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Foundation myths in Roman Palestine. Traditions and reworkings

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Roman province of Judaea (Syria–Palestine from the 2nd century onwards) was founded in the first half of the 1st century,[1] replacing the independent Herodian state.[2] In the preceding centuries (beginning with the Alexandrian conquest of the Achaemenid realm), Hellenistic influences had been spreading throughout the country of the Jews, even at the time when a Jewish monarchy was reestablished: mainly in Greek cities on the coast, and as far afield as Jewish cities like Jerusalem (cf. map, fig. 1), as we know from the internal conflict under the Maccabees. In accordance with the well-known Greek tradition of civic self-assertion,[3] many cities claimed to have been founded by gods or heroes. Most looked to Greek origins; some coastal cities, however, argued for a Semitic foundation, while others, as we shall see, had points of reference that were more varied. Although the antiquity of their foundations and the fact that they all underwent a process of Hellenisation may partially explain the diversity of these claims, it does not do so fully. In fact, Greek cities, founded by the Ptolemies or Seleucids, followed either local or imported traditions, whether Egyptian, Syro-Phoenician or Canaanite.[4] These traditions continued with varying strength beneath an uneven layer of Hellenism or alongside authentic Greek ones.

Claiming a mythical foundation as a way of defining one's identity was not a new phenomenon in the Roman period.[5] However, the process of reviving ancient mythical traditions, or of creating new mythical points of reference, gathered momentum from the era of the Antonines – a time of growing urbanisation. Thanks to the valuable studies of L. Robert, M. Sartre and F. Millar, among others, we know that *agônes* between cities jealous of their image generated the same trend throughout the Roman East.[6]

[1] I wish to thank T. Derks for his close reading of the manuscript and F. Lachaud, M. Lobban and A. Visser for their correction of the English text.

[2] Eck 2007a.

[3] Malkin 1987 and Bouffartigue 1996.

[4] Schürer *et al.* 1979 (vol. II), 85-183; Cohen 2006, ch. 5.

[5] Hall 2002; Rogers 1991; Bruit Zaidman/Gherchanoc 2006.

[6] Robert 1977; Sartre 1991; Millar 1993.

Does this mean that the Palestine example followed the norm? The ethnic and religious composition of the province renders such a conclusion doubtful. In fact, the assertion of mythical foundations went further than the simple expression of membership of the Graeco-Roman *oikoumenè*: it was also a means of parting themselves from the Jewish population, who had previously been masters of the land, and to secure the province's normalisation within the Roman world.

2   COINAGE AS A MEDIUM FOR DEFINING CIVIC IDENTITIES

The evidence for this comes from a variety of sources, including late mythographers who collected or reworked traditions, no matter how contradictory they were. The most significant information derives from coins, which conveyed powerful messages to contemporaries. Civic coinage gave communities an opportunity to show themselves off.[7] Coins displayed their loyalty to the Empire and the holder of *imperium*, set against a background of glorification of the city and its points of reference.[8] They were the medium through which the local elite expressed its civic pride and prestige in an official representation of the city's ideological position.[9] Hence, the repetitive character of figurations on coins from one city to another.[10] Indeed, they all drew heavily on the same repertoire of themes and forms, fashionable in the East in this period: where cities did not exchange moulds, models or engravers, they inspired one another. They all felt an equal pride in the exaltation of their image. However contrived the aetiologies might have become, they all desired, wherever possible, to link themselves to a Greek (or at least a Hellenised) mythological descent, since this was the only glorious one. And yet, not all cities were able to present such an image of themselves, either because (as with Caesarea Maritima) their history was too recent – and consequently too historical – or (as in Sepphoris-Diocaesarea) because they were known as Jewish centres and remained so. Others, however, such as the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina, were able to borrow a ready-made myth because they were new cities.

3   HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT[11]

In order to understand the various ways in which foundation myths were manipulated, it may be helpful to recall briefly the situation of Syria-Palaestina from the time of Hadrian. Ancient Palestine's singularity derives from the fact that this was the 'Promised' Land of Canaan, where, according to the Holy Scriptures, 'milk and honey flows'. It was a land with a single national God within a polytheistic, initially Greek and then Roman environment, organised on the basis of civic and/or ethnic identities. However, the monotheistic Jewish population were never the sole inhabitants of the country. As far as we can see – and the Old Testament offers the first evidence of this –, Iudaea-Palaestina was peopled by various groups, each with their own language, culture and religion. After the revolt of Galilee under Trajan and the failure of the Second Jewish Revolt, known as the Bar Kokhba war (in 132/136),[12] the new province of Syria–Palaestina was no longer distinguished as the land of the Jews, despite its rabbinical Judaism. Rather, the religious mix created in the Roman melting pot was gaining ground: at the beginning of the 4th century, Eusebius of

[7]   Millar 1993, 230: 'the most deliberate of all symbols of public identity'; Howgego/Heuchert/Burnett 2007.

[8]   E.g. the young Commodus' symbolical *adventus*, Kadman 1956, n° 65, and Gaza coins dated by Hadrian's ἐπιδημία in 130, *BMC Pal.* n° 14-55. Harl 1987, 31-51 and pl. 22.

[9]   For the imperial coinage, see Veyne 2002, 15-21.

[10]   Harl 1987, 52-81; Belayche 2003.

[11]   For an exhaustive study, see Belayche 2001.

[12]   Eck 2007b.
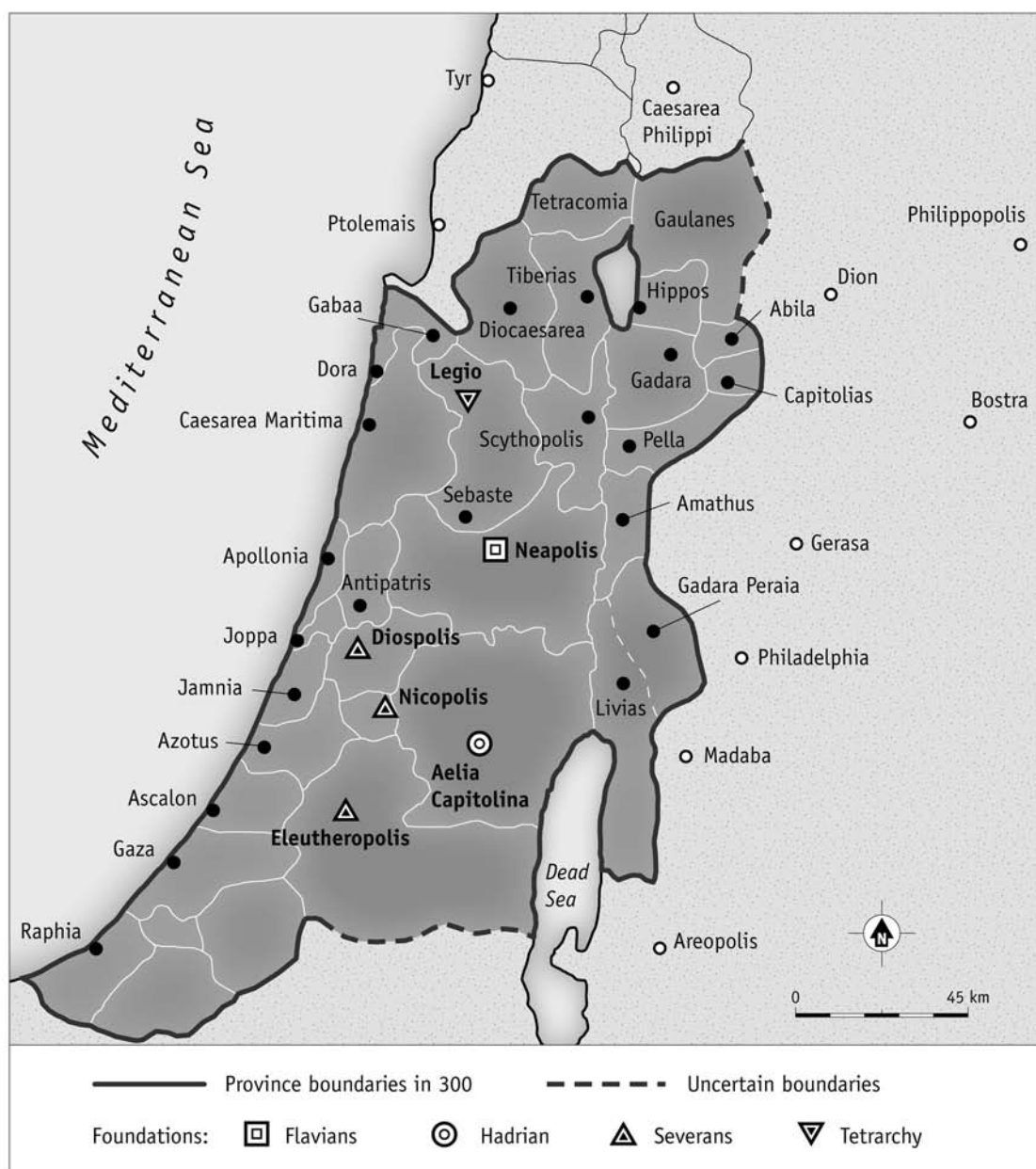
Fig. 1. Map of the cities in Roman Palestine listing the successive foundations from the Flavians until the 4th century (design IRSAM-UPPA: Monique Morales).

