X. The Size of the Population of Antioch

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The ancient evidence for the size of the population of Antioch is in general no more clear or reliable than it is for the populations of other cities, for the authors often speak of these matters in allusive terms and we cannot always be sure of the meaning of their figures. As might be expected, the testimonia in the case of Antioch differ greatly in clarity and apparent reliability, and some of the figures given are capable of being interpreted in different ways. The present collection of material offers all the texts known to the writer which might have some significance for the size of the population of Antioch between 301 B.C. and A.D. 588. The collection is also, the writer believes, more comprehensive than the figures which scholars have had occasion to use in the past, and some new interpretations of the known evidence are proposed here. While it is not yet possible to arrive at definitive conclusions in the case of some of the figures which have been preserved, the material available does indicate certain general conclusions; and it may be of value in the study of the populations of other cities. Since there are such differences in the estimates of the size of the population of Antioch at various times in its history which have been proposed by scholars, and since such estimates sometimes represent different bases and methods of calculation, the present writer has thought it wiser on the whole not to add his own hypotheses to those which already exist, especially since our ideas of the size of the population of Antioch are inevitably connected with the problems of the size of other cities. For this reason it has seemed best for the most part merely to present the figures and the interpretations which have been placed upon them, and allow the reader to form his own judgment.

The ancient tradition concerning the size of the population of Antioch at the time of its settlement in 301 B.C., preserved in the local *Chronicle* of John Malalas (201.12–16 Bonn ed.), is that the Athenians and Macedonians who were settled in the city

numbered τοὺς πάντας ἄνδρας ͵ετ'. Whether this figure is intended to represent the grand total, or only the adult male citizens, is not clear. The number given suggests a comparison with the figure 5,040 which Plato (*Laws* 737E, 740D–E) gives for the landholders and heads of households in the ideal city. If there were 5,500 adult male citizens in the original settlement of Antioch, the total free population, including women and children, would have been somewhere between 17,000 and 25,000, according to the different methods of estimating the size of average families. In addition, the founder, Seleucus Nicator, settled a number of native Syrians in Antioch at the same time,[1] but there is no indication how many of these there may have been. V. Tscherikower in his study of Hellenistic city foundations[2] concludes that cities such as Antioch did not, at the time of foundation, ordinarily possess more than 10,000 free citizens; and this would support the view that the figure preserved by Malalas refers to adult male citizens, rather than to the total free population. A possible parallel may be found in the statement of Polybius (5.61.1) that in 220 B.C. Seleucia Pieria, one of the sister cities of Antioch, contained 6,000 *eleutheroi*, presumably the adult male citizens.

We know from literary texts that the area of Antioch was enlarged several times in the Hellenistic period, notably in the reigns of Seleucus II (246–226 B.C.), Antiochus III (223–187 B.C.) and Antiochus IV (170–163 B.C.),[3] but there is no reliable indication of the size of the population at this time. There is one text in which figures are given, but it seems untrustworthy. When the Jewish leader Jonathan sent Jewish troops to Antioch to aid Demetrius II in 145 B.C., the Jews are said in 1 *Maccabees* 11.45–47 to have killed 100,000 of the 120,000 Antiochenes who resisted them. This claim, which is not substantiated by the narrative of Josephus (*Ant.* 13.137), is very likely an exaggeration, especially since only 3,000 Jewish troops are said to have been

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[1] Strabo 16.2.4, p. 750; see W. W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization*[3] (London 1952) 158; A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (Oxford 1937) 244; G. Downey, "Strabo on Antioch: Notes on his Method," *TAPA* 72 (1941) 89, 95.

[2] "Die hellenistische Städtegründungen," *Philologus*, Suppl. 19, pt. 1 (1927) 199–200. For an illuminating study of the purposes and methods of the founders of the Hellenistic cities, see C. Bradford Welles, "The Greek City," *Studi in onore di A. Calderini e R. Paribeni* (Milan 1956) 81–99.

[3] Downey (above, note 1) 85–95.

involved; but the figures given may actually represent the population of the city, rather than the number slain. If it were reported that the population of the city was 120,000, then an exaggerated statement that most of the people were slain might produce the claim made in 1 *Maccabees*.

