's identification) and subsequently probably itinerant around the countryside (1954). From the thirteenth century it is thought to have been based at Dayr al-Za'faran near Mardin. Indeed, the Patriarchate of the Monophysite church was not based within a city until 1933 when it moved to Homs, and then to Bab Tuma in Damascus from 1959 (Syrian Orthodox Resources 2001). It would seem therefore that the monastic movement displayed some degree of opposition to the Church in former years, but that the two later became synonymous, partly as a result of the theological controversies of the fifth century.



#### 7.4 Syriac identity and the Monophysite church

The second issue to resolve is how monastic authority was maintained throughout the hegemonic changes in the countryside. Some have suggested that the Monophysite 'cause' became inextricably bound within a broader Syriac cause, along 'ethnic' or even 'national' lines. The nature of this argument has recently been discussed elsewhere (Hull 2004), so it will not be dealt with in detail here. However, it is important to decide how far monasteries were responsible for the construction of a Syriac, Monophysite identity.

It is tempting to conclude that if the population of Syria Prima was predominantly Syriac speaking, was largely Monophysite in belief, and had an organised ecclesiastical authority developing by the late fifth century, that we may use a variety of meaningful collective terms – perhaps 'ethnic group', 'culture' or even 'nation' – to describe such a movement. Indeed Frend has used the term 'nation' to describe the link between political dissent, collective identity and heretical beliefs which combined to form the Donatist movement in North Africa in the fourth century. This movement, he argues, 'was not merely a schism, it was part of a revolution' (Frend 1952, 336).

Arguments of this kind regarding the relationship between 'heresy' and nationalism originated with Woodward who proposed as early as 1916 that Christian heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries fuelled 'nationalist' political movements, and that, furthermore, it was these movements which brought widespread hegemonic collapse to the Roman state (1916). Subsequently, Jones contended that evidence for liturgical and linguistic consensus is not enough to justify the complex political apparatus necessary to justify the term 'nation' (1959). More recently, use of this term in archaeological and historical discussions of medieval and earlier contexts has received much criticism. Harman, for example, points out the difficulty of defining a 'nation' as this term does not equate neatly with factors like language, culture or those who inhabit a particular geographical entity, and there are modern nations in existence which present exceptions to each of these categories (1992). He proposes the argument, following Hobsbawm, Anderson and others, that nations are 'imaginary' entities (Hobsbawm 1990, Anderson 1991). Furthermore, they are an invention of sixteenth century northern Europe, and are essentially a product of, and a means by which to facilitate, capitalism. It would certainly be extremely difficult to justify use of this term for the countryside of sixth century northern Syria, increasingly divided from the political apparatus of Antioch and moving, it has been argued here, towards a predominantly feudal mode of production.



However, the rarity of pagan Syriac literature (with important exceptions), in contrast to the rise of Christian literature throughout the fourth to sixth centuries would suggest that the connection between Syriac and Monophysite Christianity was partially responsible for the rapid development of the language (Brock 1994). The likes of Ephrem, Aphrahat, Mar Aba and Zenobius from the later fourth century, in the fifth century Rabbula, Isaac of Edessa, and Jacob of Sarugh, Philoxenes of Mabbug and increasing others in the sixth century illustrate that both writers and an audience existed whose choices were deliberately *not* to use the Greek language of the Byzantine empire. Nor was Syriac an exclusively literary language. The evidence would seem to suggest that its development as a literary language in fact derived from the fact that most of the population of rural Syria and Mesopotamia were Syriac speakers in Late Antiquity. John Chrysostom in the late fourth century mentions that the country people who come into Antioch for festivals 'have a different language from us, but share the same faith' (PG II: 88, cited in Brock 1994). Imperial documentation from third century Edessa (and indeed elsewhere in Osrhoene) suggests that bi-lingual administration was a necessity otherwise the country people simply would not understand (Brock 1994, 151). So if 'nation' is too strict and too historically specific a term, yet distinct linguistic groups specific to rural areas existed, what other term should we use to describe the populations which the largely Monophysite monasteries sought to have authority over?

A useful comparison might be Millar's analysis of Jewish identity in the late Roman period (1987). For him, *Jewish* identity had all of the necessary mechanisms for us to regard it not only as a distinct ethnic group, but as a politically coherent group. It had a religious text which carried political messages, a collective and exclusive language, a system of law, recognised interpreters of that law (in this case, rabbis), social institutions and a communal leader. Faulkner has also proposed that a Jewish 'nation' existed (2004). But Millar urges caution when assigning other groups such clear labels. He has argued that the Syriac speaking Monophysites of northern Syria certainly do not represent a distinct *ethnos* during the late Roman period, on the grounds that the language was not the primary public language of worship until somewhat later (1998).

Indeed, it is tempting to conflate what are in fact a group of Syriac-related languages spread across Syria and Mesopotamia, but which in fact break down into distinct linguistic branches in Late Antiquity. It is difficult to believe, for example, that Monophysite Christians living under Sasanian rule in Mosul, and speaking a version of eastern Syriac, had the same grievances, priorities and intentions and identified themselves directly with those living within 40km of Antioch. Even within the fairly distinct region of north-west Syria, it is



difficult to identify a distinct material culture which may have shaped and been shaped by a collective group identity. So if the terms 'nation' and 'ethnic' are abrogated, was there really any sense of collective identity among the communities of rural northern Syria?

This is a crucial question if we are to understand the ways in which monastic authority may have fostered a sense of collective association and how such a group remained a distinct community in the face of the arrival of Islam, the Arabic language and the *jizya* tax, as well as how Syrian Orthodox Christians view their own origins as a congregation today.

Epigraphic evidence from the limestone massif, though complex, does suggest that the majority of the population indeed bore Semitic names (Trombley 2004, 68). The majority of early inscriptions tend to use Greek, but this may have been following a social convention which later came to be questioned. For example, a lintel from the east church at Baqirha seems originally to have borne a Greek inscription, but was then overwritten in Syriac at a later date. There is no denying that Greek and Syriac co-existed in many complex ways. However, it is noteworthy that the choice increasingly became Syriac rather than Greek, and it would be tempting to conclude that this was for greater reasons than convenience alone. It could be argued, in fact, that the particular kind of monasticism practised in north-west Syria was a specifically Syriac conception, which always bore different philosophical and linguistic characteristics to Greek Orthodoxy. In Theodoret of Cyrrhus, many of the monks are Syriac speakers, and many of conspicuously local origin in terms of their dress and mannerisms. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that monasticism and village society did not profoundly influence each other, with the Syriac language and local social practices appealing to a predominantly locally-derived monastic population who espoused doctrines and particular ideas of monasticism specific to the region, and vice versa.

So it could be argued then that a collective social identity developed which, if not completely in existence prior to the arrival of monasticism, certainly entered into a reflexive relationship with a particularly local, Syriac monasticism, both of which were additionally bound together as a result of Monophysite persecution under Justin I in the 520s. The effects of such a relationship on the changes from a mainly tax to tributary and then proto-feudal mode of production, are profound in various ways. It could be suggested that loyalty to monastic authority, as the guardians of the 'correct' Monophysite position which would ensure salvation for the population, would have been increased. Furthermore, such a relationship, and the possible alternative of persecution, would have prevented migration of large sections of the population, either to the city or to other rural areas. This situation would also have



bound all of the varied ways in which local ideas of monasticism, and the specifics of local ideologies, together into an apparently collective set of 'beliefs and practices that unite(d) adherents in a single moral community' (Durkheim 2001, 46).

Clearly this is not a clear-cut division, with 'Syriac, rural and Monophysite' being bound to monasteries and 'Greek, urban and Orthodox' remaining somehow loyal to the imperial administration. This is amply illustrated by the case of a monastery at Zeugma on the Euphrates, where both Greek and Syriac monks were present, and where both languages were used during worship (Brock 1994, 158).

However, monasteries could be seen as an embodiment of local power, developing the Syriac language as a literary and administrative medium, and creating a sense of communal Monophysite identity defending itself from the attentions of a Greek speaking and largely Orthodox empire. So in this sense, monasticism assumed a role which may accurately be called 'political', since it involved the mediation of identity at a local level with the broader issues of ideological and economic control across whole regions.