Caesarea listed in his *Onomasticon* a mere eighteen mono-ethnic villages out of more than nine hundred cited.[13] After the First Revolt (66-73), Graeco-Romanisation had already increased in some cities, such as Caesarea Maritima, which no longer had a Jewish population. From 117-120 onwards, two legions were stationed permanently in the province, which became a consular one. Jewish losses during the Second Revolt and reinforcement of the Roman presence changed the ethnic balance.[14] A good indication of this is the widespread use of the Latin language, which was very unusual in an Eastern province.[15] In quantita-

[13] Isaac 1998b; more generally, Schäfer 2003.
[14] Belayche 2004.
[15] Isaac 1990a, 304-307; Geiger 1996, 39-57; Eck 2003 and 2007a, 157-200.

tive terms, Graeco-Roman populations were in the majority, and Jews were even exiled by law from the Judaean district and its heart, Jerusalem. This religious and cultural resettlement happened at a time when Hadrian was attempting to spread Hellenism. During his second Palestinian tour in 129/130, he showed his zeal towards Zeus Olympios on Mount Gerizim and sought to embellish the province along Graeco-Roman lines. He monumentalised the Mambre sanctuary, close to Hebron, and transformed Jerusalem into a Roman colony, giving it a new name.[16] In return for his benefaction, religious honours were bestowed on him, including two *Hadrianeia* in Caesarea and Tiberias and a festival in Gaza, to mention only the main ones.[17] The philhellenic example given by the emperor himself, at a time when Jews were reorganising their life around the *Torah*, created favourable conditions for pagan populations to craft an image of their own cities, now part of what was almost an ordinary province.

In Palestine, Rome enforced its usual territorial policy of maintaining autonomous *poleis*, which were charged with heavy administrative burdens, including fiscal levies. The majority of the civic settlements in the area dated from earlier periods, for urbanisation had been the means of occupying territory since Hellenistic times, if not before.[18] There were about twenty-five cities of varying status (cf. map, fig. 1). One of the main roots of 'Romanisation' – conveying Hellenism as well[19] – was the intense urbanisation that took place from the time of the Flavians,[20] and was comparable to what was happening in Syria and, to a lesser degree, in Arabia after AD 106. But in fact, Roman power did not create cities *ex nihilo*: emperors modified the status of existing settlements, promoting simple townships to municipal or colonial rank. The Severan period in particular was characterised by numerous alterations in status, with foundations of colonies in line with the general policies of the dynasty.[21] An urban network secured Roman order in a region coveted by enemies both from within and without. For instance, during the war of succession of 193–196, the granting or denial of civic status was used by Septimius Severus as a means of rewarding or punishing political choices: while Neapolis was favoured, Sebaste was punished, these two fates echoing the opposing destinies of Nicaea and Nicomedia in Bithynia. Such favour encouraged loyalty and an adherence to the dominant culture.

The presence of sizeable pagan or mixed cities set the tone for regional behaviour.[22] Nomenclature documented by funerary inscriptions[23] and the use of epigrams[24] testifies to the vitality of Hellenism, which was to be found in every field. From the first half of the 2nd century, local elites competed with each other for the importance of their benefaction, following the example of Transjordanian cities that used their prosperity to fund monumental urban amenities and festivals.[25] Theatres and other buildings, which placed a heavy burden on local finances, revealed the cultural tastes and religious attitudes of the

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[16] Ptolemy, *Geography* V, 15, 5: 'Jerusalem that we call today *Aelia Capitolina*'; Eusebius, *HE* IV, 6, 4.

[17] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30, 12, 2; *Chronicon Pascale* I, 474 (Dindorf).

[18] Jones 1930; Schürer *et al.* 1979 (vol. II), 85-97. On the coast, at least, the list of cities in the Roman period is almost identical to that of 'Hellenistic cities' studied by Schürer *et al.* 1979 (vol. II), 97-184. Frézouls 1988 examines methodological problems.

[19] Sartre 1991, 390. For a review by dynasty (from the Flavians to the Severans), see Isaac 1990b; more generally, see Woolf 1997.

[20] Isaac 1990a, 344-361.

[21] Millar 1990, 31-56. For the period from the Severans to Constantine, see Jones 1971, 273-281.

[22] Lapin 2000, 74-80.

[23] E.g., in the neighbourhood of Lydda (latterly Diospolis), Savignac 1904, 83-84, n° 5: 'Marcion son of Kronidès, native of Pelle'. For a mixed Roman and Palestinian nomenclature in an inscription from the Golan, see Applebaum/Isaac/Landau 1981-1982, 109, n° 19: Titus Iulianus Zabaios.

[24] *SEG* 7 (1934), 329; 14 (1957), 847.

[25] For the moral obligations behind such benefactions, compare Julian the emperor's famous judgment about the situation in Syrian Antioch: 'Money spent on such festivals gives your curiales much more credibility and renown in others' eyes than Solon had after he met Croesus'. Julian, *Or.* VII (*Misopogon*) 8 [342c].

majority of the civic population. Revealingly, although the Mishnah forbade trade in bears and lions, since they were sold for the circus games,[26] the people of all the cities, ancient and newly founded alike, had the same recreational activities and types of display as those of any town in the empire. This can be seen from the list of victories of one wrestler, summed up in an inscription from Aphrodisias in Caria dated to about 165. The text reads like a roll-call of the eastern *oikoumenè*, in which Palestinian cities hold a good position: *In Damascus …, in Berytos …, in Tyre …, in Caesarea Stratonis the men's pancratium, in Neapolis of Samaria the men's pancratium, in Scythopolis, the men's pancratium, in Gaza the men's pancratium, in Caesarea Panias the men's pancratium twice, in Hierapolis …*[27] In Palestine, unlike neighbouring Syria and the Hauran, the Semitic pagan background had been severely attacked by the Hasmonaean reconquest, causing the destruction of many ancient sanctuaries, such as those of Ascalon and Gaza. In the mid-2nd century BC, the Jewish monarchy, heirs to the Maccabees and based on theocratic principles, made it a point of honour to destroy pagan cults.[28] Once Pompey had liberated the coastal cities, the sanctuaries that were rebuilt promoted the revival of local non-Jewish traditions, but this took place in a definitely Graeco-Roman cultural atmosphere.

From the Hellenistic period, onwards and despite Jewish parentheses, civic foundation legends, recast in a Greek mould, suggested that it was only Greek founders who were capable of promoting cities in a Hellenised world. At Tell Abu Shusha-Gabba Hippeon, founded by Herod to the north east of Dora, a Greek inscription honours *Abdagos, son of Alexandros, first citizen of the city and its founder*. The citizen's name − *slave of Dagon* − evokes the Phoenician cult of the great god of Arados, which had been wiped out by the Maccabees at Azotus in 148-146 BC.[29] But the honour granted to the *ktistès* shows that the mental attitude was Greek. This did not prevent the perpetuation of Syrian myths in a Hellenised form.[30] If the foundation was voluntary, however, the reference could be Roman, as in Aelia Capitolina.