Writing in the reign of Augustus and the first years of Tiberius, Strabo says (16.2.5, p. 750c) that Antioch was not much smaller in size and population than Seleucia on the Tigris and Alexandria in Egypt. Here we have the basis for one of our best estimates for the size of the population of Antioch, for Diodorus Siculus, writing just before the middle of the first century before Christ, states (17.52) that he had been told by officials in Alexandria that the city had a population of more than 300,000 *eleutheroi* or free inhabitants. This would place the population of Antioch in Strabo's day at about 300,000.[4] There is no way of calculating the number of the slaves and the non-citizen inhabitants. Pliny, writing fifty years or more after Strabo, gives the population of Seleucia on the Tigris as 600,000 (*Nat. hist.* 6.122). Unless there had been a very marked increase since the time of Strabo, this would presumably represent both the slave and the free population. When Seleucia on the Tigris was destroyed by Avidius Cassius in A.D. 165, the population was 300,000 or 400,000.[5]

Evidence for the population of Antioch next occurs in the time of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred at Rome under Trajan, ca. 100–17.[6] St. John Chrysostom in his homily on Ignatius says that, at the time when the bishop was active in Antioch, the *dêmos* amounted to 200,000 (*In S. Ignat.* 4, *Patrologia graeca* 50.591). What Chrysostom understood by *dêmos* is not certain. The word might mean the whole free population, including both adults and children, or it might mean only free adult men and women. In the latter case, which seems more

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[4] See K. J. Beloch, *Die Bevölkerung der griech.-röm. Welt* (Leipzig 1886) 245, 258–9. Beloch estimates the total population of Syria and Palestine in the reign of Augustus at five to six million. His figures are accepted by F. M. Heichelheim in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* ed. by T. Frank, 4 (Baltimore 1938) 158 and by C. H. Kraeling, "The Jewish Community at Antioch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932) 136, but are considered too low by F. Cumont, "The Population of Syria," *JRS* (1934) 187–90.

[5] M. Streck, "Seleukeia (am Tigris)" *RE* 2A (1923) 1158, 1183.

[6] B. J. Kidd, *A History of the Church to* A.D. 461 (Oxford 1922) 1.165.

likely, the total, including children, slaves, and non-citizens, would have been considerably greater.[7]

Our next evidence come from the fourth century. In a letter written in 363, Libanius speaks of Antioch as containing 150,000 *anthrôpoi*.[8] The figure appears in a report which Libanius is sending to a friend concerning the activities of a certain person, who is not named, who apparently was hostile to paganism; and in concluding his remarks, Libanius observes, with reference to this person and his activities, that it is not possible that, among 150,000 *anthrôpoi*, all should be good. *Anthrôpos* ordinarily ought to mean "a human being," of whatever age, sex or condition, and Sievers, Bury, E. Stein and Pack take the figure 150,000 to represent the total population, though Bury thinks the figure too small.[9] In connection with this figure and that given for the time of Trajan, it is well to keep in mind that, as Heichelheim points out (above, note 4), the population of Antioch was probably much larger in the prosperous and secure first and second centuries after Christ than it was at later times.

In 383/4 an attempt was made to enlarge the Plethrion at Antioch on the ground that the population of the city had increased since the last enlargements of the building, which had been made in 332 and 336 (Libanius *Or.* 10.9, 13, 25). There is no indication, in the references to this episode, of either the size of the population or the amount of the increase.

[7] In the view of Chrysostomus Baur, *Der heilige Johannes Chrysostomus und seine Zeit* (Munich 1929–30) 1.29, Chrysostom's figure presumably refers only to adult men and women. The context shows clearly that Chrysostom refers to the time of Ignatius, but several scholars have mistakenly thought that Chrysostom was speaking of his own time; see, e.g., E. Stein, *Geschichte des spätrömischen Reiches*, 1: *Vom römischen zum byzantinischen Staat* (Vienna 1928) 195, note 6; G. R. Sievers, *Das Leben des Libanius* (Berlin 1868) 3, note 9, and 122, note 101; R. A. Pack, *Studies in Libanius and Antiochene Society under Theodosius* (Diss. Michigan 1935) 12; Kraeling (above, note 4) 136; Cumont (above, note 4) 188; P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV*ᵉ *siècle après J.-C.* (Paris 1955) 310. Chrysostom elsewhere provides material concerning the population in his own day, which will be discussed below. L. Duchesne, *Histoire ancienne de l'Église* (Paris 1923–9) 1.445, states (without mentioning his authority) that the population of Antioch after the beginning of the second century after Christ was 700,000.

