

Resources and Religion

Sacred Places as Brokers of Resilience Strategies in the River Valleys of the Roman Lebanon

ABSTRACT

The sanctuaries of the first centuries CE in Lebanon's water-rich mountains are often seen as part of a »sacred nature«. This view on religion and environment falls short from a cultural- and environmental-historical perspective. The paper explores the sacred sites along the rivers Adonis and Chrysorrhoas through the lens of resilience, aiming to link religious activities to people's livelihood needs against the backdrop of social, environmental and economic risks. Resilience, so the argument, is enhanced through the management of water resources, for which religious institutions, shared myths and rituals play a crucial role. They offer frames for collaborative actions necessary for distributing and taming the resources in the long term. Religion serves as a stabilizing force, promoting social cohesion, solidarity, and knowledge transmission; it helps manage conflicts and reduce complexity in the communities facing stress through natural powers. The concept of resilience provides a comprehensive perspective on technical infrastructure, natural environment, social institutions, and religious practices in the river valleys.

KEYWORDS

Lebanon mountains / river Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) / source of Apheca / river Chrysorrhoas (Barada) / Byblos / Abila / resource management / religion / Roman sanctuaries / communities of practices

Sacred Places in the Roman Lebanon and Resilience

The Lebanon mountains were dotted with all kinds of sacred places – temples, shrines, and precincts at any altitude up to the highest peaks in Roman times¹. J. Aliquot in his seminal work on the »vie religieuse au Liban« lists 120 sacred places (fig. 1). Some researchers explain this phenomenon in a pragmatic-

economical way by the exploitation of the Roman provincial administration from the 1st century BCE onwards imposed on the region reaching its peak in the 2nd century CE². Other explanation models draw on the »sacredness« of the mountainous environment as well as a specific religiosity of the population³.

¹ Sanctuaries on summits at Jabal Knissé and Jabal Sannine (Aliquot 2009, nos *37; *32) above 2,000 m asl were still in use in Roman times. Mount Hermon was conceived as sacred, »hrm« meaning »sacred«, and sacred places were located here (Qasr Antar, Quadi Abou Moussa, Deir Nebi Younan, Aliquot 2009, no. 114. 5. 79). – I am very grateful to Andreas Hartmann and Christopher Schliephake for their thorough reading of my text which helped improve the argument and eliminate errors. All remaining flaws are mine.

² The Lebanon was part of the province of Syria, founded in 64 BCE and reorganised in the early 2nd c. CE.

³ Aliquot 2009, 17–37. In an emic perspective – by those practicing religion – the sacredness of a place is more or less given. In an etic perspective the sacred character of a place, person, or object is construed.

Both explanation models lack or overemphasize some aspects: The first does not explain why religion was of any interest for the Roman administration of Lebanon, which instigated renovations of sanctuaries, aiming at control and exploitation of resources; the second does not explain why some places, became sacred places, and what the economical implications might be.

To mediate between these positions, I approach the topic of sacred places, resource exploitation and religion in the Lebanon mountains by applying the analytical and descriptive tool of resilience as discussed and sharpened in our »Scientific Network«⁴. I ask what roles the sacred places and its users in the socio-economic landscape of the Lebanon mountains played. With a focus on the resource water, the guiding assumption is that the abundant and powerful, but also destructive resource and its management had an impact on the religiously used places, which the people – inhabitants as well as Roman administration – installed or renovated.

My aim is twofold: Firstly, I bring forward a nuanced explanation of why so many sacred places enlivened the mountain ranges, what relationships they had to each other, and how they functioned for the people visiting, using, and maintaining them. Secondly, I not only apply the concept of resilience to past socio-ecological systems in the Lebanon mountains, but also try to sharpen its applicability for the relational perspective on resources and religion. Since material resources are often unquestioningly examined as belonging to the ecological sphere, whereas the immaterial resource religion is allocated in the socio-psychological sphere⁵, the attempt is to methodologically build a bridge between these views by investigating the resilient practices of the communities manifest in the social resources as well as in their conceptualisation of natural resources⁶. The analyses of two river valleys and their sacred places in the Lebanon (Adonis) and Antilebanon (Chrysorrhoas) offer insights into interactions and interdependencies of environment, resources as well as socio-religious agents and institutions in Roman times. They are understood in this context as agents and parts in a socio-ecological system (fig. 2) and allow us to draw a differentiated picture of how people relied on material and immaterial resources.

The Multifaceted Character of the Lebanon

The Lebanon is a region of extremes regarding the natural environment, i. e. landscape units, geology, vegetation, and climate. The Lebanon mountains raise directly after a narrow coastal strip along the Mediterranean Sea with the old Phoenician harbour cities such as Tyros, Sidon, Byblos, or Berytus and reach heights up to 3,000 m asl (fig. 1). They consist mostly of limestone and form a karstic underground, have an Alpine climate and vegetation on the western ranges (Lebanon) and a more arid climate on the eastern ranges (Antilebanon) separated by the semi-arid plain of Beqaa. This brief characterisation shows the highly variable ecological zones of the Lebanon which result in multifaceted socio-economic life-strategies. Depending on the different ecological environments people in the Lebanon live(d) a more urban life along the coast, with trade activities, ship building, and other crafts, whereas in the mountains a village life with livestock breeding and agriculture is/was predominant⁷. At the same time permanent links through exchange of goods, long distance trade between the Mediterranean and central Syria, and resources management establish(ed) not only relations between ecosystems, inhabitants, and livelihoods across all zones, but also a highly interconnected region. These factors must be taken in consideration, when looking at the religious life in the Roman Lebanon through the lens of resilience.

Sacred Places, River Valleys and their Communities

Regarding religious life and practices the Roman province of Syria was a region where many traditions and religions intermingled, which is archaeologically reflected in unique and variegated architectural layouts and designs of sacred places⁸. The above-mentioned particularities of the natural environment have an impact on the location and layout as well as the function of many sacred places, where, however, the assumption of a »sacredness of nature« falls short, even though many sanctuaries and tem-

⁴ Cf. the introduction to this volume p. 9–12. See below p. 86–88 my definition and application of resilience in my case study.

⁵ I follow the definition of material and immaterial resources developed in the Research Group RessourcenKulturen, cf. Hardenberg et al. 2017.

⁶ Resilience in a modern perspective is often seen as immaterial resource in a psychological meaning of well-being and self-care to which religion as

an inner emotional and cognitive resource can add, see e. g. Richter 2017. Recent research tries to connect the individual and societal-collective layers of resilience, see Busch/Lieb 2024; Redman/Kinzig 2003.

⁷ Cf. Rieger in print.

⁸ Kaizer 2008; Aliquot 2009.