4   ROMAN FOUNDATION MYTHS IN COLONIES

In Roman colonies, which were considered 'miniatures of Rome' according to A. Gellius' well-known formula,[31] the Roman origin myth was borrowed and transferred naturally, without any need for a special exegesis. In all these communities, Rome was referred to on coins through the use of the classic image of the she-wolf and the twins. However, because of their diverse histories, not all Palestinian colonies assigned the same role to the myth.

In Caesarea Maritima, for instance, coins showed the *sulcus primigenius* as a symbol of colonial status (fig. 2). Caesarea was a Greek city by foundation and its promotion as a Roman colony by Vespasian did not significantly change its ethnic composition. Its points of reference remained mainly Greek, Roman influence passing only through the presence of the *legatus Augusti* and his following.[32] In Sebaste, a town that was granted colonial status in 201/202, Roman symbolism is also confined. The city's legal promotion

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[26]   Mishnah *Avodah Zarah* 1, 7; on the damnation of theatre and circus because they were devoted to idols, see Babylonian Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 18b. Cf. Jacobs 1998.

[27]   Moretti 1953, 206-211, n° 72 ; also 250, n° 85 (AD 221).

[28]   Cf. e.g. Josephus, *BJ* 1, 85-106. Schürer *et al.* 1973 (vol. I), 228, about Alexander Jannaeus: 'this work of conquest … was … a question of … annihilation of Greek civilisation'.

[29]   Isaac 1998a, 31-35; John Chrysostom, *In principium indictionis* 199 (*PG* 59, col. 673) listing Near Eastern deities: ἐν τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ τῷ Δαγων ἐθυσίασαι.

[30]   Kasher 1990, 32-48, who in my opinion relies too much on late Roman evidence to reconstruct the Hellenistic situation. For parallel developments in Asia Minor, see Heller 2006.

[31]   Gellius, Noctes Atticae XVI, 13, 9: *effigies paruae simulacraque populi Romani*; Grelle 1972, 140-144. The *lex coloniae Genetiuae* organises the public cult in the colony. See Crawford 1996, I, ch. 64 ff, esp. 70-71 (*munus ludosue scaenicos Ioui Iunoni Mineruae*); Rüpke 2006.

[32]   Haensch 1997, 227-237; Eck 2007a, 79-103.

Fig. 2. Bronze coin from Caesarea Maritima with reverse showing the drawing of the boundary of the colony, with ox and cow and the *conditor* receiving a wreath from a small Nike flying towards him (after Meshorer 1985, n° 26, Septimius Severus).

Fig. 3. Bronze coin from Sebaste with reverse representing the toga-clad emperor while founding the Roman colony by *circumductio* of the plough (after Meshorer 1985, n° 118, Caracalla).
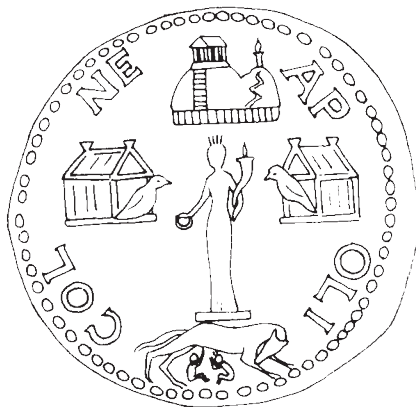

Fig. 4. Reverse of a bronze coin from Neapolis showing the civic Tyche, standing on the she-wolf suckling the twins, between two cages shaped in the manner of temples on either side, and topped by Mount Gerizim with its temple (after Meshorer 1985, n° 148, Trebonianus Gallus). Its composite construction reveals the city's diverse cultural references.

is celebrated in foundation coinage minted under Caracalla, which figures the *circumductio* (fig. 3).[33] This is one of two coin issues of truly Roman inspiration, with the Capitoline triad standing in a tetrastyle temple.[34] But here also, tradition remained Greek, as expressed by the name of the city, *Sebaste*, derived from the Greek equivalent of *Augusta*. Next, in neighbouring Neapolis, the Roman myth was only used to give iconographic expression to the collectivity's legal status. From the composite reverse of a coin minted under Trebonianus Gallus (fig. 4), we can infer that the religious atmosphere in this Flavian 'new city' was mainly Graeco-Semitic. The city honoured its recent (Philip I) status as a Roman colony by representing the she-wolf suckling the twins. This motif forms the basis of the whole composition: in the centre, a Tyche, holding a phial and the horn of plenty, rests her feet on the she-wolf, a position that designates her as a figure equivalent to *Genius/Iuno civitatis*. Flanking this civic divinity are two cages shaped in the

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[33] Meshorer 1985, 45, n° 118; *BMC Pal*. n° 14.

[34] *BMC Pal*. n° 12 (Septimius Severus), and n° 15 (Julia Maesa); Crowfoot/Crowfoot/Kenyon 1954, 67, n° 17 and 68, n° 20.

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Fig. 5. Silver medallion from Neapolis with a very realistic representation of Mount Gerizim with its two eminences, an ascending flight of steps with eight chapels on either side leading to the temple on top of the central peak (after Meshorer 1985, n° 126, Antoninus Pius).

manner of Graeco-Roman temples with pediments housing doves, the birds of the Dea Syria. The true *patronus* of the whole construct is Mount Gerizim, depicted in a very realistic fashion: dominating the town, with a portico at the bottom and two eminences (cf. fig. 5).[35] The three cultural points of reference of the city are represented on this coin, but their respective positions paint a clear hierarchy that maintains the Graeco-Semitic tradition of *Neapolis*. The new, Roman status of the city is expressed by the she-wolf, but in an almost anecdotal fashion. It is a fact that, with the *Constitutio Antoniniana* from AD 212 onwards, colonial promotion did not lead to status changes for persons. The Gerizim and its temple remained the local reference *par excellence*: Zeus's eagle bears its shrine on his outspread wings, and two Victories carry it in a crown (fig. 6).[36] Even the she-wolf suckling the twins is protected by the eminence of the mount, and the Forum's Marsyas, another colonial symbol, can be found together with a Victory or an eagle with Gerizim.[37] If we turn finally to Scythopolis, we know, thanks to a bilingual dedication in honour of the emperor Galerius,[38] that this city was upgraded to colonial status. Unfortunately, there is no foundation coinage, because the honour probably dates from the Tetrarchy, when cities no longer minted coins. Had such a coinage existed, it would probably have shown the she-wolf, as in Caesarea, Sebaste or Neapolis, and this despite the fact that Scythopolis claimed Dionysos as its founder, as we shall see.

In all these colonies, we can infer that the reference to the Roman foundation myth was no more than a simple expression of their political status. Things were different in the colony of Aelia Capitolina (Jerusalem), where the Roman myth was part of the construction of civic identity, for reasons related to the specific conditions of its creation. The colony's intended character was proclaimed by its new name: *Aelia* honoured its imperial founder with its patronymic,[39] and *Capitolina* ensured the new community the protection of Jupiter, which Hadrian had spread in the East, albeit in the form of Zeus Olympios.[40] The revolts of AD 66-73 and 132-136, which left the civic landscape of Jerusalem a *tabula rasa*, facilitated the

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[35] On the northern one stood the temple of Zeus Olympios, connected to the town by a large flight of steps. *BMC Pal.* n° 159 with pl. VII, 18 and Meshorer 1985, 52, n° 148. For a Samaritan explanation of the coin type, see Meshorer 1989b, 173-174, n° 1.

[36] Meshorer 1985, n° 140.

[37] *BMC Pal.* n° 118-121 (Philip I) and n° 132 (Philip I and Junior); Meshorer 1985, 51, n° 141.