[8] *Epist.* 1137 ed. Wolf= 1119 ed. Förster. On the circumstances and date of the letter, see O. Seeck, *Die Briefe des Libanius* (*Texte u. Untersuchungen* 30, pt. 1–2, 1906) 221, 414.

[9] Stein and Pack *locc. citt.* (above, note 7); Sievers (above, note 7) 3, note 9; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (London 1923, reprinted New York 1958) 1.88, note 3.

Chrysostom, in one of his homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, which were delivered between the early part of 386 (when he became a priest) and 20 November 393,[10] gives a figure whose interpretation has caused some difficulty, partly because it has generally been used in connection with another figure which has been misinterpreted. In speaking of the mission of Christianity, and of the duties and responsibilities of Christians, Chrysostom says (*In Matth. hom.* 85 [86] 4, *Patrologia graeca* 58.762 f.) Καὶ γὰρ τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ χάριτι εἰς δέκα μυριάδων ἀριθμὸν οἶμαι τοὺς ἐνταῦθα συναγομένους τελεῖν. Chrysostom usually preached in the octagonal Great Church of Antioch which, after the defeat of Arianism and the reestablishment of orthodoxy under Theodosius I, was the official principal church of the city.[11] On the supposition that *entautha* refers to the Great Church, this passage has been taken (e.g. by von Harnack and C. Baur[12]) to mean that there were 100,000 orthodox Christians who belonged to the Great Church, as distinguished from members of other groups, such as Arians and followers of Apollinaris. The number 100,000 would be either the total number of the adherents of the Great Church (von Harnack) or the number of the adult adherents (as Baur tentatively suggests). On the other hand, *entautha* has been understood to refer to Antioch as a whole, and Chrysostom's words have been taken to mean that there were 100,000 Christians, of all persuasions, in the city.[13]

The figure 100,000 has been studied by some scholars (see above, note 7) in conjunction with the other figure of 200,000 mentioned by Chrysostom, and the figure 200,000 has been taken to mean that the population of Antioch at this time was 200,000, of whom half were Christians; and some students, thinking that the number 200,000 refers to adult free persons, have estimated that the total population, including children, slaves and people living in the suburbs, came to between 300,000 and 500,000.[14]

[10] H. Lietzmann, "Ioannes Chrysostomus" *RE* 9 (1916) 1814, 1817.

[11] Baur (above, note 7) 1.23 (in the copy I have used, this page is mistakenly numbered 32; it follows 22 and precedes 24).

[12] A. von Harnack, *Die Mission u. Ausbreitung des Christentums*[4] (Leipzig 1924) 2.669; Baur (above, note 7) 1.29.

[13] Pack (above, note 7) 12, note 3.

[14] Baur (above, note 7) 1.29; E. Renan, *Les apôtres*[11] (Paris 1882) 215, followed by A. Neubauer, *La géographie du Talmud* (Paris 1868) 311 (citing an earlier edition of Renan's work), Kraeling (above, note 4) 136, Petit (above, note 7) 310–11.

V. Schultze estimated a total population of about 800,000.[15] However, as has been pointed out, Chrysostom's figure of 200,000 refers not to his own time, but to that of Ignatius.