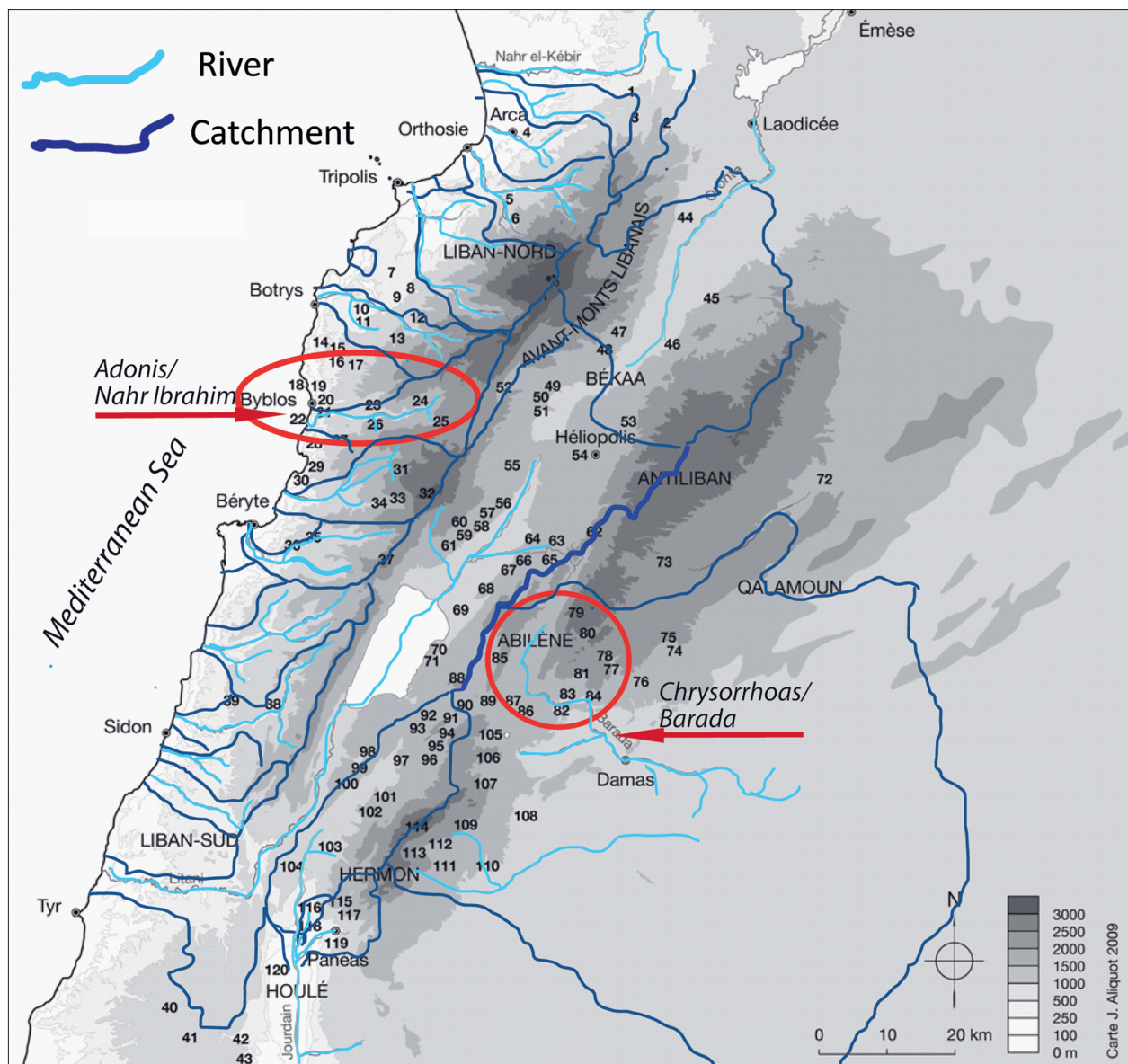


Fig. 1 The Lebanon mountains with the catchment areas of the rivers and the sacred places in Roman times. The red circles mark the river valley of the Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) on the western slopes of the central Lebanon mountains in today's Lebanon and the valley of the Chrysorrhoeas (Barada) on the eastern slopes of the Antilebanon in today's Syria. – (Map A.-K. Rieger based on Aliquot 2009, fig. 1).

ples are located at the springs, sources, rivers, close to grottoes, or on top of mountains⁹.

In search of an explanation based on the lived practices instead of an assumed primordial »sacredness« of places in our case of those with outstanding natural features I take a hydrological view on religion and focus on river valleys, catchment areas, infrastructural installations, in relation to sacred places: Along the valley of the river Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) east of Byblos the most prominent sacred

place is the temple at the source of Apeca (Afqa) which is linked to a series of others down the river; in the valley of the river Chrysorrhoeas (Barada) west of Damascus, the interventions at the road in Roman times are the best known ancient remain, which I will bring into relation with the water of the river, sacred places, and its religious purposes. In the first case the approach is a spatial one, where I investigate the relations between the places and their role for people and the environment. The second case

⁹ Archaeology normally does not engage with the question of how exactly a place which has outstanding natural features became a sacred place, see e. g., Scheer 2019 and above note 3.

offers not only the sacred places as such, but also epigraphic evidence which gives insight into the valley's communities and their activities as well as their deities.

The hypotheses are that the locations of sacred places are chosen according to the catchment area, the management of water and distribution to agricultural terraces; and that the sacred places are hubs of not only religious, but environmental knowledge, which is transmitted and memorised via recurrent practices (rituals)¹⁰.

This perspective widens the prevalent and narrow interpretation of water as relevant factor for cultic activities and acknowledges its meaning as powerful and necessary resource, which must be distributed, managed, and controlled, in relation to resilient livelihoods and ecological knowledge, which was important for both the Roman administration and the inhabitants¹¹. I try to carve out how the communities in the two river valleys were connected via knowledge and practices, since these parameters are contributing to the resilience of communities¹².

The focus on natural resources in the Lebanon mountains could be read as an attempt to look for economical and ecological resilience in Roman antiquity¹³. However, this would be on the one hand difficult, since palaeo-environmental data attesting to flow rates, snow melt, flooding, mud slides or water shortage are not extant. On the other hand, an endeavour of assessing past lives in the Lebanon mountains from a perspective of environmental history and resilience would easily fall short of religious aspects¹⁴.

People inhabiting the highly dynamic landscape of the Lebanon mountains, had (and have) an understanding of how to live in this landscape, its fauna and flora, how to make a living there. The communities along the river valleys acted with agency and intentionality, whereas the biophysical landscape enacts only agency (fig. 2)¹⁵. In this tension between system and agency, between stability and ongoing change (in societies, groups, and institutions) the interrelations of ecosystem, economic networks as well as religious resources unfold. Since religion

is about communication – not only with deities, but also with the social environment, it plays an important role for the resilience of societies and individuals in the past, where religion was part of everyday lives. Individual and shared religious practices bring along social cohesion or clarify roles and positions of power and responsibilities, which are especially necessary in environments and situations of stress, potential conflict, and shared or diverging interests. Religion in the two river valleys in Graeco-Roman Lebanon materialises in sacred places as well as rituals and religiously induced meetings which we reconstruct from the material remains. Religion is not only conceived as a set of narratives or symbols to interpret – in our case – the environmental stressor water. Rather, they show that religion itself is a resource and offers strategies which help reduce the complexities of life by routines and rituals, to enhance social cohesion by shared practices and knowledge, and to allow religious specialists to manage and control resources¹⁶. Shared rituals are opportunities for communication to exchange information, to organise work and to negotiate resources distribution¹⁷.

Resilience is in these cases about the long-term strategies people developed in relation to the highly dynamic landscape and powerful water resources, life-giving and destructive at the same time. Religious institutions and practices – I argue – turn out to be not only a social resource, but highly relevant for bettering ecological, social, and economical resilience.

Resilience and the River Valleys of the Lebanon Mountains and their Past Communities

To better understand these interrelations, I will apply resilience as a concept and a research paradigm. Resilience as a concept can be understood as the ability of a socio-political or ecological system, of an organisation or of individuals to recover after a shock, to keep going even though they have ex-

¹⁰ On environmental history see Schliephake 2018 and Post 2022; esp. on water see Strang 2011. Foltz 2003 offers a religious perspective on environmental issues.

¹¹ Anderson et al. 2019; Strang 2023.

¹² Cf. the application of communities of practice, knowledge, and memory in Rieger 2023; communities of memory are established by burial places; however, they are excluded in this paper. See Reckwitz 2002; Werlen 2017; Løvschal 2022.

¹³ Regarding marginal ecological systems like mountainous areas, they are on the one hand prone to stressors, but at the same time well-adapted.

They can be more fragile or more resilient in case of crisis, cf. Rieger 2023, 3.

¹⁴ The difficulty for (geo- and bio-)archaeology is to obtain the fine resolution of chronologies in the record, which is either missing or technically unrecognisable, so that the differentiation of short-term variabilities is rarely possible. But see approaches such as Harfouche et al. 2017, 172–174.

¹⁵ Wall/Waterman 2018; Rampp 2020.

¹⁶ Schuppert 2021 refers to »Sinngabung« and »solidarische Netzwerke« which can be established through religion, see also Rüpke 2015.

¹⁷ Flaherty 2019.