### **7.5 Consumption & stagnation**

It is not automatically apparent why this situation coincided with a dramatic reduction in building inscriptions from around 550. It would be all too easy to argue that resources went to monasteries and therefore could not be invested in buildings, but how exactly did one lead to the other? Where did the wealth 'go'? It is clear that not all surplus did go to monasteries, as large numbers of agricultural presses are not located within monasteries and in fact pre-date them, with no obvious evidence for a 'decommissioning' of such structures once new arrangements were in place. It would seem likely that a piecemeal situation was in place, with a gradual increase in the resources given to monastic institutions over perhaps a generation or two, and a reduction in the availability of domestic surplus controlled by family units. However, this switch, though gradual, may well have been decisive, particularly if Tate's assessment of a rapid increase in the population throughout the mid- to late fifth century is correct (1992, 184). The 'squeeze' may have become gradually more pronounced until a situation existed where few families could either command sufficient resources to enlarge their homes, or find the land available to do so in an increasingly exploited agricultural landscape.

But if increased exploitation, and an increased organisation of production by monastic communities, was indeed taking place, where did the resulting surplus go? It is conceivable



that surplus production must have resulted in the exchange of some of this surplus in order to convert it to other forms of wealth. The Dehes excavation demonstrates that coinage was certainly in use in this region, though the extent to which it was used and the ways in which it was procured are difficult to discern given the paucity of high quality excavation in the limestone massif. Debates concerning the nature of the olive oil trade have been discussed, and it would seem sensible to conclude, as Tate has done, that a mixed economy is likely, with grain and stock rearing also playing a role (1997). Decker's suggestion that wine has been underplayed as a likely product also seems a useful correction (2001). Tate has emphasised local exchange and consumption, with imperial armies east of the limestone massif consuming some also (1997). As taxation declines and local control of surplus increases, use of such surplus for the *annona* seems less and less likely. It cannot be ruled out, of course, that this *annona* ceased altogether, and it is not inconceivable that this could have been paid *through* monastic institutions, though this may be unlikely given the origins of the monastic movement in the region in tax evasion and local advocacy. Deducing the stance taken by monastic institutions towards imperial taxation could be undertaken archaeologically by analysing the relationship between cadastration divisions and newly founded monastic sites. Do monasteries deliberately disrupt such divisions and rearrange field systems? The evidence is not yet available, and such a study would necessitate a large-scale analysis of aerial photographs and Corona satellite imagery, as outlined in the final section of this chapter.

Even if some taxation continued, this would surely not account for the large quantities of surplus being generated in the limestone massif. Where were exports from the region going? Certainly, Tchalenko's argument for a reliance on Mediterranean markets is no longer entirely tenable given that it is far from clear how oil and wine were transported, where they were transferred to amphorae, and where those amphorae went. Knowledge of this may improve once understanding of LRA1 provenance locations improves. A number of scholars have assumed that this vessel form must have played a role in the economy of the limestone massif (for example, Wickham 2005, 772). This assumption is constructed on the basis that LRA1 is known to originate from somewhere in the north-east Mediterranean and that the limestone massif clearly produced a surplus of olive oil. However, current work suggests that although LRA1 was manufactured on Cyprus and in Turkish Cilicia, it was *not* produced on the Syrian mainland as once thought. Sherds from Seleucia previously thought to have been wasters have more recently been proved to be otherwise (Reynolds *forthcoming*). Indeed, Reynolds suggests that local exchange networks for oil are also conceivable inland, but as is *some* participation in Mediterranean trade, as long as the mechanisms of this can be



made clear. Currently, those mechanisms are not clear, and it would seem to be a stretch of the evidence to suggest uncritically that north-west Syria was 'an economic focal point for the late Roman and early Byzantine period' (Decker 2001, 82), on the basis of a general LRA1 abundance on fifth and sixth sites throughout the eastern Mediterranean. A clear connection between this region and amphorae production cannot be demonstrated at present. If the export of oil from the limestone massif to Mediterranean trade networks remained strong throughout the sixth and seventh centuries, one would expect Antioch to remain 'an exchange focus' throughout this period also, as suggested recently by Wickham (2005, 714). But this also cannot be known at present due to the fact that the only large-scale excavations there were conducted in the 1930s, and were largely an exercise in mosaic recovery without very much attention to the stratigraphic record. Kennedy's conclusion, that some urban depopulation and contravention of the street system was taking place there during the latter part of the sixth century, is an attractive one (1985), though in reality, a firm chronology for settlement abatement in Antioch cannot be verified without further archaeological work.

However, a surplus certainly was being produced in the limestone massif, if Decker's comparison between that region and the the hinterland of Lepcis Magna is correct. He calculates 1.5 presses per km<sup>2</sup> in Syria, which is three times that for Lepcis Magna, where the density is 0.5 per square km<sup>2</sup> (Decker 2001, 81). If some of this surplus was being consumed locally and some used to participate in long-distance exchange, whether inland as suggested by Reynolds (*forthcoming*) or as part of Mediterranean trade (Wickham 2005), what happened to the resultant wealth from this exchange?

It is clear that some wealth was used to fund the construction of new ecclesiastical buildings and the management of monastic estates. Most investment in the agricultural infrastructure would probably then have taken place within monastic domains, and not elsewhere. Once rural monasteries became the setting for an itinerant Monophysite hierarchy under Jacob Baradaeus, it is conceivable that investment in church infrastructure took place, with increasing members of the clergy requiring support and investment in church plate, manuscripts and other items of conspicuous consumption. Although manuscripts such as the Rabbula Gospels, written in 586 at the monastery of Bet Mar Yohannan of Zagba, are in evidence, investment in less tangible items is generally difficult to prove. However, an argument could be made along lines established by Brenner (1986). This would argue that economic patterns of behaviour set in which prevented the agricultural infrastructure from keeping up with the population increases of the later fifth century. The producers in the



villages also had little incentive to specialise economically once markets had begun to internalise following a change in relationship between city and countryside. Thus, the fluctuations of long distance exchange often posited as the reasons behind socio-economic change were in fact not the reason for a decline in building programmes in the later sixth century. Instead, wealth was contingent on the social relations of the countryside (an argument made in general terms by Roskams 1996, Wickham 2003 & 2005, 819), in this case the ability of village communities to produce enough surplus and engage sufficiently in distant markets. Without the ability to engage in these markets, local and diverse (rather than specialist) economies were maintained, so surplus was never really accumulated.

There is a second part to this village-monastery relationship, because just as villages themselves do not seem to have invested in production infrastructure in the later sixth century, monasteries also do not seem to have constructed very much for themselves either. Although some building inscriptions are known, it seems that the Monophysite church instead invested politically. For Brenner and the development of later feudalism in Europe, this investment in apparatus was politico-military. For north-west Syria where the specific conditions and time period are somewhat different, the struggle to invest was not military, but was well organised and structured nonetheless.

## 7.6 Regional comparisons

In order to allow sufficient time for a thorough examination of the evidence and for the eventual development of a refined framework of interpretation, this thesis has taken a small dataset specific to just one region, rather than attempt very broad comparisons. It has already been established that the limestone massif was far from unique, in anything other than taphonomic terms, on the basis of good survey data from elsewhere in the region (Casana 2004). However, this view must be balanced by the recognition that we must exercise caution in automatically drawing parallels between monasteries of north-west Syria and elsewhere (Cameron 1980). So in order to examine the extent to which monasteries may have developed along similar lines in a region outside the Roman province of Syria, it is stimulating to discuss another area. Many other areas in the region of Greater Syria do not have the same preservational advantage as the limestone massif, and so do not permit sophisticated analysis so readily. The Qalamun, for example, between Damascus, Homs and Palmyra, is known to have a number of monastic sites in existence in Late Antiquity (von Sachsen 1927, Nasrullah 1956, Kaufold 1995). The difficulties of accessing and investigating such sites archaeologically are not inconsiderable. At Dayr Mar Elian, for example,



preliminary historical and archaeological investigation seemed to establish a reasonable basis to assume that fifth and sixth century deposits may be *in situ* (Hull & Loosley *in press*).



Figure 126: The monastic site of Dayr Mar Elian in the Qalamun region of Syria

However, apart from occasional residual sherds and one coin, *in situ* deposits have proved elusive, in part due to the difficulties of discerning sound stratigraphic sequences where mud brick was the primary building material, and partly due to the large scale development of the site in the medieval and Ottoman periods (Loosley & Finneran 2005).

In the Tur Abdin to the north-east of the limestone massif, survival of monastic sites was well attested by Bell in the early decades of the twentieth-century (1982). However, warfare, settlement development and quite probably deliberate governmental policy have played a role in destroying or obscuring the majority of the evidence (though some archaeological recording has been undertaken by Leroy [1961]).

In the far south of Syria in the Hauran region, within the Roman province of Arabia, archaeological preservation is more promising, although some site destruction has been noted (D.Kennedy 2002). The hard, basalt geology and relative depopulation of the region



from the later first millennium AD to the nineteenth century has left a relatively complex and accessible archaeological record. Recently, the Hauran Monastic Landscapes Project has established that three potential monastic sites remain extant on the modern Syrian side of the Hauran (Al-Azm & Hull 2004).