[38] *AE* 1993, 1618 = *SEG* 20 (1964), 455; Laniado *et al.*

1993, (with bibliography and photo); Di Segni 1997b, 384-387, n° 99.

[39] Eusebius, *HE* IV, 6, 4: 'The Roman city which arose afterwards, changed its name and was called *Aelia* in honour of the reigning emperor Aelius Hadrianus'; cf. also *Chronicon Pascale* 119 (*PG* 92, 613) and Malalas XI (Dindorf, 279).

[40] The wording was not completely unique since a Capitolias had been founded in the Decapolis in 97/98. *RE* III (1899), *s.v.* Capitolias, col. 1529 (Benzinger).

Fig. 6. Silver tetradrachm from Neapolis with reverse depicting Zeus's eagle embracing the Gerizim temple in its outspread wings (after Meshorer 1985, n° 135, Caracalla).

establishment of an imported, not to mention implanted, settlement. This was done according to secular rules: the Etrusco-Roman ritual. The ritual of the *circumductio* gave the colony its religious limits: drawn by two oxen, the plough was driven by the founding magistrate acting with the assistance of priests. Roman religious and historiographical tradition, the latter illustrated by Plutarch's *Life of Romulus*, stated that this ritual re-enacted the foundation scene on the bank of the Tiber.[41] This was all the more true in this case, since the ritual was performed under the personal auspices of the emperor himself as *conditor*. The event was immortalised on coins with a toga-clad Hadrian holding the yoke (fig. 7).[42] Throughout the period of the city's mint, which was active from Hadrian to Herennius and Hostilian, bronze coin issues celebrated the foundation *ex nihilo* in 130/135, as well as later changes to the colony's status, using the same canonical type.[43] On the Hadrianic coin, which remained the standard, the *vexillum*[44] engraved behind the *conditor* expresses the fundamental link between the colonial foundation and the legionary camp that preceded it. This link was to figure on all foundation coins. For Aelia, the myth of the twins was not merely a form of political language: it was part of the demonstrative Romanness of the new colony, dominated by the Golgotha where a Capitol was built, next to the forum.[45] Gradually, from the period of the Severans onwards, the colony took on a more Graeco-oriental aspect; the Severan military reforms, when allowing legionaries to found legal families, certainly played a role in this evolution.

5   THE CREATION OF A GREEK FOUNDATION MYTH IN SCYTHOPOLIS

Scythopolis, on the west bank of the river Jordan and formerly belonging to the Pompeyan Decapolis,[46] was a Greek city which had been re-founded by Antiochos IV as Nysa, the name of a Seleucid princess. It had first been settled by the Scythians when they invaded Persian Palestine in the 7th century, and this may account for its name, 'the city of Scythians', which appears in *Judith* (3, 10) and later on in Polybius and the *Book of Maccabees*.[47] Expressions of Semitic or Nabataean culture were occasional or superficial in Scythopolis, and there were almost no monotheists in the city between the massacre of its Jewish population in AD 66[48] and the 3rd century.

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[41]   Plutarch, *Romulus* 11.

[42]   Meshorer 1989a, n° 2.

[43]   Under Marcus Aurelius, there was a new allotment for colonists (Meshorer 1989a, n° 42); under Septimius Severus, *in itinere Palaestinis, plurima iura fundavit* (SHA *Sev.* 17, 1); under Elagabalus, Aelia received a new eponymous epithet, *Aurelia Antoniniana* or *Aurelia Augusta* (Meshorer 1989a, n° 112); finally, in 251 under Hostilianus (Meshorer 1989a, n° 178), there was another privilege, unknown to

us because the mint was closed in 235 and only reopened under Decius. Roman and Talmudic books gave opposite meanings to this type, for which, see Stern 1998, 242-245.

[44]   Rostovtzeff 1942.

[45]   Belayche 1997.

[46]   Isaac 1981; Bowsher 1992; Millar 1993, 408–414.

[47]   Lifshitz 1977, 262-268.

[48]   According to Josephus (*BJ* 2, 468), 13,000 were killed.

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Fig. 7. Bronze coin from *Aelia Capitolina* celebrating the foundation of the Roman colony by the emperor Hadrian himself, holding the yoke. The standard (*vexillum*) on the back expresses the constituent link between the colonial foundation and the legionary camp which preceded it. Above to right *COL(onia) AEL(ia) KAPIT(olina)* and in exergue *COND(ita)* (cf. Meshorer 1989a, n° 2).

At the foot of the ancestral tell, the Roman city had all the features and facilities of a particularly sumptuous Graeco-Roman settlement in contact with the Graeco-Asiatic world.[49] Its lifestyle was able to rival that of the most opulent Greek cities in Asia.[50] The image Scythopolis presented of itself was never a Roman one, in spite of the reference in the Talmud to *Saturnalia* celebrated there;[51] the tradition of the future capital of the Palaestina Secunda was Greek. Zeus Olympios and the Saviour gods (the Dioscuri) had been venerated there since the times of Demetrius II Nicator in the 2nd century BC.[52] The worship of Zeus Olympios was replaced on the acropolis by that of Zeus Akraios, an epithet known to the Greek world for a mountain Zeus, and which was akin to the adoration of the gods of the heights in the Syro-Phoenician world.[53] This 'Zeus of the heights' was still honoured in Roman times.[54]

Despite his dominant position, Zeus was not the city's main god. Legend had it that the town had been the birth or burial place of Nysa, Dionysos' wet nurse. In the 1st century, Pliny the Elder knew the legend which combined the explanation of the two names of the city: 'Scythopolis, formerly Nysa, where Liber Pater (= Bacchus) settled the Scythians after having buried his nurse there'.[55] This tradition continued in the 2nd century with Solinus, but curiously, Nonnos' *Dionysiaca* do not mention the legend of the nurse.[56] In the 6th century AD, in his *Chronographia*, John Malalas gave a new version of the story, connecting it even more closely to the most glorious Greek mythology. He related how Orestes and Pylades had come to Palestine with Iphigenia whom they had freed from the Scythian king Thoas; impressed by the young girl, the inhabitants built a temple to her goddess, Artemis, and asked Iphigenia to offer to the deity a young girl named Nysa.[57] Malalas is notorious for his mythographical reconstructions, and although I shall not discuss the origin of this late story, I would like to emphasise that the Byzantine writer also attempted to establish a connection between the two names and to integrate them into the oldest tradition, the Homeric one.

From the time of Gabinius in the mid-1st century BC, Dionysos appears in a public context. One century later, he is depicted on Claudian coinage.[58] However, the name of Nysa did not become common until the 2nd century. It then stood for the cultural self-assertion by a city stressing its divine origin at a time when Palestine was being progressively normalised. It marked the shift from the conception of a Scythian foundation, which – judging from the rare presence of Artemis in either official documents or the local pantheon – was never much exploited, to a more glorious Dionysian origin. In front of Dionysos' temple, an honorific inscription on the base of a statue of Marcus Aurelius dedicated on the

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49 It was divided into *amphodoi*. Fitzgerald 1927; Applebaum 1989, 1–8; Lifshitz 1977, 270-271.

50 Two Thasos marble statues, probably imported from Aphrodisias in the 2nd century, represent a helmeted Athena and Aphrodite. Vitto 1991.

51 Jerusalem Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 1, 2 (39c); Lifshitz 1977, 276; Goodman 1983, 48.

52 Ovadiah 1975; Rigsby 1980; Fuks 1983, 81.

53 Cook 1925, 871; Lifshitz 1977, 15; Tsafrir 1989; Briquel Chatonnet 2005.

54 Lifshitz 1961, 186-190, n° 1 = Di Segni 1997b, 379–380, n° 96.

55 Pliny, *NH* V, 74: *Scythopolim, antea Nysam, a Libero Patre sepulta nutrice ibi Scythis deductis.*

56 Chuvin 1991a.

57 Flusser 1974, 1066-1067.

58 Spijkerman/Piccirillo 1978, 188, n° 2.

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occasion of his visit in 175 exalted the city's titles: 'the city of the Nysaeans, also called Scythopolitans (Νυσαέων τῶν καὶ Σκυθοπολιτῶν)'.[59] This tradition thus gave Dionysos an eminent position within the civic, religious organisation of Scythopolis.