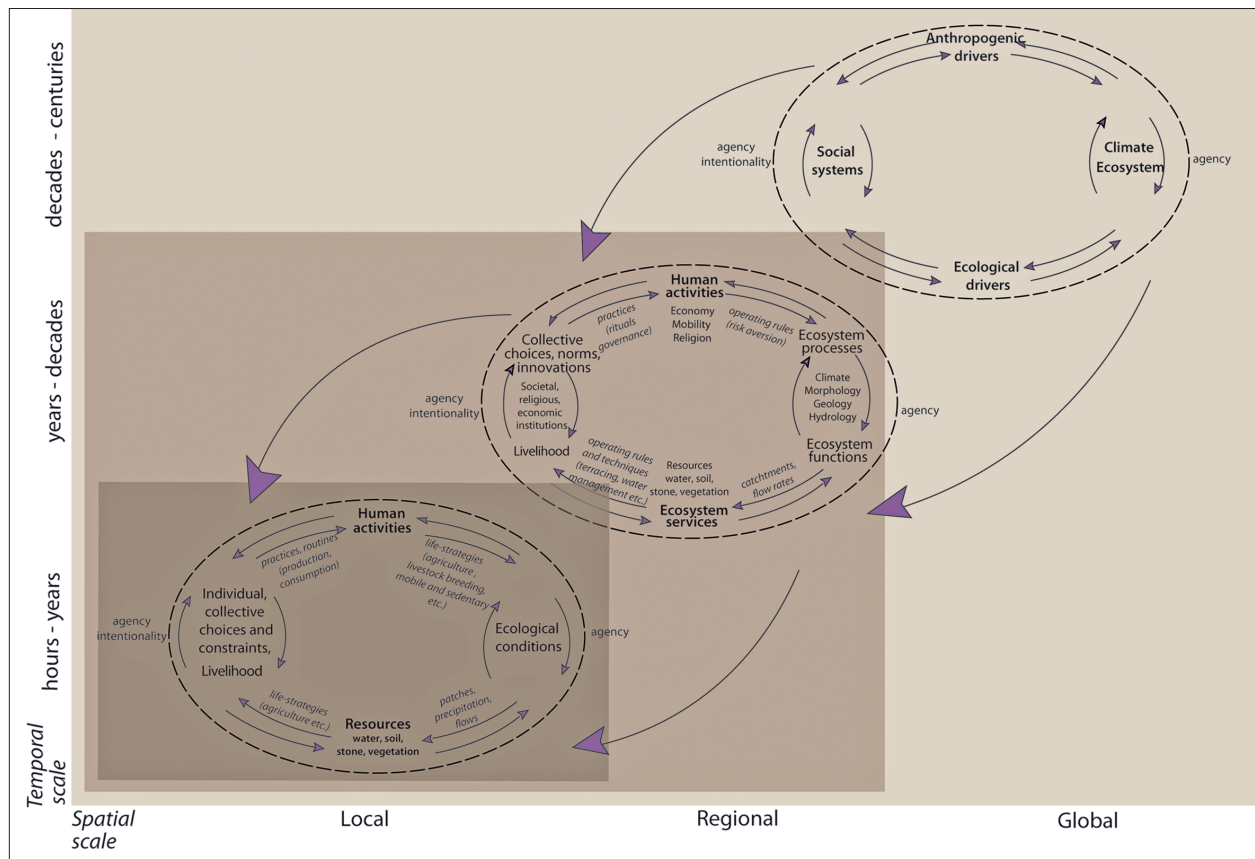


Fig. 2 The scheme illustrates the interdependencies of resilience in the various scales in socio-ecological systems from a daily and regional to a century-long and global dimension. – (Graph A.-K. Rieger based on Xu et al. 2021, fig. 38.3).

perienced changes to which they were able to adapt practices and ways of living¹⁸. As such, resilience is not a property of an individual or system but emerges through the mutual dependencies of agents and factors and is as such a highly relational, non-normative concept¹⁹.

The concept of resilience was introduced for explaining states and transformations of ecological systems. In the wake of socio-constructivist and science-technology studies in the 1980s applications of the concept of resilience shifted to socio-psychological and socio-economical entities and took subsystems or co-occurring systems into consideration²⁰. As a modern concept it requires a sound methodology when applied to socio-historical contexts of the past. However, many activities, practices, insti-

tutions, and technologies of people in ancient times allow us to reconstruct their material, narrative, or performative practices to explain catastrophes to find relief, or to re-organise systems under changed conditions²¹.

Resilience as a research paradigm is an etic concept, whose meaning depends on ascriptions of what feature is resilient towards which disruption²². Since resilience includes aspects of stability or conservatism as well as aspects of transformation and adaptation, they need to be clearly addressed: Who or what parts are recovering, and which institutions, traditions, physical spaces survive? How many must keep for calling a society or system resilient? Who defines such characteristics – from an etic and emic perspective²³?

¹⁸ A common definition of resilience is the capacity of a system or an individual »to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks«, Walker et al. 2004, abstract. See also the definition by Holling 1973, and the introduction to this volume p. 9.

¹⁹ This is often overlooked in studies, where resilience tends to be essentialised to simply explain how systems remain »stable«, see Endreß 2022, 4-8; Løvschal 2022. As described elsewhere (Rieger 2023), an ecological system does not care about breaking up or continuing in the existent form.

²⁰ Law 1999; Cote/Nightingale 2012; Turner 2014; Rampp 2020.

²¹ Our Scientific Network based on these threefold practices, reflected in the three sections of this volume. See also Cannon/Müller-Mahn 2010.

²² Izdebski et al. 2018.

²³ Cf. etic and emic perspectives on resilience: Hartmann; Moser; Zingg in this volume and introduction p. 17.

Looking at the management and integration of material and immaterial resources as resilient strategy in riparian and mountain communities in the Lebanon of Roman times I do not deal with a crisis or catastrophe but with the permanent stressor – the abundancy of water, where the religious institutions act retrospectively and prospectively on an inter-

individual and intergenerational level. My etic view takes into consideration the various scales from micro- (a village, a spring) to meso- (a river valley) and macro-scale (a mountain range) over various time spans to account for the variables in a system and its relations, which can foster or inhibit its overall resilience (fig. 2)²⁴.

The Valley of the Adonis and of the Chrysorrhoas

My case studies are the valley of the river Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) with its sources Apheca (Afqa) and Ain er-Rouaiss on the western slopes of Jebel Sannine in the central Lebanon as well as the river Chrysorrhoas (Barada) on the eastern slopes of the Antilebanon in today's Syria (figs 1. 3. 14). They represent cult places connected not only to water bodies, but to other sacred places along the valleys²⁵. Their socio-religious as well as ecological and economical embedding in settlement and resource networks will be the analytical grid to then interpret the role of the religious practices for the resilience of the communities in the valley.

The Source Apheca, the Adonis and the Valley down to the Coast South of Byblos

In the valley of the river Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) I look at four sacred places – el-Ginéh at ca. 960 m asl, Machnaqa at ca. 1,050 m asl, Yanouh at ca. 1,130 m asl, and Afqa at ca. 1,250 m asl – before I end in the coastal zone south of Byblos (Jbeil), where the river drains to the Mediterranean Sea.

The Source Apheca

The source Apheca (Afqa) is located 25 km east of Byblos on the slopes of the Jebel Sannine (fig. 3a). Gushing from a grotto in a steep rock face its water feeds one of the countless rivers, the river Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) which cuts deep into the coastal mountain range (figs 3b; 4a-b).

It is not the only source of the Adonis: Ain er-Rouaiss, located a little to the northeast is the second one, making the Adonis the water-richest river in the Lebanon mountains after the Litani (fig. 3c). With a length of only 27 km with a difference in altitude of 1,250 m, and a mean flow rate of 495 million m³/year it is a powerful water body²⁶.

The water level reaches its peak between March and May with the snowmelt in higher altitudes (fig. 3d)²⁷. Sediments and minerals in the soil cause the reddish colour of the river in this time of the year. In antiquity the myth of Adonis, the young lover of Aphrodite, who was killed by boars sent by the jealous Ares explained this phenomenon²⁸: His blood tinted the water of the river red, serving as the aitiology for the festivals for Adonis (and Aphrodite) held in spring, e. g. at Byblos. The source Apheca was seen as the place where his death took place. The source located in a cave in the theatre-like rock face is characterised by its visibility as well as the pools filled by a waterfall cascading from the grotto and a cliff ca. 50 m downstream (fig. 4b). Southwest of the grotto in front of the rock face raises a hill on which the temple to Aphrodite Aphacitis was located²⁹.

Little is known about the layout, rising architecture, decoration, or dedications³⁰, since only parts of the terrace and the podium are preserved (fig. 5a-b). However, the dimension of the substructures (c. 40 m in length) and podium as well as the size of the ashlar show that temple must have been huge (fig. 5c-d). Its supra-regional significance and powerful commissioners or stakeholders become evident not only by the physical dimensions and textu-

²⁴ Schilling 2022; Rieger 2023; Rampp 2022: Applying the concept of resilience allows for crossing scales of our study-subjects and materials we often look at separately.