Statements by Chrysostom in another of his homilies on Matthew (66 [67] 3, *Patrologia graeca* 58.630) may throw further light on the size of the population at this time, possibly confirming some of the estimates mentioned above. Chrysostom states that in the population of Antioch, one-tenth of the people are wealthy and one-tenth paupers, with the remainder in various circumstances between these extremes. But the poor, he says, are not fed, as they should be, by their fellow Christians, though they are much fewer in number. As an example of the lack of humanity of the Christians of Antioch, he goes on to say that although the church does not feed the poor properly, it is already supporting 3,000 widows and virgins, plus many others of all conditions. Chrysostom claims that although those who are now supported, including the 3,000 widows and virgins, are only one-fifth or one-tenth of the number of the poor, the Christian community could still support the poor without serious loss to its members. Unless Chrysostom is exaggerating for rhetorical effect, this would imply that there were at least 15,000 or at least 30,000 Christian poor (the number depending upon Chrysostom's estimates of one-fifth or one-tenth for the relationship between the persons now supported and the poor); and if the poor, as Chrysostom says, formed one-tenth of the (presumably Christian) population, there would be a Christian population of 150,000 or 300,000. The Emperor Julian asserted that most of the common people of Antioch were Christians in his time (*Misopogon* 357D), and they doubtless continued to be so in the time of Theodosius I, when Chrysostom spoke. Unfortunately the rather hyperbolical language of Chrysostom's homily does not make it possible to be sure just which figures he intended to convey; and of course it was not his purpose to be precise. C. O. Müller[16] concluded from this homily that the Great Church supported 3,000 paupers, but it seems possible that Müller had not considered the passage carefully. Of course if Chrysostom meant to speak only of the adherents of the Great Church, allowance would have to be made,

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[15] *Antiocheia* (Gütersloh 1930) 152.

[16] *Antiquitates Antiochenae* (Göttingen 1839) 110, note 1, followed by H. Leclercq, "Antioche," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 1.2374.

in using his figures, for the members of the other Christian groups in the city at that time.

Under Theodosius II (A.D. 408–450) the city wall of Antioch was extended, but this does not necessarily reflect an increase in the population at this time, and may only show that it had become necessary, for reasons of security, to enclose within the city wall inhabited areas which had grown up outside the old wall.[17]

There was undoubtedly a sharp drop in the size of the population in the time of Justinian as a result of the loss of life and the property damage caused by the disastrous earthquakes of 526 and 528 and the capture and sack of the city by the Persians in 540.[18]

Attempts have been made to take the figures for the casualties in these earthquakes into account in estimating the size of the population. In the earthquake of 526, 250,000 people perished, according to Malalas (420.5), 300,000 according to Procopius (*Wars* 2.14.6), although he gives this as a report (*legontai*). However, as Malalas points out, the city was crowded with visitors because the earthquake occurred at the time of the festival of the Ascension. There is no way of determining how many of those who perished were residents of Antioch; and, further, there is no means of estimating what proportion of the residents were killed, though the casualty rate was presumably high since the earthquake is described as catastrophic. In any case figures such as this would, in view of the magnitude of the disaster, be subject to exaggeration. Leclercq[19] cites the passage in Malalas as showing that the population of the city at this time was 300,000. It is not clear whether this is an inference from the figure of the dead as given by Malalas, or whether it is a confusion of Malalas' figure with that of Procopius.

A corrective to the use of the figures for the earthquake of 526 as a basis for an estimate of the population should be found in the figures for the earthquake of 528, in which the casualties are given as 4,870 (Theophanes *anno* 6021, p. 177.31 ed. De Boor) or "about 5,000" (Malalas 443.3). The economic loss and destruction of property resulting from the earthquake of 526 must have caused some decline in the population of the city, but it is

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[17] G. Downey, "The Wall of Theodosius at Antioch," *AJP* 62 (1941) 207–13.

[18] On these episodes see E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 2: *De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien* (Paris 1949) 241–3, 420, 429, 487–91.

[19] Leclercq (above, note 16) 2371.

difficult to believe that the decline can have been in the ratio between the figures given for the casualties in the two disasters.

What seems to be the final reference of this kind in our sources appears in the accounts of the earthquake of 588 (Evagrius *Hist. eccl.* 6.8). We are told that it was estimated from the decline in the consumption of bread (the baking of which was supervised by the municipal authorities) that 60,000 persons were killed in the disaster. Here again, of course, we have no way of knowing whether the earthquake was a particularly severe one, or whether it may have occurred at a time when the city happened to be crowded.