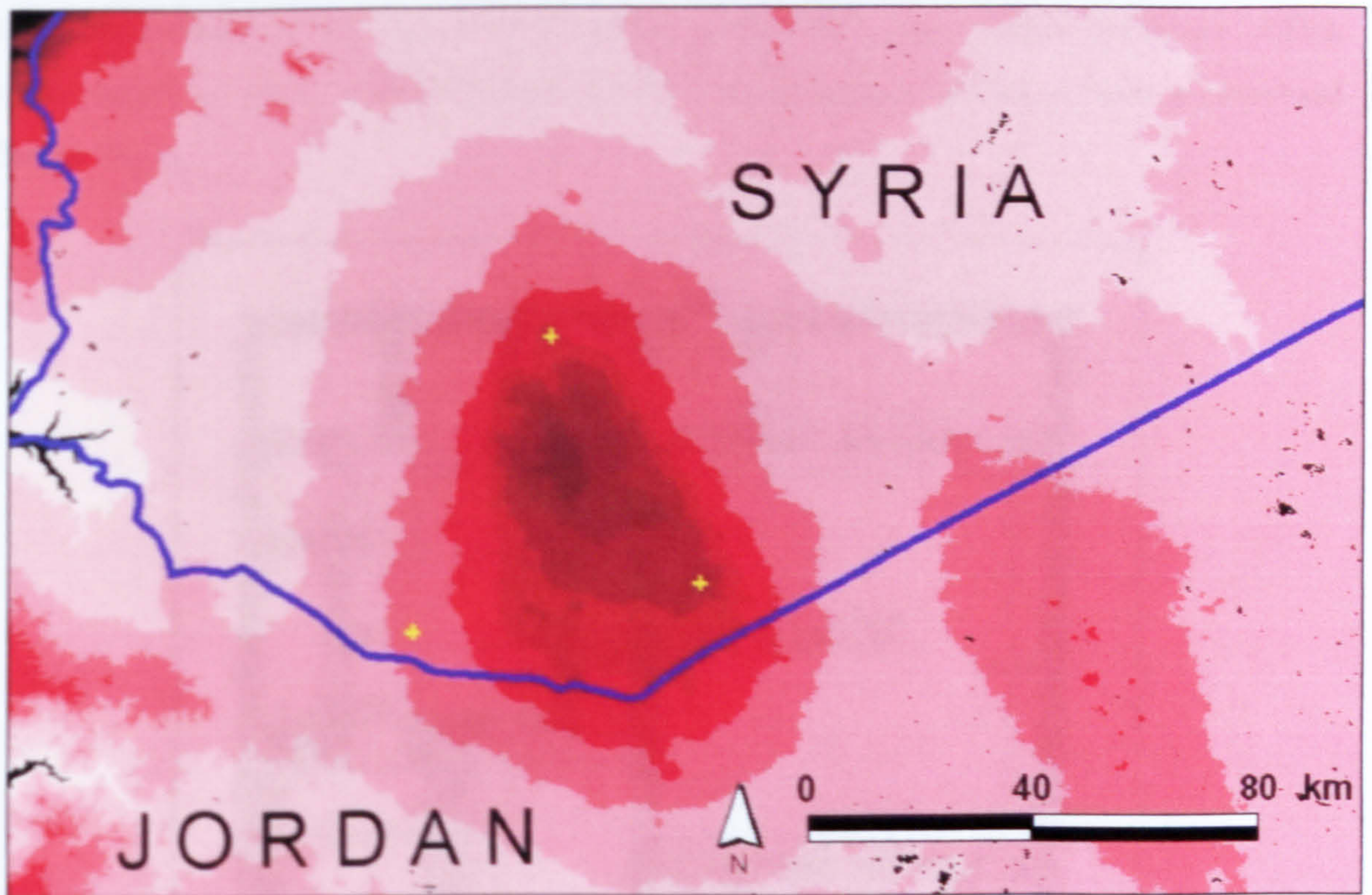


Figure 127: A map of the Hauran region, showing the position of three surviving monastic sites on the Syrian side of the border

Preliminary mapping of these sites in comparison with areas of secular settlement would seem to suggest that monasteries here are far more dispersed and isolated than in the Antiochene region of the limestone massif. While some are fairly close, such as the site of Shaqqa, others like Dayr al-Nasrani are at least 6km away from the nearest village. Does this suggest a less marked participation in the socio-economy of the Hauran? On the contrary, it could be argued that it may simply suggest the socio-economy into which monasticism emerged was somewhat different to begin with. The settlement pattern itself seems more dispersed, with around 11.3 settlement sites per 500km<sup>2</sup>, rather than the 87.5 per 500km<sup>2</sup> of the limestone massif (though this is, admittedly, comparing the data generated by this thesis with the more rapid survey in Villeneuve 1985). Yet, the Hauran, or Roman *Auranitis*, was also a region with excellent communications networks and a far broader hierarchy of settlement types, with a large *bedu* population evidenced by inscriptions to the south and east (Macdonald 2000), dispersed villages like Dayr al-Juwani, larger nucleated settlements such as Tisiyah, 'Anz and Nimrah and genuinely urban entities in the form of Bostra, Shahba (Philipopolis), Suwayda (Dionysias). From the time monasticism emerged here in the early



sixth century, it seems to have played as strong a socio-economic role as in the limestone massif.

Although investigations are at a very early stage, sites such as Dayr al-Nasrani represent complex centres for a variety of economic activities. Butler recorded the most obvious structural remains of the site in 1904, which consist of a high, walled enclosure, within which stands a tower, a small church and several residential rooms around a courtyard (Butler 1913).

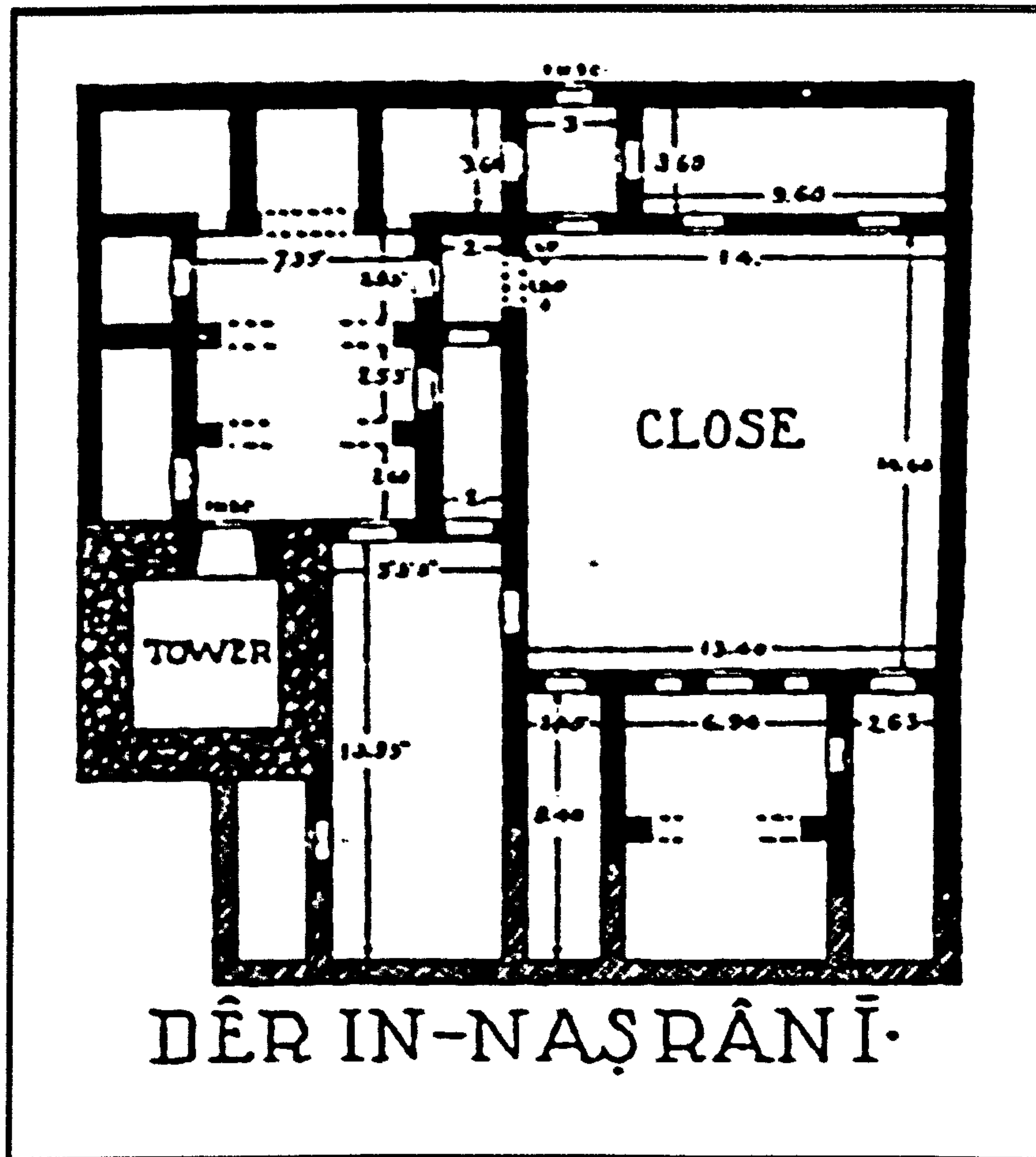


Figure 128: Butler's plan of Dayr al-Nasrani (Butler 1914, 335)

Beyond this, recent survey work has suggested evidence for resource procurement and storage (Al-Azm & Hull 2004). A very large, well-constructed cistern with a plastered interior is present on the south-eastern side of the hill on which the monastery is situated.