Many coin types depict a Greek Dionysos, naked, with oinochoe, thyrsus, grapes, and panther, or standing on a chariot.[60] During the Hadrianic period, the god was also represented as a member of a triad, with Tyche and Zeus, from whose thigh the body of a child emerges.[61] Some types show him in association with Tyche only, as on a Gordian III coin where a *kourotrophos* Tyche is depicted as a sitting Nysa suckling the divine child.[62] An inscribed hexagonal limestone altar dated to AD 141/142 tells the foundation myth in the most public context (fig. 8). The altar, decorated with masks of Dionysos, Pan and Silenus, and adorned with Dionysiac attributes (thyrsus, panpipes and crook), was erected in front of the basilica's apse. Its location cannot have been fortuitous, since basilicas were the public buildings to which *curiae* were usually linked.[63] The location, the donor, and the epigraph, all suggest an official offering. The altar was dedicated by Seleukos, son of Ariston, according to a traditional votive formula: Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. Θεῷ Διονύσῳ (to the god Dionysos), κτίστῃ τῷ κυρίῳ (founding master), Σέλευκος Ἀρίστωνος, χαριστήριον (in recognition).[64] The dedicator, of Hellenised, Seleucid origin, seems to have belonged to the city's ruling aristocracy (*aristoi*).[65] A shorter epigraph, Θεῷ Διονύσῳ Γερμανός,[66] confirms the interest in the god from a dedicant whose name occurs many times in the Near East. In addition to the altars, there must have been a temple of Dionysos in Scythopolis; this was probably the prostyle temple which had a *naos* with a circular apse.[67] It was located in the heart of the town, at the intersection of the two main streets,[68] and opened onto a paved square where the monumental base offered to Marcus Aurelius[69] was situated, which was perhaps intended for a statue of the god. A young Dionysos, crowned with a vine branch and ivy, and a monumental head, have been found in the portico built during the Byzantine period. Fragments of a frieze adorned with Dionysos' head may have been part of the temple's decoration.[70]

The Scythopolitan dedication is the only known Palestinian inscription honouring a founder god, although several other cities, mainly on the coast, also claim such a glorious foundation. L. Di Segni explains this lack of evidence by a deliberate refusal to use the word *ktistès* − the Creator's name in the Septuagint − in a country 'strongly imbued with Jewish, Christian and pagan-monotheistic beliefs'.[71] However, during the Roman period, cities claiming a divine founder did not in fact come under strong monotheistic influences. In addition, Graeco-Roman populations had not read the Greek version of the Bible, at least until the development of an anti-Christian polemic in the 2nd century AD, which did not reach Palestine at that time. In the same paper, L. Di Segni provides a detailed analysis of the meaning

[59] Foerster/Tsafrir 1986/1987 = Di Segni 1997b, 382-384.

[60] *BMC Pal.* n° 12-13 (Gordian); Spijkerman/Piccirillo 1978, 187; Meshorer 1985, n° 105 (Antoninus Pius), n° 107 (Commodus), n° 109 (Geta).

[61] *BMC Pal.* n° 11; Meshorer 1985, n° 112 (Gordian III).

[62] *BMC Pal.* n° 6-10; Meshorer 1985, n° 110. *LIMC* III, 1 (1986), *s.v.* Dionysos *in Peripheria Orientali*, 523 (Augé/Linant de Bellefonds).

[63] Balty 1991.

[64] Di Segni/Foerster/Tsafrir 1996 = Di Segni 1997b, 381-382, n° 97.

[65] Di Segni 1997a, 140-143. It is doubtful that a link existed with the mid-3rd century Seleukos (*ibid.*, 143 n. 12) who

dedicated the inscription to Ares Hoplophoros and who was obviously a soldier or an official in transit. Three other inscriptions (two of them dating from 235/240) dedicated by a Seleukos, son of Ariston, are mentioned by Foerster and Tsafrir (1993, 8) but not published. They must have come from the basilica area where they were reused.

[66] Lifshitz 1970, 62, n° 3 with pl. a; Ovadiah 1975, 122, n° 6.

[67] On the basis of the circular shape, Foerster/Tsafrir (1990, 31-32) surmise that it could have been a *herôon* dedicated to Nysa.

[68] *NEAEHL* 1, 'Beth-Shean', 227 (Foerster).

[69] *Supra*, note 59.

[70] Foerster 2000.

[71] Di Segni 1997a.

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Fig. 8. Limestone hexagonal altar from Scythopolis for the god Dionysos, whose mask is carved above an inscription written in a *tabula ansata* honouring him as the 'founding master' (after Foerster/Tsafrir 2002, 77, fig. 110-111). With its prominent place in front of the local basilica, the inscribed altar, dedicated by Seleukos, son of Ariston, most probably a member of the city's ruling aristocracy, proclaims the city's foundation myth.

of the founder's cult, with Hadrian represented as a human archetype. She lists parallels from Asia Minor and the Balkans and relates them to the emphasis placed on origins, which was characteristic of the 2nd century and which reflected the Panhellenism to which Hadrian gave such a strong impetus.[72] In Scythopolis, two monumental cuirassed statues testify to his impact in the area. A bronze statue of Hadrian found at Tell Shalem near the city is one of two pointers to the city's sympathies with Romanness.[73] It was closely linked to the encampment of the *legio VI* during the Second Revolt, and strongly recalls the torso of a marble statue found in the urban excavations, with a breastplate decoration showing an apotropaic Medusa's head above two griffins and an eagle perched on a thunderbolt. The dedication of the public altar to Dionysos is slightly later in date, from the reign of Antoninus Pius, when the last vestiges of agitation following the Bar Kokhba war were finally stamped out.

Since Dionysian aetiology does not appear in the city's propaganda before the imperial period, it is impossible to date this devotion back to the Ptolemies, who venerated Dionysos as their ἀρχέτης[74] and who raised tribute to Scythopolis until 218 BC. Nor can we invoke the assimilation between Yahveh and

[72] Pont 2007.

[73] Foerster 1980 and 1985; Gergel 1991.

[74] *RE* II (1895), *s.v. Archègetès*, col. 442-443 (H. Jessen), and Leschhorn 1984.

Fig. 9. Bronze coin from Ascalon with reverse showing Poseidon standing with his right leg on a rock, his left hand holding the trident, and a dolphin above his right hand; AD 158-159 (cf. Rosenberger 1975, n° 189). Source: http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/marcus_aurelius/_ascalon_ AE26_Rosenberger_189.jpg.

Dionysos, of which traces are to be found in some 2nd-century BC speculations.[75] On the other hand, its expression fits perfectly well with the claim for Hellenism which the city repeated on its coin legends[76] as well as on the above-mentioned dedication to Marcus Aurelius: 'holy and inviolable, among Greek cities of Coele Syria'.[77] The rare final formula *Hellenis polis*[78] suits the image of a city whose toponym refers to Europe.[79] It was doubly pertinent to choose Dionysos as a founder, since the god linked the city to the most triumphal of Greek traditions, providing it, at the same time, with the means to assert its loyalty to the empire. In fact, when the Nysaean tradition developed, under the Antonines, emperors were worshipped as Νέοι Διόνυσοι.[80] Independently from any imperial reference, the period saw the widespread iconographic diffusion of the Dionysian myth. For instance, the triumph of Dionysos provided a popular motif for luxurious mosaic pavements. Palestine was also geographically well situated for the use of this theme, since the young victorious god was known to have crossed the region on his journey back from India; therefore his passage through Scythopolis was not inconceivable. Even in the Galilaean city of Sepphoris-Diocaesarea, where the majority of the population was Jewish, this theme was favoured. The earthquake of 363 preserved the Dionysiac pavement of a sumptuous building. The *triclinium* mosaic displays the mythological story of the god BAXXE and depicts Bacchic rites; its central panel shows the two victorious gods, Dionysos and Heracles, feasting. The choice of Dionysos' adventure, with its mythical and ritual features, was not accidental. The villa was probably connected to the neighbouring theatre and must have housed the actors invited by the city. The iconographic theme conformed to the main trends of the Greek world's religiosity in the 2nd-3rd centuries, a period when Dionysos had become the symbol of hope for survival.[81]