²⁵ Many sacred places are connected to water bodies in the Lebanon mountains, see Aliquot 2009, 55–92.

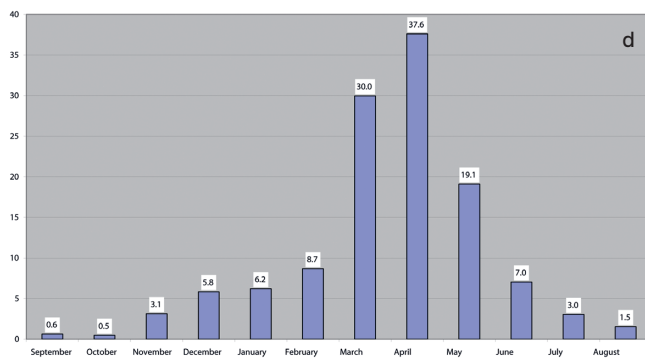
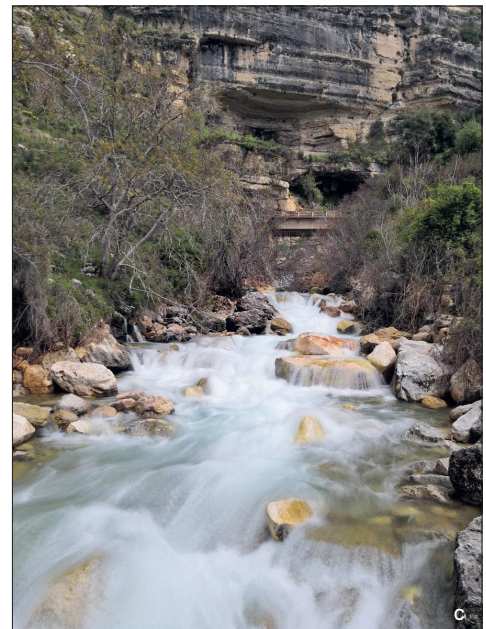
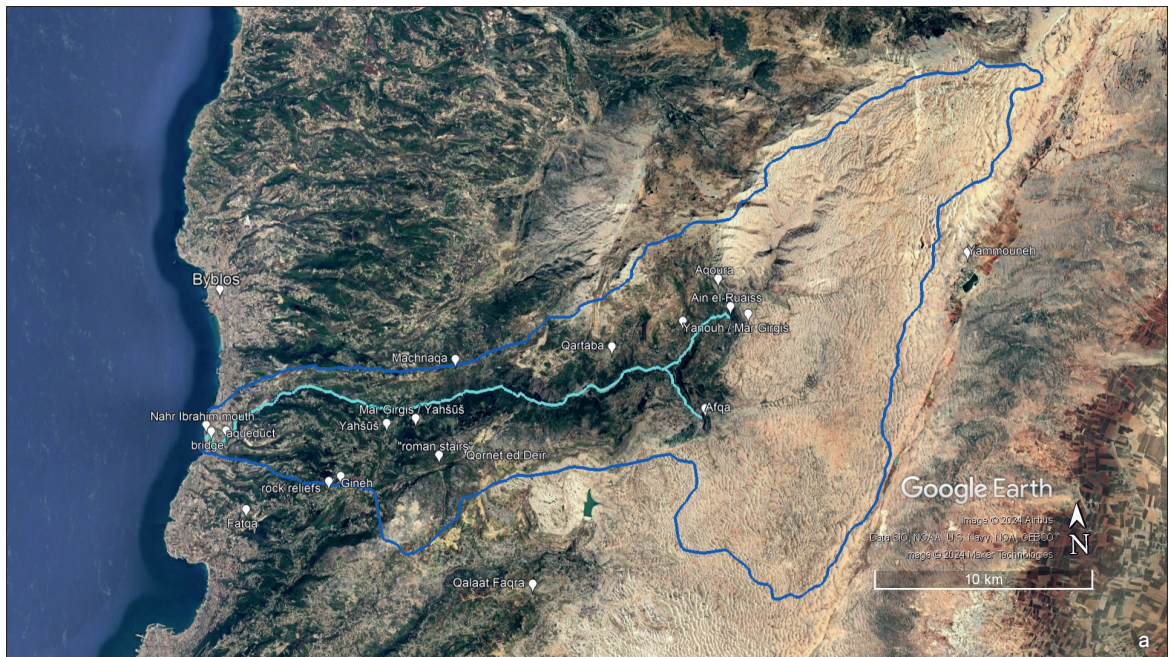
²⁶ Today snowmelt from altitudes higher than 1,200 m is contributing 30–80 % to the total flow; the remaining portion is generated by rainfall, see Hamzé/Shabann 2017, 22 with tab. 2.1. 30.

²⁷ Fayad 2017.

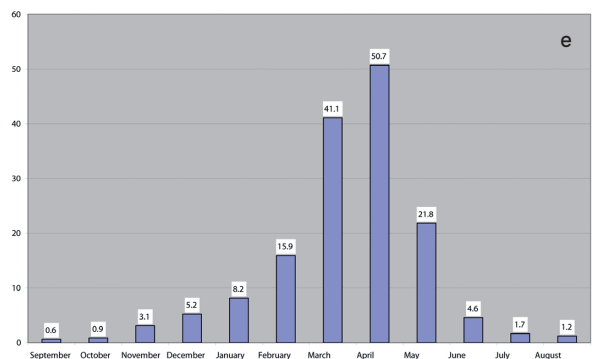
²⁸ See Luc. Syr. D. 6, 6 and Macr. Sat. 1, 21 for the myth of Adonis.

²⁹ Aliquot 2009, no. 25; Krencker/Zschietzschmann 1938, 56–64 pls 27–30; Rouvier 1900; Luc. Syr. D. 8; Eus. Vita Const. 3, 55; Zos. 1, 58. The late antique sources speak about a temple at the Apheca source dedicated to Aphrodite Aphacitis, which allows the identification of the remains. At Ain er-Rouaiss no traces of religious activities were found.

³⁰ There is hardly any material found apart from a fragmentary inscription, see Hajjar 1977, 258 no. 4, who reconstructs Δ[ι] Ἡ[λ]ιο[ς] πολει[τ]η. To connect the small relief with female figure found at Qartaba close to Yanouh with Aphrodite (*Venus lugens*? – acc. to Macr. Sat. 1, 21,5) and the temple is debated, see Bonnet 2015, 190–194 fig. 34.



Average Monthly Discharge of Afqa Spring during Water Years 2000/01 - 2009-10 [MCM]



Average Monthly Discharge of Rouaiss Spring during Water Years 2000/01 - 2009-10 [MCM]

Fig. 3 The Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim): **a** the catchment area of the Adonis/Nahr Ibrahim. – The sources Apheca/Afqqa (**b**) and Ain er-Rouaiss (**c**). – The flow rates over the year with the peaks in April/May after the snowmelt at the time of the festival of the *Adoneia* of Apheca/Afqqa (**d**) and Ain er-Rouaiss (**e**) – (a map A.-K. Rieger based on Google Earth satellite image, credits in map; b photo T. Hergelian, <https://t1p.de/source-nahr-ibrahim>; c photo M. Sadek, <https://t1p.de/er-roueiss>; d-e after Margane/Stoeckl 2013, figs 32–33).



Fig. 4 The Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim): **a** in a view along the river valley upstream to the east. – **b** the rockface at the source Apheca (Afqa) with the huge grotto. – (a photo »OadrienvallentineG«, <https://t1p.de/nahr-ibrahim>; b photo A. Mauersberger, <https://t1p.de/source-afqa>).

31 The columns of granite are mentioned in travellers' reports of the 19th c., see Robinson/Smith 1854, only some fragments seem still to be preserved on spot.

32 Two of the three *finis* inscriptions are close to the temple, the third higher up in the direction to Qalaat Faqra (cf. fig. 3a), where also another inscription was found, see AE 2004,1573-1576. Their numbers V, VI and VII let assume at least seven inscriptions. With a max. letter height of 32 cm engraved in rock faces they are well-visible. The fourth inscription runs *larith N / mont(es) / cont(ingunt) or montibus con(igent)*, see Yon 2004,

al sources, but also by the applied material: Columns made of Egyptian granite point to an influence of the Roman emperors, who controlled the quarries³¹.