Figure 129: The large cistern at Dayr al-Nasrani

Also, several smaller water catchment features are evident to the east of the site, and a number of caves have been cut into the side of the mound, some of which contain burial niches and platforms, while others have been revetted and may have served as storage features. Field systems in the area have largely been remodelled, but some evidence exists close to the mound for oval enclosures, the cleared interior of which indicates animal penning. Their date is ambiguous, but it seems likely that such features would have been used continuously for a considerable period of time.



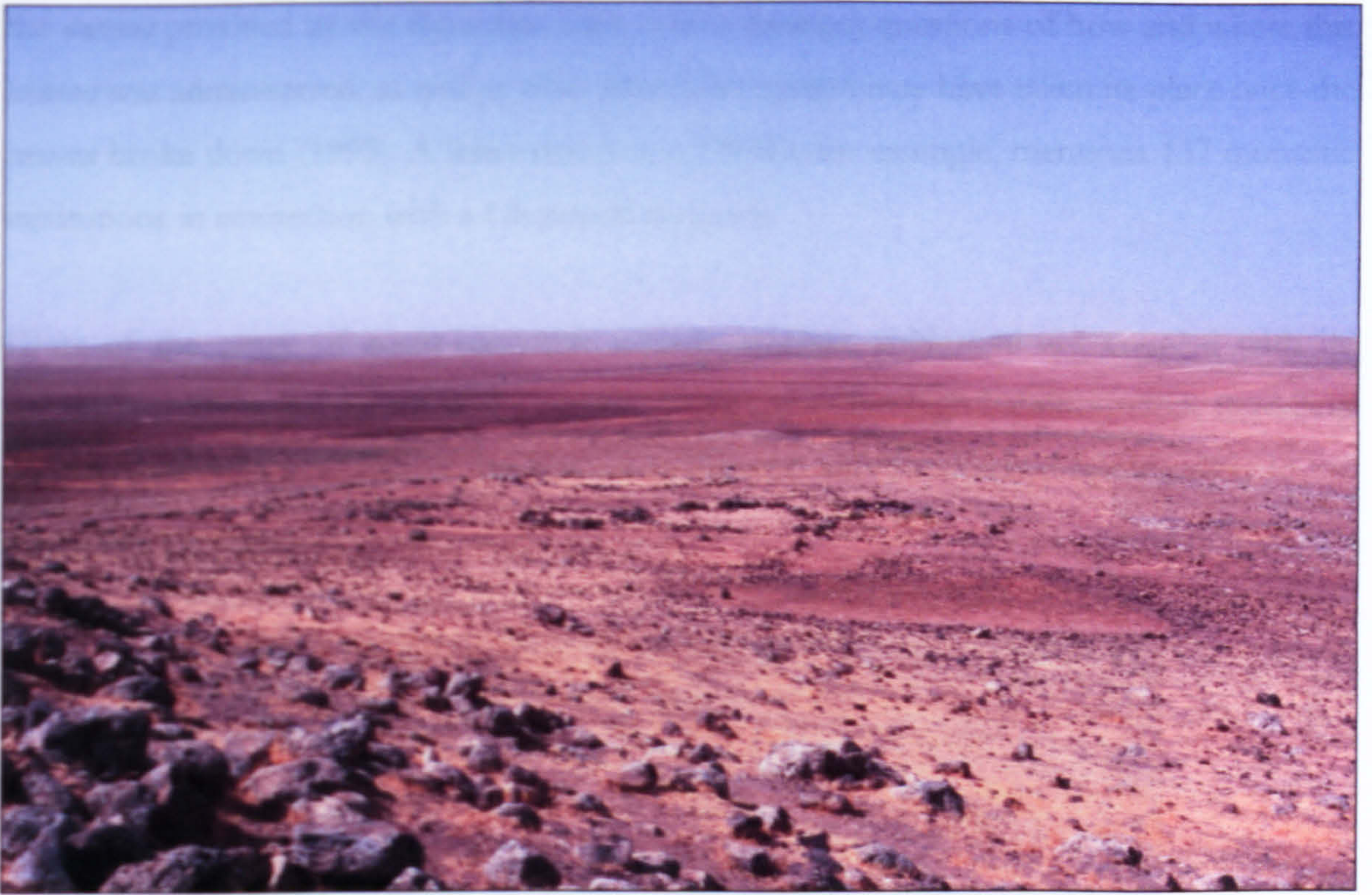


Figure 130: Field systems (centre), probably for stock management, photographed from the site of Dayr al-Nasrani

The environs of the site operate today as a camping ground for small, nomadic groups, and it may have been the case that such activity took place in Late Antiquity also. Archaeological evidence for nomadic encampment at or very close to monastic sites was located by Gibson and Dauphin at al-Ramthaniya in the *Jawlan* to the west of Dayr al-Nasrani (1990). Modern parallels with Christian *bedu* tribes in the Qalamun suggests that sites such as Dayr Mar Elian act as focal points for social interaction, as well as places to obtain water.

This raises interesting questions about the ways in which monastic sites and nomadic tribes may have interacted in Late Antiquity. Key to such issues is the role which monasteries played in mediating between the settled populations of the Byzantine state, and the *bedu* of the Ghassanid confederation. The possibility of such a role was first raised by Theodore Nöldeke in the 1870s and further discussion of this issue has been made by Peters, who pointed out that the Ghassanid tribes were adherents of Christianity from the fourth century and Monophysite by the mid-fifth (Nöldeke 1875, Peters 1978). The local saint Sergius seems to have acted as a particular focus for the beliefs of nomadic groups, and shrines and churches dedicated to this figure occur often along Syria's desert fringe (for example, at Resafa). Dayr al-Nasrani bears an inscription which states 'O God of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, bless the monastery...' (Littmann et al 1921, 334). Ghassanid tribes are attested in various documentary sources as having had a complex, inter-dependent relationship with monasteries in the Hauran. Irfan Shahid mentions that Ghassanid *foedorati* were entitled to



the *annona* provided by the Byzantine state, which prompts questions of how and where this *annona* was administered, as well as what alternative system may have taken its place once the *annona* broke down (1995). A letter dated to c.570AD, for example, mentions 137 monastic institutions in connection with a Ghassanid phylarch.

Hints of the range of socio-economic activity at Dayr al-Nasrani are coupled with its position of visual dominance as the site sits on top of a 70m high basalt outcrop, straddling the edge of the settled plain of the Hauran to the west and the desert dropping away to the south and east.