In Scythopolis, the ideological construct, publicly endorsed by the ruling class, sheds light on the culture of the local society. In the extreme south of Palestine, on the border with Egypt, the city of Raphia also claimed a Dionysian patronage, but in a more contrived way. Despite the scanty information available on this city, one may safely assume that in this case the connection was established purely on an etymological basis. The town's name evoked the stitching, ῥαφή, that Zeus put into his thigh in order to bring Semele's child to term. This may explain why the local coinage features either the child held by the civic Tyche or the young god, naked, holding the thyrsus and accompanied by a triumphal panther as

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[75] Under Antiochos Epiphanes, Dionysia were celebrated in Jerusalem: *II Maccabees* 6, 7; Kern 1923-1924. Flusser 1974, 1068-1069 'surmises' that the link between Dionysos and Beth Shean would have come from good relationships between Jews and pagans and from the assimilation of Yahveh with Dionysos.

[76] Gitler 1990-1991.

[77] τῆς ἱερᾶς καὶ ἀσύλου τῶν κατὰ Κοίλην Συρίαν Ἑλληνίδων πόλεων. Cf *supra*, note 69.

[78] Cohen 2006, 290-299.

[79] Sartre 1988; Gatier 1990, 205-206, n° 2; more generally Foerster/Tsafrir 1992. We read a similar pride in Dura

Europos: Κωλονεία Εὐρωπαῖων Σελεύκου (Seleucos Nicator). Welles/Fink/Gilliam 1959, n° 32, l. 4.

[80] Beaujeu 1955, 172 and 307-311; Pleket 1965. Dionysos also appears in Abila: Mare 1994, 370; *LIMC* III, 1 (1986), *s.v. Dionysos in Peripheria Orientali*, 406-419 (Augé).

[81] Jeanmaire 1970, 372-416. For the fashion of Dionysiac representations on sarcophagi, e.g. on the Neapolis road to the north of Jerusalem, see Michon 1913. In Erez (near Ascalon), on a 5th-century mosaic pavement, Dionysos' triumphal procession has been adapted to Christian conceptions. See Rahmani 1975 and Daszewski 1985.

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in Scythopolis.[82] In the Decapolis, another city also played on etymology in order to link itself to some glorious origin. On the coinage of Hippos–Susita, founded by the Seleucids (Antiochia ad Hippum),[83] the city's name is spelled out by an emblematic horse: coins feature either a horse's head, or Tyche, holding a horse by the bridle or carrying a little horse on her right hand.[84] Aetiology was clearly at work here, turning a trivial horse into a Pegasus by reference to Greek mythology.[85]

6 A SYRIAN FOUNDATION MYTH IN ASCALON

In Ascalon, Greek tradition is also evident in the legend which attributed the foundation to Ascalos, son of Poseidon (fig. 9).[86] This, however, was never the main tradition. The Philistine town, which passed into Tyre's control during the Persian period,[87] was known above all for the temple of its *thea patria* Atargatis-Derketo, Aphrodite Urania in Greek.[88] As early as the 5th century BC, Herodotus knew of this as 'the oldest of all the temples of the goddess'.[89] On his way to Jerusalem, Philo of Alexandria would have noticed how popular the local tradition was. 'In Syria, by the sea, is a town called Ascalon; when I passed by there …, I saw an incredible number of doves at the crossroads and in each house'.[90] Derketo was the civic goddess to whom the foundation of the city was attributed.[91] Her name is a dialectical variation of Atargatis, the Syrian goddess, probably formed in the 7th century BC; the link with Semiramis, Derketo's daughter according to mythology, went back to the times of Persian domination.[92] On silver coins dated from the 1st century BC, the dove depicted on the reverse was used as the city's emblem, and a coin from AD 225 chose the two symbolical representations of Astarte-Tyche: the *aphlaston* (the ornament on a ship's stern) and the dove.[93] Clearly, in Ascalon, the foundation myth did not primarily serve a political assertion; it was the pillar of one of the two great local cults.

7 FOUNDATION MYTHS IN BICULTURAL, GRAECO–SEMITIC CITIES

Greek cities were little open to Romanisation on the linguistic level; the Latin language remained confined to the administrative and military population which settled there. These cities continued in their

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82 *BMC Pal.*, LXXXII and n° 3 (Septimius Severus) and 6 (Elagabalus); Meshorer 1985, n° 71 (Commodus).

83 Roman coinage emphasises this origin with the legend 'Antiocheans of the city of Hippos, holy, asylum'. Meshorer 1985, n° 199 (Lucius Verus).

84 Meshorer 1985, n° 203 (Antoninus Pius); Rosenberger 1990-1991, 79, n° 6 (Elagabalus); Meshorer 1985, n° 202 (Lucius Verus); but no evidence allows us to say that 'such a statue stood in a temple of Tyche in the city', *ibid.*, 75.

85 Meshorer 1985, n° 200 and 204 (Faustina Junior and Elagabalus); *RPC* II, 2102.

86 Nicolas Dam. fr. 26 (Müller, *FHG* III, 372).

87 Schürer *et al.* 1979 (vol. II), 105-108.

88 *IDélos* 2305: Ἀστάρτη Παλαιστινῆ Ἀφροδίτη Οὐρανίαι; cf. also 1719; Baslez 1977, 81. Cf. Herodian, 5, 6, 4. Roscher, *Lexicon* I, 1, *s.v.* Aphrodite (Roscher), 390-395 ('Die

orientalische Aphrodite'). In Gerasa, a *thea Ourania* is known: Welles 1938, n° 24-26.

89 Herodotus, I, 105; Pausanias, I, 14, 7; Roscher, *Lexicon* I 1, *s.v.* Aphrodite (Roscher), 390-406.

90 *Ap.* Eusebius, *PE* VIII, 64. Cf. Tibullus, *Elegies* I, 7, 18 : 'the white dove that the Syrians of Palestine revere' (*Alba Palaestino sancta columba Syro*).

91 For her mythology, see Diodorus Sic. 2, 4. Cf. Oden 1977, 69-72. For a latter, euhemeristic version of the myth, see *CCDS* 1. II, 97 ff.

92 *CCDS* 1. II, 15-20. Lucian, *Dea Syria* 14, distinguishes Derketo of Ascalon and the goddess of Hierapolis (Atargatis) honoured in human form.

93 Meshorer 1985, n° 42. Cf. Lucian, *Dea Syria* 14; Cumont 1929, 108 and 255 (note); *LIMC* III, 1 (1986), *s.v.* Dea Syria, 355-358 (Drijvers).