Roman administration left also signs at the source: In an area southwest of the temple Latin rock inscriptions which attributed the area to a kinship group or settlement called *Iarith* mark off certain parts of the territory and its limits (*finis*)³². These inscriptions form part of the many property inscriptions in the Lebanon mountains in Roman times³³. Even though the distinction between settlement, kinship group and the organisational unit which the temple represented, I assume that in the case of Apheca the inscriptions confirm the administrative function fulfilled by the temple and its persons in charge. They oversaw the land property and made sure, that these physical and juridical limits were not transgressed, or resources used by unauthorized persons. The temple officials had the position and competences to deal with the economic aspects of the resources of the area of which soil and water are the most relevant³⁴. Many villages were located on the plateau around the sources of river Adonis in Roman times (fig. 6a), some dating back to the Iron Age, some, like el-Kharayeb, also to the Bronze Age³⁵. Agricultural terracing can be traced back to these early periods, where people cultivated olives, grapes, and cereals (fig. 6b-d). The upstream zones of the river Adonis at heights between 1,100 and 1,500 m asl seem to have been a suitable place to live and cultivate.

A detail in the substruction of the temple indicates the close relationship between the water and the (house of the) goddess: A tunnel under the temple, coming from the rock face allows the water to run through below the temple and appear at its northern side (fig. 5b). Beside this close and physical relationship of the resource and the religious architecture we know from textual sources that people ascribed religious qualities to the water, namely divinatory and healing powers. The water was the means of communication with the goddess. Oracular rituals at a *limne*, a pond, at the famous Apheca source attracted the interest of Late antique Christian writers. Zosimus speaks of hydromantic rituals people conducted where they had access to the water³⁶. The remains at the source Apheca itself are not detailed enough

with figs 57-58; Jalabert 1907. Breton 1980, 28 note 7 implies to interpret the *finis* as the limit of a forest property.

33 Many of the rock inscriptions in the central Lebanon refer to the imperial domains of forest (*silva, arbores*) and show the intensive and extensive exploitation of this resource by the Roman administration, see Breton 1980, 5029-5033. 5043-5078 carte 3. 4. 7-9. See also CIL 3, 180.

34 Aliquot 2009, 85.

35 Harfouche et al. 2017.

36 Zos. 1, 58. He wrote around 500 CE.



Fig. 5 The temple of Aphrodite Aphacitis at the grotto: **a** the remains of the temple on a hill west of the grotto. – **b** a documentation of the early 20th c. – **c** the terrace and the podium with the canal running through it as visible today. – **d** the huge dimension of the ashlars of the podium. – (a photo N. Farra Haddad, <https://tip.de/remains-of-temple>; b after Krencker/Zschiezschmann 1938, pl. 27; c photo A. Mauersberger, <https://tip.de/podium-of-temple>; d photo R. Tanissa, <https://tip.de/slabs-of-temple>).

to reconstruct a *limne*. However, comparable to the spring in Caesarea Philippi³⁷, one could assume basins like the pools visible today for this kind of water-related rituals, or they could have taken place in the big grotto (figs 4b; 7a), where some small – unfortunately undatable – pools cut directly in the rock point to utilisation of the water³⁸. The hydromantic ritual is described as such: People brought objects of some weight (and value) to the pond to throw them in. In case they sank the goddess had accepted the offering; in case they floated up the goddess had refused it, which was taken as a bad omen.

The hydromancy at the source Apheca is easier to trace than healing practices, which only can be inferred from a combination of the accounts of Eusebius of Caesarea in the 4th century CE and of So-

zomenos in the 5th century CE³⁹. The first reports in his *vita Constantini* that Constantine gave order to destroy among others two famous sanctuaries: a temple of the healing god Asklepios in Cilica and ὁ ἐν Αφάκοις τῆς Αφροδίτης [sc. ναὸς] παρὰ τὸν Λίβανον τὸ ὄρος καὶ Ἀδωνιν τὸν ποταμόν⁴⁰. Beside the fame of the places (ἄμφω δὲ ἐπισημοτάτω νεώ). It were the healing and oracular services they offered which may have made the Christianized Roman empire feel the need to go against them in the early 4th century CE. Even though we cannot correlate the healing god Asklepios with Aphrodite at the Apheca mentioned one after the other in Eusebius' work and hence, cannot paralleling any functional aspects of their sanctuaries, there is ethnographical evidence corroborates the ascription of healing powers to the

³⁷ Rieger 2016, fig. 2.

³⁸ A λίμνη does not necessarily describe a natural lake. Zosimus describes the pond as man-made (τούτου πλησίον λίμνη τις ἔστιν οἰκὸς χειροποίητω δεξαμενῇ).

³⁹ Eus. vita Const. 54 and 55; Soz., hist. eccl. 2,5.

⁴⁰ Soz., hist. eccl. 2,5.

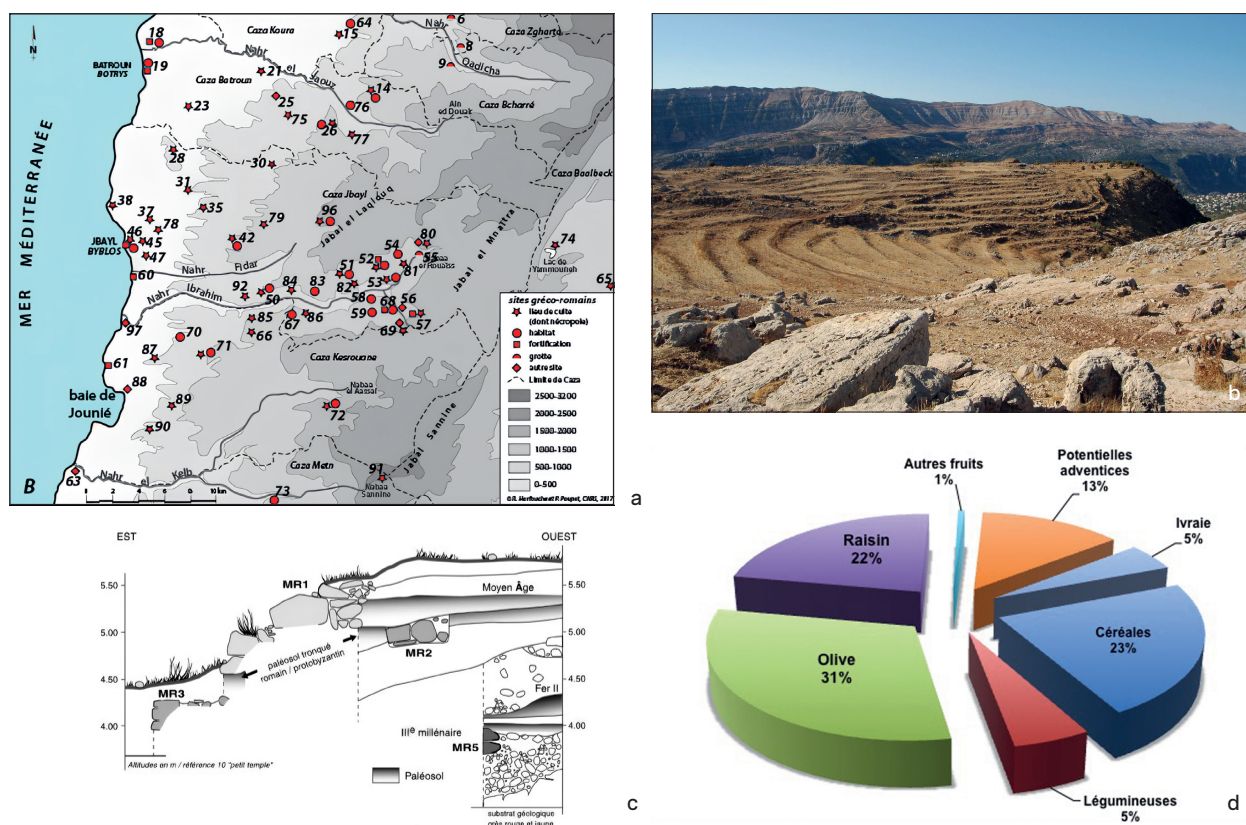


Fig. 6 The valley of Adonis (Nahr Ibrahim) with the sites of Roman times (a) and terraces in the upper parts that can be dated from the Bronze Age to Roman and recent times (b-c), where grapes, olives and cereals were cultivated (d). – (a-c after Harfouche et al. 2017, figs 32. 66. 83; d <https://archeorient.hypotheses.org/10437>, fig. 4 [24.2.2024]).

water of the source: Reports from the beginning of the 19th century describe that until recently people from the region conducted healing rites incubation practices at the source. People also left strips of textiles in the trees at the ruined temple for the female spirit of the place as prayer or thanksgiving for health issues (fig. 7b)⁴¹.