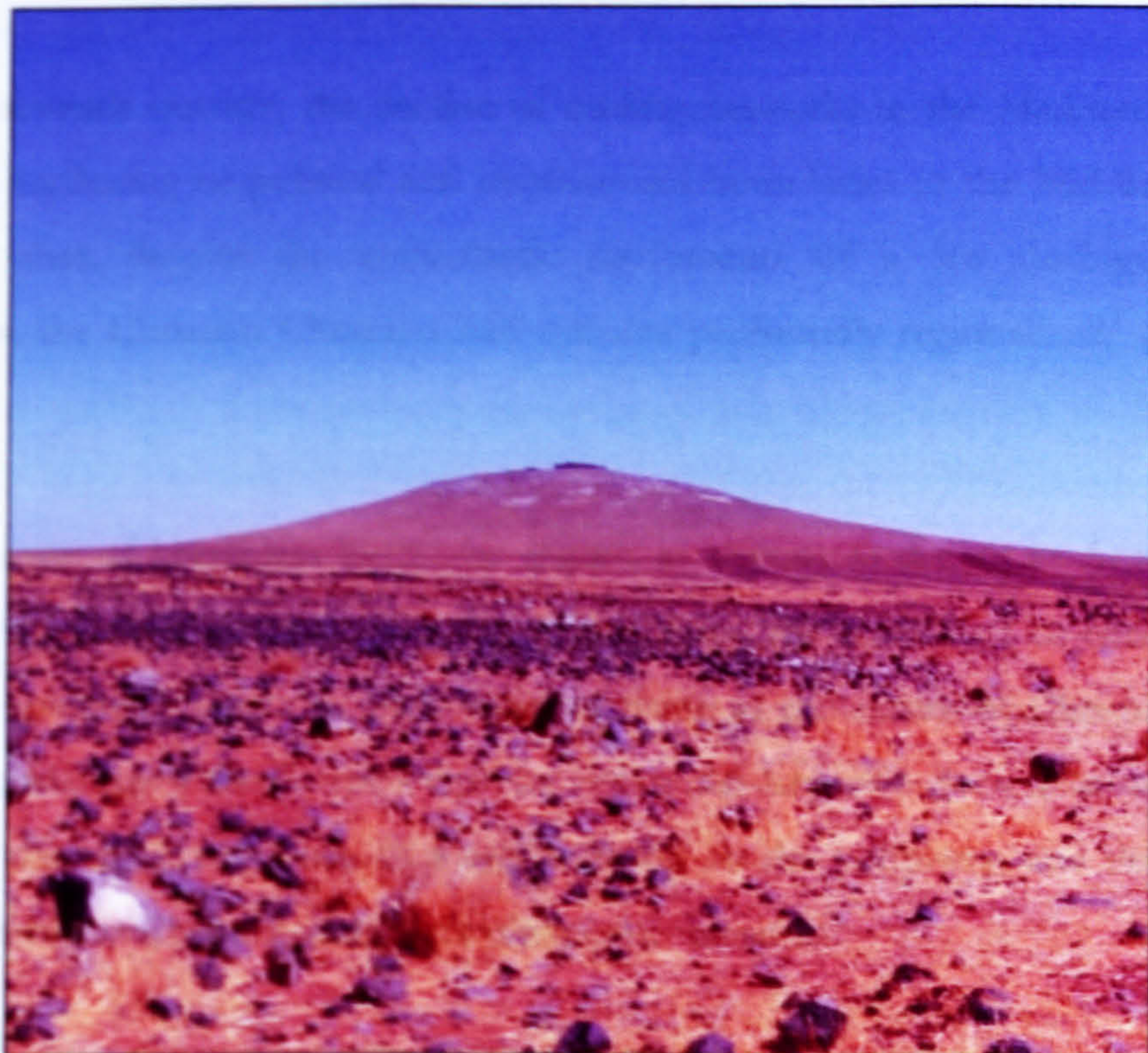


Figure 131: Dayr al-Nasrani from the west, showing its prominent position

Lassus has interpreted this site as a defensive structure protecting its inhabitants from a hostile *bedou* population (1947, 236). However, the range and scale of resource provision associated with the site suggests a more complex relationship with nearby nomadic groups. It may have been that monasteries such as this, far from being isolated and self-sufficient in Late Antiquity, in fact played a strong role in the administration of surplus gathered either from the settled population, from nomadic tribes or both. They may also have controlled the payment of taxation and the distribution of the *annona* to Ghassanid *foedorati*. Further work is required in order to suggest what forms this administration and control took, and how such relationships may have changed through time. However, a general conclusion can be drawn from this example that monasteries may have been as socially and politically



influential in the Hauran as in the limestone massif, but that the pre-existing specifics of social context mean that the subsequent development of monasticism varied slightly from region to region.

### 7.7 'Micro-Christendoms' & political fragmentation

Broadening out still further now, it is important to consider the wider theoretical context of the role argued for monasticism in this thesis. Peter Brown has pioneered the term 'micro-Christendoms' to account for the ways in which the diverse manifestations of the Christian church found advantage in the fragmented political world of new, emerging elites. He summarises that:

'By the seventh century, the decline of trading networks in the Mediterranean and the hardening of political and confessional boundaries in the Middle East ensured that, despite the enthusiastic movements of a few distinguished travellers, the Christian Churches had become profoundly regionalized.' (2002, 218)

There was 'a sense of breathless hurry', he argues, as regions as distant as Armenia, Spain and Northumbria, sought to create 'if in diminished form, the essence of an entire Christian culture'. Each sought to create its own sense of being at the centre of Christian thought, through the translation of the Gospels into the vernacular language. Such texts were of great importance in dispelling any sense of a region being on the periphery, and thus far from what was perceived as Christian truth and, ultimately, salvation.

'Like high-energy vitamin capsules, they reassured contemporaries that the total nourishment of Christian truth, once distributed with insouciant abundance through so many books, was now available in their own times, to be 'activated' in the urgent, deeply existential task of building up a local Christendom.' (2002, 218)

Those who brought and managed the expertise to create such texts were of enhanced legitimacy if they could convince their congregation that they had constructed their own 'Israel', their own paradise. Each monastery acted as the crucial broker, in that it attracted and demanded resources, and were then able to produce the works which created that sense of being at the centre of an entire Christian world. But our basis of evidence for such a process of ideological consolidation is no longer confined to early Christian texts alone. By



observing the archaeological evidence for changes in the organisation of production within and in relation to monastic sites, as well as the ways in which monastic communities structured and enclosed their space, it is possible to observe a process by which monastic estates created the basis for both local sacred landscapes and the means for a sophisticated political apparatus.

But however tempting it is to draw much broader parallels with emergent monasticism elsewhere, it is clear that such a role for monasteries may not have occurred at the same time in all regions of the Christian world. A recent survey by Baird of the Konya plain in central Turkey has located evidence for an expansion of settlement into much more marginal areas in the fifth to seventh centuries, coinciding with an organised expansion of irrigation networks (2004). The presence of a stone structure in many of these villages led Baird to conclude that ecclesiastical organisation may have been responsible for such an expansion. It could be suggested that monasteries drove such changes and sought to intensify surplus production in the countryside. Although the dating resolution for the Konya plain survey is not yet refined, its results would seem to be broadly contemporary with both the limestone massif and the Hauran in Syria. For other regions, similar trajectories may be suggested, but at different times.

In Palestine, for example, networks of monastic sites were established in Judea as early as the mid-fourth century (Hirschfeld 1992). For Europe, such developments tended to occur somewhat later. Even though Martin of Tours' pioneering foundation at Marmoutier began in the 370s, and Jerome's early experiment in Rome was in place by 382, there is little suggestion of large, collective institutions until coenobia like Monte Cassino in the 530s. In the north-west, in spite of claims that late Roman monasticism can be identified archaeologically in Britain (for example, Spary-Green 2003), there is no firm evidence until Anglo-Saxon institutions such as Monkwearmouth and Jarrow in the mid-seventh century (Cramp 1994). In central and eastern Ireland large ecclesiastical estates which were well situated to facilitate communication with other settlements, and were also well equipped themselves with associated agricultural enclosures and storage facilities did not appear until the later seventh century (Edwards 1990). For the south-west of Scotland, the north of Ireland and Cumbria, similar large ecclesiastical sites displaying links with secular power and acting as foci for specialist craftworking, appeared also in the seventh century (Toop *forthcoming*). Hodges has argued on the basis of his work at San Vincenzo al Volturno that monastic participation in the broader economy may have varied from luxury gift exchange



and patronage early in the seventh and eighth centuries, to a switch to control of agricultural production as late as the tenth century (1989, 1993).

Some of these links between monastic development in different regions may have been direct. It is known, for example, that influential ecclesiastical elites like Athanasius and Rufinus of Aquileia as well as writers and ascetics like Cassian, travelled often between the southern and eastern Mediterranean and Europe (Lawrence 2001, Stewart 1998). These travellers, as well as the works they brought with them like Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*, carried both the idea of monasticism, as well as some of its specific organisational elements, to audiences in Europe. Translations of works from Greek to Latin took place and pilgrimage from south to north gathered pace from the late fourth century onwards.

However, some of these similarities of trajectory are too chronologically diverse to have been connected. It is more likely that they are incidental and derive from the similar effects which holy men may have had on rural communities, even where the details of belief, practice and chronology are entirely local. For example, the extreme asceticism of Eusebius and his union with the like-minded Ammianus in the mid-fourth century led to the foundation of Dayr Tell 'Ada and associated complexes. Theodoret recalls numerous disciples coming to join them, then, like Eusebonas and Abibion, going off to found new complexes in the area. Communication with both associated monasteries and nearby villages like Tell Ada, Turmanin, Dana and elsewhere was probably frequent, with the communities of the villages becoming increasingly dependent on the organisation and authority of the monasteries.