Greek ways, which had been successfully grafted onto Semitic traditions. The use of Greek channels benefited local traditions relating to divine or mythical founders and to supernatural patrons.[94] According to Claudius Iolaus, Dora, the ancient Tanturah,[95] had been settled by the Phoenicians (Φοινίκων αὐτὴν οἰκούντων). And yet it displayed its status as a Greek city 'sacred, inviolable autonomous, (Δωριτῶν ἱερὰ ἄσυλος αὐτονομος)'.[96] Playing with etymology in a rather imaginative way, it claimed a mythical Greek founder, Doros, son of Poseidon. The two figures inspired the motif struck on the reverse of local bronze coins, as well as the representation in a temple of Zeus and Astarte-Aphrodite-Tyche, or that of the deity holding a marine ensign, an appropriate symbol for a city which called itself ναυαρχίς ('flagship').[97]

Further to the south, in Jaffa (Ἰόπη, Ἰόππη), the coinage only depicted the legend that linked the city to Greek mythological tradition, despite having acquired the title of *Flavia* in the reign of Vespasian. The Greeks associated the city with the myth of Perseus and Andromeda, which went back to the most ancient times of Palestine, since its foundation was reputed to be *antiquior terrarum inundatione*.[98] A spring of red water near Jaffa kept alive the memory of the Greek hero who, 'after having killed the sea-monster, to which the daughter of Cepheus had been exposed, washed off the blood in the spring'.[99] The bones of the monster had been displayed in Rome itself during a triumph in 58 BC,[100] and according to Flavius Josephus, 'the impressions of Andromeda's chains' could still be seen on the sea rocks.[101] This myth was the main – and almost exclusive – inspiration for local coinage in the Severan period: Perseus holding the harpoon and Medusa's head, the bull offered as a thanksgiving sacrifice to the gods, and Athena – the protective goddess of the hero – who remained alone on coinage after Elagabalus.[102] With the progress of Christianisation, this mythological episode, recorded on civic coins in the shape of a rider besieging a monster with his lance,[103] may have endured in the representation of St. George, martyred under Diocletian and buried in Lydda-Diospolis. Jaffa thus expressed its glorious birth in two forms, one linked to the most ancient near-eastern traditions (the Flood) and another one dependent on Greek tradition. But unlike Scythopolis, the evidence does not allow us to see whether the foundation myth went further than a mediatic image, and no founder cult is attested in Jaffa.

The elaboration of Gaza's origins was more complex and contrived. The great local god was Marnas, 'Lord of the rains'.[104] Sometimes represented on coins by the Phoenician letter *mem*, which had become the mint's trademark,[105] Marnas was the only god sufficiently representative of the local identity to be transported to Transjordan and even as far as Ostia by emigrants from Gaza.[106] His image as a great pagan god is nearly as paradigmatic as that of Serapis in Alexandria, whom he survived by ten years.[107] He was so much

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[94] For the Hellenistic period, see Geiger 1990.

[95] Pliny, *NH* V, 17. For a general presentation, see *NEAEHL* 1, 'Dor', 357-368 (Stern).

[96] Claudius Iolaus *ap.* Steph. Byz., *s.v.* Δῶρος (Müller, FHG IV, 363).

[97] Meshorer 1986-1987.

[98] Pliny, *NH* V, 69; Ammianus 22, 15, 24. Hill 1914, XXIV; Flusser 1974, 1080-1083. For Sartre 2002, this case betrays 'une géographie 'syrienne' de la mythologie grecque'.

[99] Pausanias IV, 35, 9 [*GLAJJ* II, n° 354]; already in Pseudo-Scylax, *Periple* 104; Strabo XVI, 2, 28; Pliny, *NH* V, 128. Grimal 1988⁹, *s.v.* Andromède, 36, and *LIMC* I, 1 (1981) *s.v.* Andromeda, 774-790 (Schauenburg).

[100] Pliny, *NH* IX, 11 [*GLAJJ* I, n° 209].

[101] Josephus, *BJ* 3, 420.

[102] Meshorer 1985, n° 35-38. In Syria-Phoenicia, Ptolemais

coinage also depicts Perseus' harpe, as well as the thunderbolt of Zeus and of the great Semitic god of storms, from Caracalla's time on; cf. *RPC* I, 4748.

[103] Meshorer 1985, n° 39 (Caracalla).

[104] Roscher, *Lexicon* II, 2 (1895/1897), *s.v.* Marnas, 2377-2382 (Drexler); Cook 1940, 552-558; *RAC* VIII (1972), *s.v.* Gaza, 1124-1125 (Downey).

[105] Damascius, *In Parmenidem*, 262 (Ruelle, vol. II, 127-128): 'among the Egyptians, the sign called tet, which is formed by a vertical line and three horizontal ones …, in the same way another sign among the Heliopolis people and among the Gaza people a third one for Zeus (παρὰ Γαζαίοις ἄλλο τοῦ Διός)'. Mussies 1990, 2424-2425.

[106] *IGLS* 2412g (Διὶ Μάρνᾳ τῷ Κυρίῳ); for the Marneion of Ostia in Aramaic, *CIS* I, 16.

[107] Jerome, Epist. 107, 2.

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the face of the city that, during the Christians' attack in 402, a crisis arose among the Christians themselves, with a minority wanting to keep the temple intact by converting it into a church.[108] Marnas' reputation of being honoured by human sacrifices,[109] despite the lack of proof during the Roman period, calls to mind the cultic practices for the Philistine god Dagon, honoured in Azotus before the time of Jonathan Maccabee.[110] The literary tradition unanimously identifies Marnas with the Cretan Zeus interpreted as meaning 'born in Crete' (ἑρμηνευόμενον Κρηταγενῆ).[111] In spite of a name which is probably Semitic ('Our Lord'),[112] Stephanus Byzantinus says that Marnas/Marnan is a Cretan name meaning Παρθένος. 'But some people tell of a legend according to which it [Gaza] was founded by Zeus who left his treasure there, for Gaza is the Persian word for silver.[113] It was also called Minoa because Minos, with his brothers Eachus and Rhadamanthus, leaving his country, founded this city'.[114] The connection between Crete and Phoenicia is attested to from the earliest times.[115] Without going back as far as the arrival of the Peoples of the Sea, Gaza and its port maintained regular links with the Greek island. Nevertheless, in the light of other Palestinian traditions, I prefer to follow the conclusions of G. Mussies, who considers 'the Cretan origin of this enigmatic deity as a later addition due to the – mainly Hellenistic – tendency to elaborate the historical fact of the stay of the Philistines in Crete'.[116] As far as historical evidence is concerned, the aetiology of the Cretan Zeus is confirmed by the legend on a coin from Hadrian's time, which bears the name MINOS, the legendary king of Knossos,[117] and by the toponymy: a village situated to the south-east of Gaza is called *Minois*.

Etymologies for Marnas seem to have developed in a more or less coherent fashion. They highlight the value which the citizens of Gaza and the literary tradition attached to a Greek ascendance. Flavius Josephus stressed this connection to explain why, on Herod's death, Gaza, like Gadara and Hippos, had been integrated in the province of Syria.[118] We see the city proudly boasting its Greek titles on a dedication made in Ostia in 243 on the god's order and through the temple's curator: ἡ πόλις ἡ τῶν Γαζαίων ἱερὰ καὶ ἄσυλος καὶ αὐτόνομος πιστὴ καὶ εὐσεβὴς λαμπρὰ καὶ μεγάλη ('the city of the Gazaeans, holy, asylum, autonomous, faithful, pious, illustrious and great').[119] The dedication shows the same noble series of titles as the other Greek cities in Asia Minor, Syria and Palestine. Overall, the nomenclature of notables was Graeco-Roman,[120] even though some names were of Egyptian origin.[121]

On coins, the depiction of Marnas varies, reflecting the more or less Hellenic aspect of his personality and cult. When he is represented, for instance on a Gordian III coin, standing naked, his right hand raised and his left hand brandishing the thunderbolt, it is his Jovian aspect that is being emphasised. This is enhanced by the depiction of an eagle at his feet and of a Nike who is crowning him.[122] However, the Marnas of

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[108] Mark Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii* 66, 3-4.

[109] Mark Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii* 66, 12-13.

[110] *I Maccabees* 10, 83-84; *RAC* I (1950), *s.v.* Baal, Dagon, 1086 (Klauser).

[111] Stephanus Byzantinus *s.v.* Γάζα; Mark Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii* 64, 18. Cf. also Epiphanius of Salamis, *Ancoratus* 109C (*PG* 43, 209). Mussies 1990, 2427-2433, has collected the mythological sources. On the Cretan Zeus as a juvenile god, see Capdeville 1995, 179-196.

[112] *RE* XIV, 2 (1930), *s.v.* Marna, Marnas, col. 1899-1906 (Preisendanz). Cf. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 39, on a demonstration in Alexandria against Agrippa qualified as '*Marin*'. After etymological research, Mussies 1990, 2433-2443, concludes that it is a Philistine name, and not an Aramaic one.