The rituals and the myths of the deity and her lover are all about the water. The temple as institution seems to have been responsible for this resource as for the territory. It stood at the beginning of the river, whose water had to be observed, controlled, and distributed. People from coastal places apparently took the long way up to come to the sanctuary of Aphrodite Aphacitis. The mourning rituals known from Byblos for the (semi-)god Adonis connect the river mouth with the source, where he died⁴². The day-long walk up to the source can be read from Lucian's *De Dea Syria*⁴³. The temple up here was not

standing in remote mystic nature but was embedded in this pragmatic as well as mythological-divine network. Starting from this observation and the power of the river, we need to examine the way along the river to understand how this line of religious and economic-ecological communication was organised.

Yanouh

Going down the river the next sacred place is at Yanouh about 2.5 km, which not by chance is located above the confluence of the two sources – Ain er-Rouaiss and Apheca. In this village a Roman sanctuary is preserved at the site of a monastery of Saint George (Mar Girios el-Azraq) (figs 3a; 8)⁴⁴. The remains of a platform from Hellenistic times and of two temple buildings, constructed in 2nd century CE, are well documented by a French mission (fig. 8a-c), as are the Byzantine chapel and the basilica belong-

⁴¹ The source is a pilgrimage site for Muslims and Christians alike, where vows are addressed to the *Sayyidat al-Kabirah* (great female spirit), see Paton 1919–1920, 51–65; Burton 1885, vol. 10, note 35.

⁴² The chronology of the temple of Adonis at Byblos is debated as is the festival of the *Adoneia*. However, it seems to have been celebrated since Hellenistic times. Soyez 1977; Bonnet 2015; Nawotka/Głogowski 2023.

⁴³ Cf. note 33 and also Luc. Syr. D. 9, who rather came for touristic-historical interests (the old temple) than religious ones.

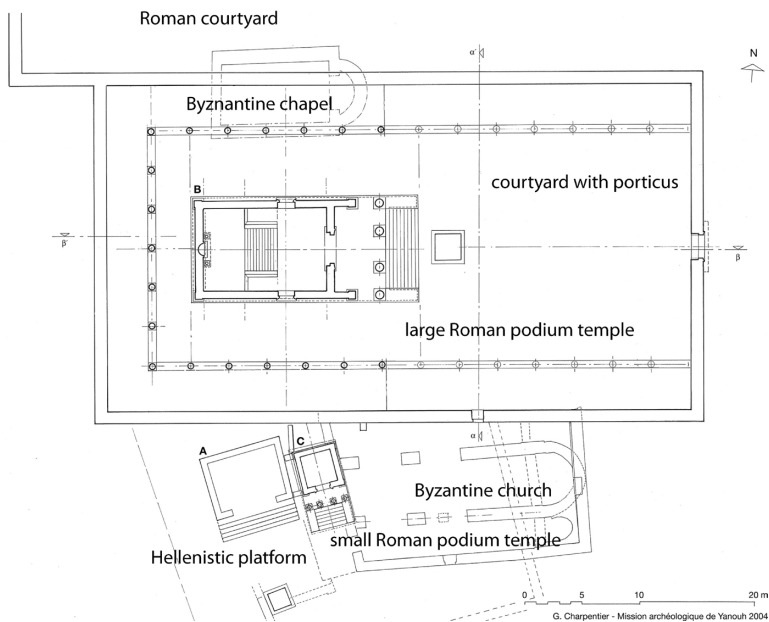
⁴⁴ Aliquot 2009, no. 24; Krencker/Zschietzschmann 1938, 35–37; Gatier et al. 2001; 2002; 2004.



Fig. 7 a The grotto of the source Apheca with traces of anthropogenic interventions. – b a tree at the temple podium in a photograph from the early 20th c. with textile stripes as dedications to the healing spirit of the place. – (a photo M. Zeidan, <https://tip.de/grotto-apheca>; b after Krencker/Zschietzschmann 1938, pl. 30).



Fig. 8 The Hellenistic and Roman sanctuary at Yanouh, today used as a monastery of Mar Girios: **a** a recent photograph showing the remains of the large Roman temple. – **b** a plan showing the two large courtyards, and the buildings from Hellenistic to Byzantine times. – **c** a reconstruction of the Roman podium temple in the courtyard with the porticus. – (a. c after Aliquot 2009, figs 137. 135; b after Charpentier 2020, fig. 22, see also fig. 20 for a section).



ing to the later monastery (**fig. 8c**)⁴⁵. The larger of the temple buildings is surrounded by a substantial *temenos* of ca. 50 m × 30 m. A second courtyard adjoins to the north, which was constructed at the same time, does not show any structures inside⁴⁶. The particularity of the complex is the portico that can be reconstructed around the *temenos* – a rare feature in sanctuaries of the Lebanon (**fig. 8b-c**). Hence, large spaces were available, which could house many people and various activities. A porticoed courtyard and a large precinct with religious buildings do not make a healing sanctuary; however, the eponymic saint later monastery Mar Girios el-Azraq, Saint George the Blue, has the power to heal the sick. One can interpret him as continuing the activities in the former Roman sanctuary. The precinct at Yanouh can be understood as the more functional, spacious »medical centre«, whereas the temple of Aphrodite at the source on the hill with limited space could not house people for longer stays.

The position above the confluence makes Yanouh a hub between the two sources of the river, on whose water people in the villages on the plateau relied. They lived on agriculture (and livestock breeding)⁴⁷. The cultivation on terraced fields depends mainly on the rainfalls, stored in the soil layers behind the terrace walls (**fig. 6b-c**), but also on irrigation, because of the short and intense cultivation season at this height. Hence, the water from the river was important for people and animals and needs to be diverted and channelled to be available for irrigation. Even though no remains of channels are documented, we can assume their existence⁴⁸. Water management is highly interrelated to soil management in the river valley and on the terraced slopes on the plateau. Erosion in the steep terrain is a risk and required high competences in prevention, riverine protection, and maintenance of the retaining and channelling structures. To know about the water balance at the source, to evaluate the expected water amounts from the snow melt, and to manage the water over the year was a crucial necessity for all people living up here, but not only for them. The temple at the source and at the confluence (**fig. 3a**) represent the organisa-

tional centres where people regularly came to, where they could discuss measures, share observations of nature, and archive the knowledge about the Adonis and its valley⁴⁹.

Machnaqa

The issue of water connects the villages and sacred places along the river valley (**fig. 3a**). Even though most of them are located on the slopes of the narrow valley, observing what happens upstream and downstream, how much water and when was to be expected, and organising maintenance work was important for the cultivation of the soil, the flocks, and mobility along the valley⁵⁰. Machnaqa was one of those villages, located at 1,050 m asl at the northern side of the river valley, halfway between Byblos and Yanouh, of which at least remains of Byzantine time are preserved. Its sacred precinct lies on a spur and can be interpreted in two ways: as a religious place for the settlement and as a stop-over on the line of communication between coast and source along the Adonis (**fig. 9a**). The precinct consists of a huge walled courtyard (95 m × 43 m) with a tower-altar in a separate area of 26 m × 20 m in its western parts (**fig. 9b-c**)⁵¹. This altar on a podium of 5.30 m × 5.30 m with columns around a central block had a Hellenistic predecessor incorporated in the later building of the 1st or 2nd century CE⁵².

Whether Machnaqa with its huge courtyard was part of an official processional route or just a village with a temple along the road remains open. However, since there are only two comfortable routes along the northern and the southern side of the river, of which the northern leads via Machnaqa directly to Yanouh, they might have been linked not only practically. Like Yanouh, it has a big courtyard to be used for gatherings, ceremonies, or as resting area for people on their way up to Aphrodite source.

The river itself lies far down in the valley below the sanctuary of Machnaqa on the spur. However, from here one has a rather good sight upstream, even though the valley is steep and meandering (**fig. 10**)⁵³. One could control the water level in the

⁴⁵ For the chronology see Gatier et al. 2004, 132–133.