For Cassiodorus in Italy, a former military officer and aristocrat of the early sixth century, monasticism was primarily a matter of learning and his *Institutes* imply a sense of order to the learning he imposed on his monastic followers (Lawrence 2001). The educational scheme is one which encourages the classics of Hellenic philosophy, contrasting with the down-to-earth anti-Hellenic rhetoric of many of the Syrian figures. Asceticism did not feature and Cassiodorus established his own monastic complex at Vivarium, on his own estate. This is in stark contrast to the Dayr Tell 'Ada project which, Theodoret tells us, only came about following long persuasion by Ammianus that Eusebius should abandon his harsh, solitary life. Once he had done so, Eusebius' instructions to his followers were to pray or worship however they wish, as long as they had learned to conquer the challenges of ascetic life. But in spite of these differences of local practice, it is the fierce determination of individual holy figures, their ability to influence others to take up the monastic idea and ability – whether by



private means or through the extraction of tribute – to support it economically, that makes the development of early monasticism in many contrasting parts of the late antique world similar.

If the rise and development of monasticism can be seen to be in some respects similar in many areas, but with important differences relating to local socio-economic contexts, what of their subsequent development and decline in later centuries?

### 7.8 Arrested development? Monastic landscapes and early Islam

Returning to the north-west of Syria, is it possible to suggest why the early stages of proto-feudal organisation suggested by this thesis did not continue further? The subject of the decline of monasteries has received little attention. However, this stands in contrast to attention given to the issue of settlement as a whole. Tchalenko's argument, that the Muslim invasions of the 640s disrupted trade between rural Syria and the Mediterranean, and thus brought to an end the great period of prosperity for the olive producing regions of Late Antiquity has been shown to be flawed. The excavation of Dehes indicated a longevity of settlement survival right into the ninth century, but with a period of marked impoverishment from the later sixth century (Sodini et al 1980). Magness has taken issue with the interpretation of accumulated deposits on floors as 'impoverishment', suggesting instead that it indicates a period of thriving economic success for the sixth and seventh centuries, and is thus similar to her conclusions for rural Palestine (2003). However, there seems little doubt that the increasing subdivision of internal rooms with makeshift partitions at Dehes indicates a lack of ability by the inhabitants to expand settlement by erecting new buildings, and instead an attempt to cope with increasing family sizes within the same buildings. Tate's analysis of domestic housing across the region also suggests a more general trend of the subdivision of rooms from around 550 (1992, 307). Indeed, if Tate's dating schemes for architectural and construction styles are correct, it seems likely that almost no new buildings were erected across the limestone massif until the Medieval mosques of the mid- and late Islamic periods (Tchalenko 1953 I, 154-155). This would concur with the interpretation of socio-economic control given by this thesis, that increasing control of land and resources by monastic authorities restricted the horizontal expansion of settlements. The question remains though, would this necessarily have brought about a period of decline?

For Kennedy, there was a major shift after around 540, caused by a combination of plague, earthquakes and the effects of the Byzanto-Persian war (1986). In particular, it was the



outbreaks of plague in 541-3, 568, 560-1, 573-4, 592 and 599 which weakened the ability of the population of Syria to cope with earthquakes and the debilitating effects of war from 540 to 561 and 572 to 591 in particular.

A somewhat longer chronology of decline could be suggested whereby sixth and seventh century disruptions were not as destructive of the socio-economy as the shift in political and economic power represented by the Abbasid foundation of Baghdad. It is often assumed, though rarely explicitly reasoned, that during the 750s and 760s, as the Euphrates-Tigris axis became more involved in trading activity, and the Arabian Gulf became the major ocean outlet, Damascus, Aleppo and Amman declined in importance and the Mediterranean ports fell out of use (a view which originated with Pirenne 1939, 284-5, but is found less explicitly in many later syntheses, such as Hillenbrand 1999, 38-40). This would have left the surpluses of the countryside with a diminished market in which to participate, and ultimately to a drastic decline in wealth in both rural and urban areas throughout the eighth and ninth centuries.

However, neither of these explanations seems entirely satisfactory. With regard to the former, both Ward-Perkins (2000b, 385-6) and Wickham (2005, 14) have criticised the tendency among scholars of Late Antiquity to cite disasters as primary forces for change, even where such events as war and famine in fact derive from deeper problems within the social structure. With regard to long distance exchange, although explanations relating to fluctuations in trade have been the norm since Pirenne (1939), it could in fact be asserted that 'economic change is dependent on structures that operate at a regional and sub-regional level' (Wickham 2003, 400; similar sentiments expressed by Roskams 1996, 172). Trade is not, in itself, the main reason for social change, but the symptom of internal, structural change within society. Earthquakes, disease and war probably did not help economic development very much, nor make social relations straightforward, but they are not viewed here as causal.

Instead, the lack of investment in the production infrastructure coupled with the demands of the Monophysite Church infrastructure may have led to a slow, long-term decline from the mid-sixth century until the ninth. The moment at which individual villages began to decline economically was probably contingent on the specifics of social relations and resources in each case, and would necessitate careful fieldwalking and selective excavation to elucidate.



So if monasteries became the new rural landlords throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, what was their role once population decline set in from the late sixth century onwards? The extent to which monasteries remained powerful in the countryside after the sixth century is not clear. Some continued as pilgrimage centres, as indicated by inscriptional evidence at Dayr Sim'an as late as the eleventh and perhaps even the twelfth, century (Littmann 1934, 5-39; Tchalenko 1953 I, 206), but these are likely to have been only those which had sufficiently complex forms of economic procurement and cultural contacts to survive. This development may be seen as similar to that of Whithorn in south-west Scotland, where the monastery continued in use in spite of the decline of many smaller sites in the Irish Sea region, on the back of burial dues (Hill 1997). The continuation of these larger institutions with a strong pilgrimage element is likely to have played a role in modern conceptions of what a late antique monastery should be regarded as, thus distorting the variation of monastic activity in place earlier in the fourth to sixth centuries.

Other monasteries enjoyed the development of some degree of success in spite of their declining ability to draw tribute, largely through patronage by Muslim elites. It is known that the Caliph al-Walid I died at Dayr Murrān in 715, for example, and other institutions are mentioned in documentary sources as acting as rests during royal hunting trips (Sourdel 1960). We know from early Islamic legal documentation that monasteries were often forbidden from erecting new buildings, or even repairing damage, though how far this was enforced on the ground is unclear (Fattal 1958). Those monasteries that survived in the very long-term were only those surrounded by continuing Christian populations who could support them, as in the Tur 'Abdin near Mardin (Bell 1982, Parry 2001).

The numbers of monasteries that survived into the early Islamic period, and the precise ways in which they drew revenue is not clear. Some have sought to suggest that Christian institutions thrived in the seventh and eighth centuries (for example, Schick 1992, 1995 for Jordan and Palestine). Some monasteries certainly continued in use well into the nineteenth century, and continued to act as centres for Church hierarchies (as at Dayr Mar Musa, for example, (Dall'Oglio 1998), and in the Tur Abdin at Dayr al-Za'faran [Bell 1982]). It could even be suggested that the continuing presence of monasteries influenced the layering of Muslim sacred space and the form of *khirqa* sanctuaries. However, the issue of monastic survival during the Islamic period has received too little attention on the whole to make any firm conclusions here.



## 7.9 The monastery as 'politician': developing the model

This thesis has now developed somewhat from the initial model proposed in Chapter 3. It is important to define a further, more refined model based on the research discussed in this thesis. This is not intended to act as the basis for crude, 'deductive' lines of reasoning, but as an interpretive framework which may serve to guide future research. Before this framework is outlined, two elements to the theoretical discussion thus far require clarification. The first relates to some of the terminology used, and especially the word 'tribute'. The second is the question of whether there is anything about the role of monasteries described in this thesis which is particular, or whether we can simply substitute 'monastery' for any other form of rural elite residence in Late Antiquity.

Earlier in this thesis it was suggested that monastic communities established themselves in positions which enabled them to oversee a change in social relations. This change was from a situation where most rural peasants paid tax to imperial collectors based in the city, to one where monasteries were instead the foremost authority, able to glean tribute and then rent either in the form of surplus or through labour from villages under their economic and ideological control. While this scenario is still largely credible, the research which contributed to Chapters 5 and 6, and the further development of these ideas in the current chapter, has in fact introduced a number of important caveats and refinements to this general idea.