[113] Cf. also Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30, 6, 7: '*gaza* means 'treasure' in Hebrew'.

[114] Stephanus Byzantinus, *s.v.* Γάζα.

[115] Mussies 1990, 2443-2447.

[116] Mussies 1990, 2446. *Contra* Chuvin 1991b, 210, who believes in the Philistine tradition, as in Tyre for Heracles Melqart.

[117] Meshorer 1985, 29, n° 55. According to Stephanus Byzantinus, the city had first been called Minoa. Thus, Cook 1914, I, 478, proposed a labyrinthic plan for the Marnas temple.

[118] *BJ* 2, 97. Schürer *et al.* 1979, II, 98-103.

[119] *IG* XIV, 926, lines 7-11.

[120] Di Segni 1997b, 541-557, n° 177*-191*.

[121] Di Segni 1997b, 510-511, n° 153: a 179/180 dedication of Ammonios, son of Domesticos.

[122] *BMC Pal.* n° 147; Meshorer 1985, n° 65.

Fig. 10. Bronze coin from Gaza (AD 131/132) with reverse display-ing a distyle temple enclosing two figures: to the right, Marnas in the form of a young, Apollo-like god, naked, holding a bow and facing his female consort (an Artemis?) in her huntress form, drawing arrow from quiver at her shoulder and holding a bow) (after Rosenberger 1977, n° 65).

Gaza could also resemble Idumaean Qos as featured in Khirbet et-Tannur.[123] Other, more numerous series of coins depict him in a temple with a triangular pediment, in the form of a young, Apollo-like god (like Zeus Casios of Pelusa), naked, holding a bow and facing his female consort (an Artemis?) in her huntress form (fig. 10).[124] He is no longer the bearded, seated Greek-style Zeus found in the Tell el-Ajjul area.[125]

A number of other city temples, which might shed some light on our enquiry, are not mentioned by Mark the Deacon, including those of Io or Artemis, and of Heracles or his son, although these deities are often summoned as divine references in aetiological legends and on coins. However, this is consist-ent with the ideological character of the documents where they do appear; we might conclude that they did not receive cultic honours.[126] Yet, Porphyrius' biographer lists τὸ λεγόμενον Ἡρωεῖον (the so-called *Heroeion*)[127]: it is only known from this list and may have preserved the memory of Heracles and his, pos-sibly eponymous, son.[128] From the available aetiological legends, Stephanus Byzantinus quoted the one which linked the city's name with Aza, son of Heracles, a presumed founder: 'It was called Aza, as well as Gaza, and until today Syrians call it Aza from Azon, son of Heracles'.[129] Coins often depict the bust of Heracles, or Heracles standing, holding a club and the lion's skin (fig. 11).[130] In the 5th century, his twelve labours were represented marking the hours on a large public clock described by Procopius of Gaza.[131] A lead sarcophagus, perhaps made in a Gaza workshop, displays a drunken Heracles on a chariot drawn by centaurs in the style of Dionysiac-inspired motifs,[132] the popularity of which in Palestine has already been illustrated by the Diocaesarea mosaic. The Heroon could also have been an Ioon. 'It is also called Ione for Io came all the way here, via the sea route, and landed here'.[133] The flight of Io pursued by Hera's ire was well known to have led Zeus' beloved, transformed into a heifer, towards the southern Mediterranean and to Egypt, so that she gave her name to the *Ionion Pelagos* between Gaza and Egypt. Her miserable fate inspired the minters, who chose to represent her either in her zoomorphic shape at the feet of the civic Tyche,[134] or in her human form, shaking the hand of the civic divinity.[135] Stephanus Byzantinus specified that 'there was a heifer near a statue'; this might indicate that a statuary group served

[123] Glueck 1937, 15 and fig. 8a and 8c; *IGLS* XXI, Jordanie 4, 124-125, n° 95.

[124] Meshorer 1985, n° 56 (during Hadrian's visit in 130), n° 62 (from AD 204), and n° 64 (from AD 220). Cf. Teixidor 1977, 97-98.

[125] Conder 1880.

[126] Similarly, depictions of Tyche do not always refer to cultic honours. Belayche 2003.

[127] Mark Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii* 64, 4-7.

[128] For Mussies, 1990, 2417, the Heroeion 'was the temple of either Heracles or Minos' with no further discussion.

[129] Stephanus Byzantinus *s.v.* Γάζα. Chuvin 1991b, 210, thinks that Heracles-Melqart, a possible founder god as in Tyre, could be the same as Marnas.

[130] *BMC Pal.* n° 46-55 (Hadrian), 80-87 (Antoninus Pius), 93-95 (Marcus Aurelius) etc.; Meshorer 1985, n° 59 (Antoninus Pius).

[131] Abel 1931, 10.

[132] Rahmani 1989, 72-74, n° IV with pl. 8.

[133] Stephanus Byzantinus *s.v.* Io; Libanios, *Orationes* 55, 32-33. Cf. Duchemin 1979, 6-23.

[134] *BMC Pal.* n° 28-45 (Hadrian); Meshorer 1985, n° 58 (Marcus Aurelius).

[135] *BMC Pal.* n° 23-27 (Hadrian); Meshorer 1985, n° 63 (Geta). Mussies 1990, 2447-2448, goes as far as to imag-ine that Io was Marnas' consort in his temple.

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Fig. 11. Bronze coin from Gaza (AD 130/131) with reverse depicting Hercules standing facing, leaning on club and holding the lion skin; to his right the letter *mem* (cf. Rosenberger 1977, n° 51). Source: http://http://imagedb.coinarchives.com/img/cng/078/image01494.jpg

as a model for the engravers. Whatever the identity of the god to whom the shrine may have been dedicated, what is significant for us is that the city's ancient Philistine history was almost concealed, and the Gazaeans preferred to trace their roots back to a Greek past.

CONCLUSION

This journey through Roman Palestine has revealed many different options for the cities wishing to boost their local image by claiming a divine foundation. These claims became more prominent in the period after the two Jewish wars, when Palestine had to redefine its position within the Roman world. In this context, the points of reference invoked for the construction of civic identity could not be original, since they had to proclaim the cities' successful integration among the communities of the Graeco-Roman world. Therefore, these models of mythical or cultural claims were sought in other oriental provinces, in Asia Minor and Syria. The fact that older local traditions were still alive did not curb this trend. In the cities with a renowned Greek mythology (e.g. Ascalon), they simply had to portray its main figures, for instance on coins. With the exception of Aelia Capitolina, all the Roman colonies preferred to keep their own cultural traditions (e.g. Neapolis) instead of borrowing the Roman twin myth, however majestic it may have been. Other cities (e.g. Scythopolis or Gaza) that had to assert their image and position in the large eastern region developed an aetiology based on Greek values; these were prevalent culturally at that time and ensured that the cities could be distinguished from their Jewish neighbours. These Greek traditions that conveyed a glorious image could be grafted onto local, Philistine traditions as in Gaza, or onto a Roman tradition (e.g. Aelia Capitolina) when the Roman political masters were exporting their own model.

ABBREVIATIONS

AE	*l'Année Epigraphique*
ARG	*Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*
BEFAR	Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome
BMC *Pal.*	Hill, G.F., 1914: *Catalogue of Greek Coins of Palaestina in the British Museum*, London.
CCDS	*Corpus Cultus Deae Syriae*
CIS	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*
FHG	Müller, K. (ed.), 1975 (1841-1851): *Fragmenta Historicum Graecorum,* Paris (5 vols).
GLAJJ	Stern, M., 1976-1984: *Greek and Latin authors on Jews and Judaism,* Jerusalem (3 vols).
IDélos	*Inscriptions de Délos*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
IGLS	*Inscriptions Grecques et Latines de Syrie*

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LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*
NEAEHL	Stern, E. (ed.), 1993: *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, Jerusalem.
PG	*Patrologie Grecque*
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RE	*Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
REJ	*Revue des Études Juives*
RPC	*Roman Provincial Coinage*
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

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