⁴⁶ Gatier et al. 2004, 138–139.

⁴⁷ See above notes 34 and 35.

⁴⁸ The French landscape-archaeological project directed by R. Harfouche did not explicitly look for the waterways in the valley and on the plateau, however, they mention: »L'eau est transportée depuis les sources dans des canaux bâtis en pierre jusqu'aux vergers où les agriculteurs pratiquent encore l'irrigation à la raie« (Harfouche et al. 2016, 83). See also Harfouche et al. 2017, 138 (recent irrigation); 145 (Bronze Age irrigation). Comparable installations we will see below, p. 102–103 in the example of the valley of the river Chrysorrohoas (cf. fig. 15).

⁴⁹ See Raja/Rieger 2021 on sanctuaries as places of not only religious knowledge.

⁵⁰ For the routes along the valley see Harfouche et al. 2017, fig. 46.

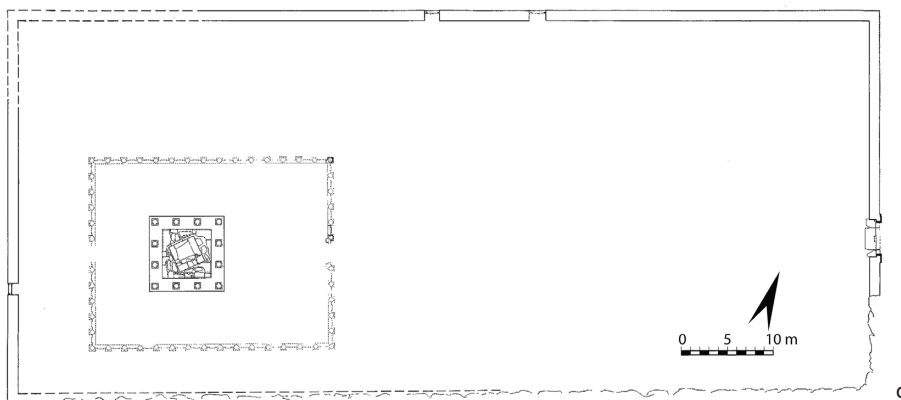
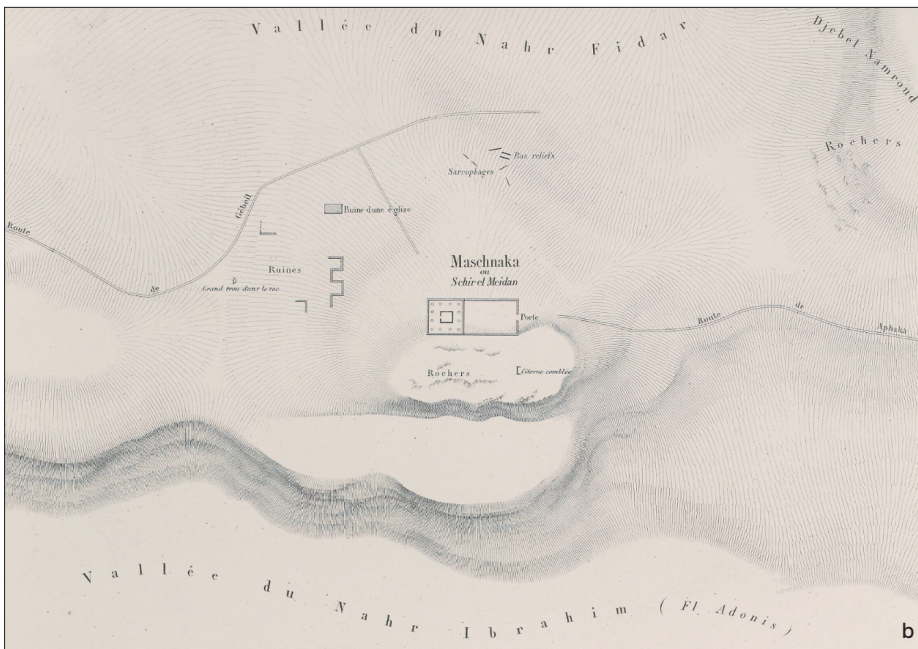
⁵¹ Renan 1864–1874, 289 describes the village northwest of the sanctuary as well as some findings (jar with a Baal/Sol head and thunderbolts, pl. XXXII, no. 2).

⁵² The latest state with the twelve columns around the inner block might be 2nd c. CE, see Aliquot 2009, 90. These tower altars are called *hamana*. At Qalaat Faqra in the valley of the Lycaios (Nahr Kalb) to the south of river Adonis, comparable buildings were erected, see Freyberger 1996.

⁵³ The tower-altar did not have stairs as other buildings of this kind, see Aliquot 2009, 89.



Fig. 9 The sacred area with the tower-altar of Machnaqa: **a** on a spur on the northern side of the river Adonis. – **b** documented in the 19th c. where remains of a village from Roman and Byzantine times were still visible. – **c** the courtyard of the sacred area with the inner precinct. – (a A. Rahayel, still from video clip at 7:28, <https://tvp.de/machnaqa>; b after Renan 1864, vol. 2, pl. XXXIII; c after Aliquot 2009, fig. 132).



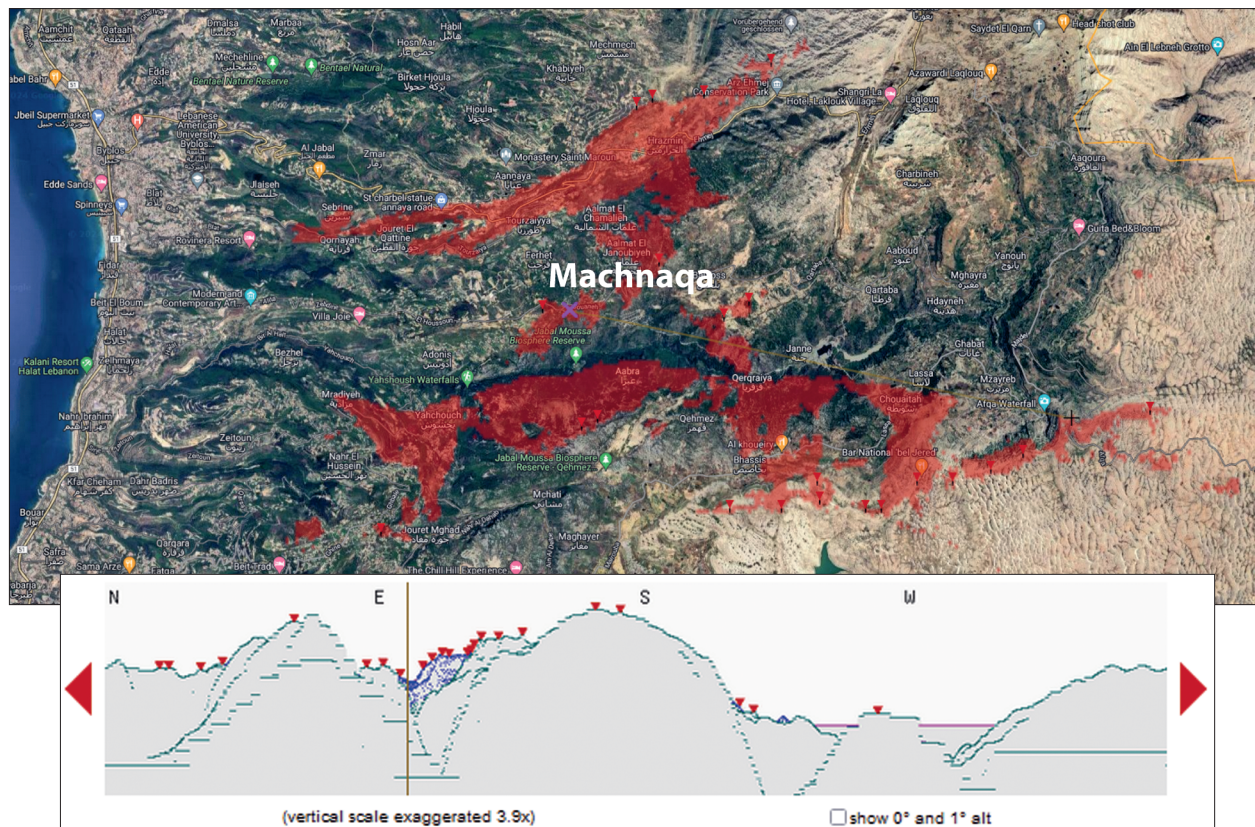


Fig. 10 The viewshed (red areas) from Machnaqa shows that one could look far up in direction of the sources of the Adonis, but also on the opposite slope in a stretch of ca. 15 km as well as to the northern adjoining river valley. – (Graph A.-K. Rieger based on the online viewshed-tool <http://www.heywhatsthat.com/>).