The first is that the issue of 'tribute' may seem ambiguous. Interpretations of this term, even among Marxist commentators, vary. For some, it is a 'catch-all' term which encompasses later developments termed by others 'feudalism' (Haldon 1993, 67-9). In this sense, it is present wherever any given society possesses a distinction between producers and exploiters with the latter drawing surplus. For Roskams and Saunders, 'tributary' relations indicate instead the specific situation where surplus is gleaned after production has taken place, and usually from groups, rather than on a household or even an individual basis (2001, 65). There is some ambiguity about whether collection on a group basis took place in northern Syria. Although Theodoret indicates that a village close to Emesa gave money to the holy man Abraham on a *collective* basis (*HR* XVII:4), he also shows there are instances where individuals alone make donations to a monk or a monastery. Given this ambiguity, it is important to be clear that the definition adopted here is not necessarily one of scale, but of regularity of payment and the point of intervention in the production process. This view is similar to that of Amin, who regards the difference between tributary and feudal modes as



deriving from the degree of control exerted by the elite, rather than any fundamental difference of scale (1976).

Section 7.2 discussed the complex and lengthy overlap likely to have occurred between a situation where occasional or irregular payments to monastic institutions took place, and where such payments were standardised or organised in the form of active monastic participation in production. Irregular payments took the form of 'donations' – of children or 'fallen' adults to a monastery, of land, food, buildings or labour to construct buildings anew. In a sense, these donations could also be regarded as votive offerings; at times they may have been given in a situation resembling alms, and in certain cases – though this is unlikely to have been the norm for fourth to sixth century Syria – we could also use patronage to denote gifts given by a wealthy elite. All of these situations are different, and probably involved a lengthy transition from irregular to standardised, but 'tribute' would seem the best overall term to describe all of these ways of giving. However, in spite of this lengthy overlap, it is crucial that we recognise the difference between these methods on the one hand, and a situation on the other where labour or rent is agreed upon in a standardised way, if we are to be clear that monasteries did, in some sense at least, organise proto-feudal relations.

It seems probable that by the mid-sixth century if not a little earlier, monasteries orchestrated a shift from somewhat arbitrary donations to a more standardised arrangement resembling the beginnings of a feudal arrangement. In some ways, such a model is similar to a number of similar ideas posited for rural communities in many areas of the late antique world, whereby local landowners interrupt the imperial taxation system and become rural landlords. For North Africa, for example, Roskams has proposed a progression throughout the fifth and sixth centuries whereby a group of local tribute collectors began to clash with the state. They attempted to separate their region from state control, but at the same time constructed an ideology which separated them from the local producers. Once 'state shackles could be cast aside', these tribute takers become 'rent-taking lords' (Roskams 1996, 178).

However, it would be problematic simply to conclude that monasteries behaved in exactly the same way as any other kind of high-status residence. In some ways a model involving monastic institutions is somewhat different, since the scenario of tribute-taking is quite specific, deriving from the complex notions of intercession with the divine built-up by holy figures from an early stage. The 'cross-over' between this situation and standardised rent is



thus especially complex, as monasteries gradually relinquish their ideology of poverty and separation, and adapt it in order to assume more explicit economic control.

Having clarified these points, the various stages described here in sections 7.1 to 7.8 to account for the role of monasteries in late antique rural society in Syria could be summarised in a way that would serve as a reformed model. Such a model contains nine general developments, and is as follows:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Development</b>
1	From as early as the second century, a network of holy figures adopts a powerful, intercessory role in rural society (Brown 1971, 1982a).
2	This begins to encompass ever-more integral economic and spiritual arrangements with local communities, as holy figures begin to adopt a variety of leadership roles.
3	The giving of land and surplus as <i>ad hoc</i> donations enables monastic institutions to develop from sparse, dispersed and often singular units into large, planned conglomerations.
4	These are placed in locations and structured in such a way as to bind communities to particular monasteries, thus enabling closer economic control. This may begin in the form of a combination of small-scale pilgrimage and limited processing of goods, develop into the larger scale processing of harvested produce and finally involve the laying out of whole field systems and interaction at every stage of the production process.
5	The control exerted by the city over its hinterland declines throughout the late fourth and fifth centuries as the economy of various rural regions partially internalises.
6	These changes coincide with the theological controversies of the mid-fifth century which further distance rural systems of control from the city by embedding an ideology of Syriac, Monophysite distinctiveness. Though some local rivalry between institutions would seem likely, groups of monastic sites form powerful collectives capable of withstanding external ideological, economic and even physical pressure.
7	Monasteries invest surpluses in both their material culture and architecture and then a political and ecclesiastical infrastructure. The productive infrastructure in the countryside begins to stagnate from the early sixth century.
8	Population rises of the fifth century, coupled with an inability of the rural peasantry to expand spatially, means that conditions within villages become somewhat impoverished, with buildings being increasingly subdivided. Recovery from plague and earthquake damage is therefore inhibited, and production declines.
9	The Muslim invasions have little immediate impact, and indeed the monasteries which are still in existence continue in use. However, with decreasing control over rural resources, their numbers decline. The institutions which remain are those specialist pilgrimage centres which are able to reach out beyond the region to sources of high status patronage.

*Table 35: Summary of the refined model presented as a result of the research in this thesis*

Clearly, this model, though a developed version of the ideas presented in Chapter 3, is at best a preliminary framework. Certain regions, such as the portion of the limestone massif north of Apamea and which formed part of Syria Secunda, were probably never as ideologically independent from the city as Syria Prima, and so the population remained



largely Orthodox in allegiance. How this ideological continuation occurred, and whether it was associated with continued economic control, is not clear and would require an extension of the kind of research carried out by this thesis, to that region. Furthermore, it is not clear how such a model should be adapted to take account of regions where control of surplus required very different mechanisms. It may have been the case, for example, that at sites such as Dayr al-Nasrani, surplus control was not of harvested crops, but of water resources and animals. The chronology of these various changes requires clarification. Different regions, and indeed different communities, are likely to have progressed at different rates, but even at a local level our understanding of the stagnation and decline of rural control in the later sixth, seventh and eighth centuries relies on the excavation at Dehes alone. The model therefore requires a number of crucial aspects to be investigated further through carefully defined fieldwork. These objectives, along with the broader intellectual context for this research, will now serve as the final section of this thesis.

#### 7.10 Future work: the monastery and Syriac identity today

It was noted at the start of this thesis that one of its aims was to enhance the range and quality of understanding about late antique monasticism in Syria, in part because of the symbolic importance of early monasticism for the Syrian Orthodox community today. In many ways, this is a community displaced by political unrest and emigration throughout the twentieth century, and one which finds the assertion of a common identity a challenging task (Sato 2003). Within the context of such challenges, early Christian figures and the monasteries with which they came to be associated represent common nodes of reference and sources of inspiration (Syrian Orthodox Resources 2000). The sense of connection felt by the Syrian Orthodox community living in Syria today with the archaeological site of Dayr Tell 'Ada, for example, has led the church authorities to purchase the land on which it stands and begin assembling plans to excavate and reconstruct the site anew (Mar Yohanna Ibrahim *pers comm.* Aug 2002). Surviving monastic communities, whether Syrian Orthodox or Syrian Catholic, act as centres for social events, festivals, meetings and arbitration of local matters (as at Dayr Mar Elian, Loosley & Finneran 2004). At a broader level, monastic communities across the Middle East continue to play a role of political representation for their congregations, as evidenced in recent decades in Lebanon (Schemm 2005). Broader still, monastic sites of all faiths act as multi-layered centres of sacred landscapes, often contested but always relevant for those who have cause to use them (Shaw 2000).

It is for these reasons that bringing a degree of methodological and theoretical rigour to the subject of the social impact of early monasteries is of crucial importance. For the narratives



highlighted here to be carried on, the information provided by the archaeological community must continue to be thought-provoking and even controversial. Without such stimuli, debate surrounding early monastic sites runs the risk of becoming stagnant and not moving forward to compete within the multi-faceted discourses of post-modernity in the twenty-first century.

It is hoped then that the refined model presented in this thesis can continue to provide such a stimulus. By looking at monasteries not solely as spiritual and cultural communities, but as politically and economically active centres which brought about social change on a wide scale, their significance can be shown to be complex and varied. However, the study presented here can only be experimental, given the restrictions of time and resources imposed by the nature of doctoral study. If the monasteries brought about a fundamental change in social relations in north-west Syria as proposed here for the fourth to seventh centuries, then a great deal more work remains to be done in order to satisfy the model in other respects. Research along these lines could be conducted with four aims. These are as follows:

#### *Improved Local Chronology and Landscape Context*

For the limestone massif, presented as a study area in this thesis, the problems of chronology in general, and of missing morphological information for certain sites in particular, have been discussed. In order to clarify the ambiguous earliest phases of monasticism, gauge more accurately their role in agricultural production and understand their decline and eventual abandonment, further fieldwork is required. Such fieldwork should consist of seven elements:

- 1) A comprehensive recording of the evidence for field systems along lines established by Abdulkarim for the Hama region (1997), and the digitisation of such information into a Geographical Information System would allow a proper study of the organisation and subsequent reorganisation of agricultural regimes beyond the anecdotal data presented by studies thus far. Aerial photography for this region, though available, has tended to be patchy and difficult to access. Therefore, use of 1960s Corona satellite imagery would prove far more fruitful given preliminary use of such images for the limestone massif carried out for this thesis.
- 2) Selected test excavation could be used at crucial junction points within these field systems – ie where field boundaries meet structures of known date, or where



different forms of agricultural system intersect. The resulting stratigraphic evidence could be used to clarify the chronology of such field systems and thereby identify when widespread agricultural changes took place.

- 3) Further excavation could be carried out in order to verify the hypothesis offered by the Dehes project that buildings become increasingly subdivided and 'impoverished' from the second half of the sixth century onwards. The chronology of such changes should also be scrutinised. The selection of such site(s) should be carefully made in order to ensure a maximum possible depth of archaeological deposits and therefore the greatest possible chance of understanding the stratigraphy accurately. Deeper deposits would also facilitate the gathering of macro-faunal and flotation samples, as well as material for ceramic chronologies in order to enhance the studies made by Touma (1984) and Villeneuve (Sodini & Villeneuve 1992, Villeneuve & Watson 2001). Examples of suitable sites are Mi'az and Radwa.
- 4) An improved understanding of ceramic chronology would enable fieldwalking within the environs of selected villages and monastic sites to be carried out in order to clarify both the length of occupation at such sites, as well as the possible extent of expansion and contraction of such sites. Fieldwalking may also clarify the extent to which LRA1 was being used in the limestone massif.
- 5) Where the layout of field systems, or indeed of specific elements within monastic sites, is unclear, geophysics could be used in rapid surveys to clarify ambiguities. In particular, resistivity would react well to the potential contrasts offered between the predominantly limestone building materials and the soft, silt soil, especially during the winter season. The site of Qasr al-Brad would be a good example, as would Burj Nasr.
- 6) Ambiguous structures on monastic sites, and particularly those the interpretation of which ranges between use for livestock, storage of goods or human accommodation, could be investigated using geochemical methods. In particular, magnetic susceptibility and phosphate analysis would offer increased insights into previous use. The structure to the north-west of Qasr al-Brad would benefit from such work, as would the tower at Dayr Dehes (if the deposits within have not already been excavated).



- 7) Finally, the standing stratigraphy present at monastic sites could be inspected further in order to clarify whether the suggestions made in this thesis for the survival of the earliest phases of monastic activity are indeed born out across the region. Sites such as Kusik, Burk 'Akkush 'A', Qasr al-Banat and Qal'at Sirmada would benefit from such an analysis. This would clarify the extent to which the earliest phases of settled monasticism can be discerned, and especially provide evidence deriving from the late fourth to mid-fifth centuries which are currently not represented in discussions of this subject.

### *Local Comparisons*

In addition to these studies at a local level, comparison of the results presented here for the northern limestone massif with the monasteries of the 'Apamean' zone further to the south would be fruitful. Do the rather different morphological characteristics of these monastic complexes derive from genuine differences of intent in the monastic movement there, or from differences in the pre-existing settlement pattern from which monasteries derived? How do such differences compare with zones immediately adjacent to the limestone massif, such as the recently investigated Amuq Valley? Did such zones host genuinely different settlement forms in the past, or are apparent differences merely taphonomic?

### *Regional Comparisons*

Comparison of the model constructed here, of monasteries driving a change in social relations from taxation to tributary to proto-feudal relations, should be made with areas outside Roman Syria. The Hauran region would seem to suggest that although a different socio-economic context prevailed, resulting in settlement patterns which contrast with those of the Syria Prima, in fact monasteries played a similarly active role in the management of surplus deriving from the rural population. However, the extent to which production was actually organised by monastic complexes, or whether the resulting resources were merely exchanged and stored there is unclear. Further fieldwork at and around sites such as Dayr al-Nasrani would help to clarify the ways in which monasteries were connected with their hinterland, and may go some way towards answering this question.

### *Heritage Management*

Finally, the Geographical Information System presented in this thesis can be used as the basis of a heritage management tool, whereby site information can be added incrementally and made accessible to a broad range of parties through the Directorate General for Antiquities and Museums. The recent creation of the Syrian limestone massif as a World



Heritage Site has focused attention on which areas of this region require further consolidation and further research. A series of site databases which could be laid over series of interchangeable base maps would help such a management project in logistical terms. By comparing information from past aerial images provided by Corona for the 1960s, with more recent Ikonos recent satellite imagery from the 1990s, identification of areas which require particular attention due to destruction could be carried out. This would help ensure that a situation whereby a handful of arbitrarily 'significant' sites such as Qal'at Sim'an and Sarjilla are conserved and presented simply because we have inherited them from the past in a better state of preservation, while the majority of 'lesser' sites risk serious neglect, could be avoided. A thorough and well-maintained GIS ensures that every area and site within the limestone massif receives equal attention.

This thesis has sought to deconstruct and reform our view of monastic behaviour in Late Antiquity, from the earliest moments for which evidence remains to the process of institutionalisation in the fifth and sixth centuries. This research has necessitated not only the generation of fresh 'data' through fieldwork and spatial analysis, but also thorough examination of the ways in which such work has been conceived, argued and theorised by past practitioners. In a similar fashion, the model suggested by this thesis needs to be subjected to proper scrutiny. It is very much hoped that implementation of the four-stage programme outlined above would enable such scrutiny to take place.

And in this way, discussion returns to the final paragraphs of Chapter 1, which stressed the importance of recognising the heterogeneity of the early Christian church. It is hoped that the viewpoint presented here, though inevitably controversial, can add a useful voice to the great many – scholars, church leaders, lay congregations and external observers – discussing, scrutinising and holding dear the early development of today's many and varied Christian communities.



## Glossary

The following is intended to clarify certain terms found throughout the thesis, especially within place names. The definitions given are not intended to be definitive, but to act as a quick reference only. In order to contextualise each term, the relevant discussion in the thesis text should be referred to. The definitions given below derive from the following sources:

Burns, R. (1999) *Monuments of Syria*. London: I.B.Tauris.

Hillenbrand, R. (1994) *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function & Meaning*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mango, C. (1978) *Byzantine Architecture*. Milan: Electa Editrice.

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- burj* Arabic term for a tower (pl *brayj*). Application of this term can vary widely throughout western Asia and North Africa, and *burj* implies no specific usage. It can be used to describe a stand alone tower, a structure associated with a fortification, a lighthouse, an agricultural barn, a dovecote or even the masonry pier of a bridge.
- dayr (or deir)* This term usually means 'monastery' in Arabic, and derives from the Syriac *dayro* (as in the monastery of Kirkmo Dayro in the Tur Abdin, in Arabic known as Deir al-Zafaran). However, *dayr* in modern Syrian Arabic can be used to denote a large parish church complex, although it is not clear for how long this usage of the term has existed. Not to be confused with 'dar' (house or government bureau in Arabic), though the two can often become conflated in popular speech. In place names, *dayr* can be assigned to any old structure perceived to have had a Christian religious association in the past, and does not necessarily constitute an accurate description of the original use of a site. See sections 4.7 and 4.8 for a more thorough discussion.
- hayr (or heir)* Arabic term for an enclosure, though not necessarily of a fortified nature. At early Islamic sites such as Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, the term refers to the enclosure of a high status residence with associated gardens. For place names in northern Syria, it is unclear what the enclosure surrounds specifically.
- jebel (or jabal)* Arabic term for mountain (pl *jibāl* or *ajbāl*).
- kafr (or kefr)* Generally refers to a village, although its linguistic origin and precise definition are unclear.
- khirba (or kherba)* Arabic term for ruins.
- qal'a (or qal'a)* Arabic term for a castle or fortress, although in place names this does not necessarily constitute a reliable description of the original use of a structure.



- qasr* (or *qaṣr*) An Arabic term which generally refers to a high status residence (pl *quṣūr*), although its usage varies widely throughout western Asia and North Africa. Mainly, variation applies to the extent to which such structures are fortified, but also to their scale. The diminutive *quṣayr* describes a small version of a *qaṣr*.
- tell* (or *tall*) Arabic term for a mound of anthropogenic origin, usually built up through centuries of mud brick deposition followed by phases of rebuilding. *Tell* is synonymous with the Turkish *tepe*.
- bema* Greek term for the slightly raised, U-shaped platform found in the nave of some churches (pl *bemata*).
- wadi* (or *wādi*) Arabic term for a dry valley which seasonally becomes a water course.



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