valley, providing useful information for the availability and utilisation of the water, which could be shared at gatherings, since it was crucial for those living downstream. So, Machnaqa formed part of a community of knowledge about the water and the river. Not by chance, I would argue, Machnaqa lies also at the northern limit of the catchment of the Adonis. To the north the catchment of the Nahr Fidar starts, so that Machnaqa with its sacred place had a connecting function between the river valleys.

el-Ginéh

el-Ginéh is a location at the southern side of the Adonis (**fig. 3a**). Opposite Machnaqa it is a point on the road coming from the coast running along the southern side of the river, which leads directly up to the source Apheca. In the area of the modern village lie two places with a religious meaning in its surroundings: two rock reliefs and a Byzantine church which sits on the remains of a Roman tem-

ple of which we can only say little⁵⁴. The reliefs in the west of the village show a hunter of boars(?) and a herdsman with two animals (**fig. 11**). Even though the remains do not appear very impressive, the place is relevant for the question of the relation of sacred places and the river Adonis: el-Ginéh is situated at the southern limits of the catchment of the river. If we go so far to interpret the herdsman and the hunter as figures of the myths around Adonis, being the herdsman who is killed by boars sent by Ares⁵⁵, the reliefs mark the natural demarcation line of the eponymous river, which is as such not recognisable in the landscape.

Byblos

Whereas little is left of channels, sluits, barrages or ponds from Roman (or earlier) times in the central and upper stretches of the river, remains of a Roman aqueduct and a bridge shortly before the river drains to the Mediterranean Sea are still preserved (**fig. 12**).

⁵⁴ Kabaal is the site of the temple. At Yahšūš ca. 3 km further up the river lies another Roman temple in what became the Mar Girios el-Azraq (**fig. 3a**). It will not be further described.

⁵⁵ See above note 28.



Fig. 11 The rock reliefs at el-Ginéh: **a** the drawings of both, the scene with the herdsman and the hunting scene. – **b** the hunting scene. – (a after Renan 1864, vol. 2, pl. XXXVIII; b photo R. Tanissa, <https://tip.de/gineh>).



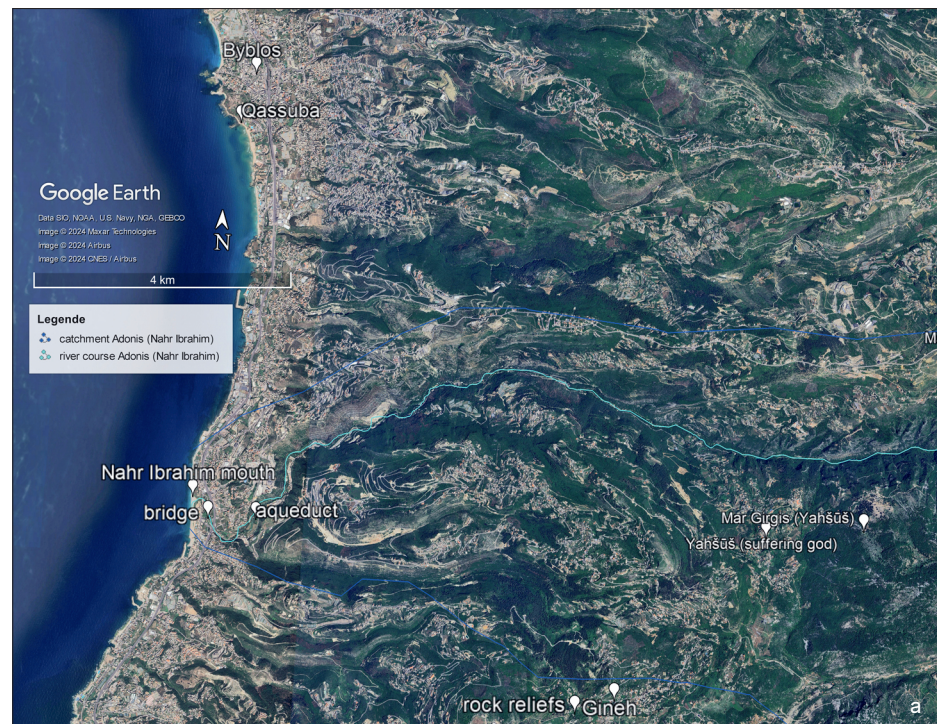
These are infrastructural buildings, not of a religious purpose. However, they are evidence of how people lived with the river and managed and used its water.

The aqueduct at Zoubeida bridges the valley and directs the water of the Adonis with a reasonable inclination from south to north to the city of Byblos (**fig. 12**). This installation allows us to evaluate the importance of the river and its sources at Apheca and Ain er-Rouaiss, especially in Roman times when the city of Byblos grew and relied on only one local source on the promontory where the city's tem-

ples of Adonis and Aphrodite stood (**fig. 13a**)⁵⁶. The water supply of Roman Byblos has not yet been in the focus of archaeological research. However, the construction of a nymphaeum in Severan times at the colonnaded street leading to the promontory with the temples can be related to the aqueduct and the river (**fig. 13b**). Whereas a nymphaeum as water providing urban architecture is known from many cities in Roman Imperial times, the sculptural decoration makes the difference here, since it included the statue of a Hygieia, the goddess of health and

⁵⁶ The source is Ain el-Malik. The Graeco-Roman history of Byblos still poses problems.

Fig. 12 The parts of a Roman aqueduct southeast of Byblos close to the mouth of the Adonis, ca. 6 km south of Byblos (Jbeil), restored in the 1st half of the 19th c. – (Map A.-K. Rieger based on Google Earth satellite image, credits in map; b photo G. Reaidy, <https://tip.de/aqueduct>).



well-being which is despite a presumable connection of this goddess with water a rare motif in nymphaea (**fig. 13c**)⁵⁷. This might have been a reverberation of the inferred competences of Aphrodite Aphacitis at the source and at Yanouh down in Roman Byblos. If this is correct, the healing powers people ascribed to the goddess and the water were »translated« into an image of Hygieia in the façade of the nymphaeum. The city by the sea depended on the water from the mountains and invested in the aqueduct. But Byblos was also religiously linked to the source of the

Adonis through the temple and cult for Adonis on the promontory. Yet, it seems that also the healing functions of the water at the source arrived and were known at Byblos.

Again, the various functions of the water are »materialised« in economic and religious infrastructure in the city, even though the aqueduct is the only documented evidence of water management structures in the river valley. In the valley of the Adonis many mills are attested to in Ottoman sources, when the economic situation was of course different. How-

⁵⁷ Winkler-Horaček 1995, A47. Only few examples of Roman statues of Hygieia/Salus come from nymphaea: We know of three examples (Winkler-

Horaček 1995, A4 and A5, elite villas, Rome; A48, Apamea public nymphaeum).



Fig. 13 The city of Byblos with its most ancient parts on the promontory, among them the probable temples for Adonis and Aphrodite, the Roman buildings and the street network (a). The red circle marks the joint in the street grid where the Severan nymphaeum stood (b), whose façade was adorned with the statue of Hygieia (c), today in the National Museum Beirut. – (a map M. Zarzoour/R. Chamoun, Lebanese American University, byblos-board-history-city-structure.pdf; b photo R. Voorburg, <https://tip.de/byblos-nymphaeum>; c photo A. Molon, <https://tip.de/byblos-hygieia>).

ever, it could be paralleled to Roman times, where, in general, exploitation and utilisation of the water and the valley was more extensive and intensive⁵⁸. In analogy to the Jawz, a river further south, in Ottoman times, I assume that also the water-rich and fast-flowing Adonis had channel-like installations along its course (known as »Waale« or »Suonen« in the Alpine region) keeping the water at a certain altitude to be distributed by weirs to cultivation plots with lesser inclination⁵⁹.

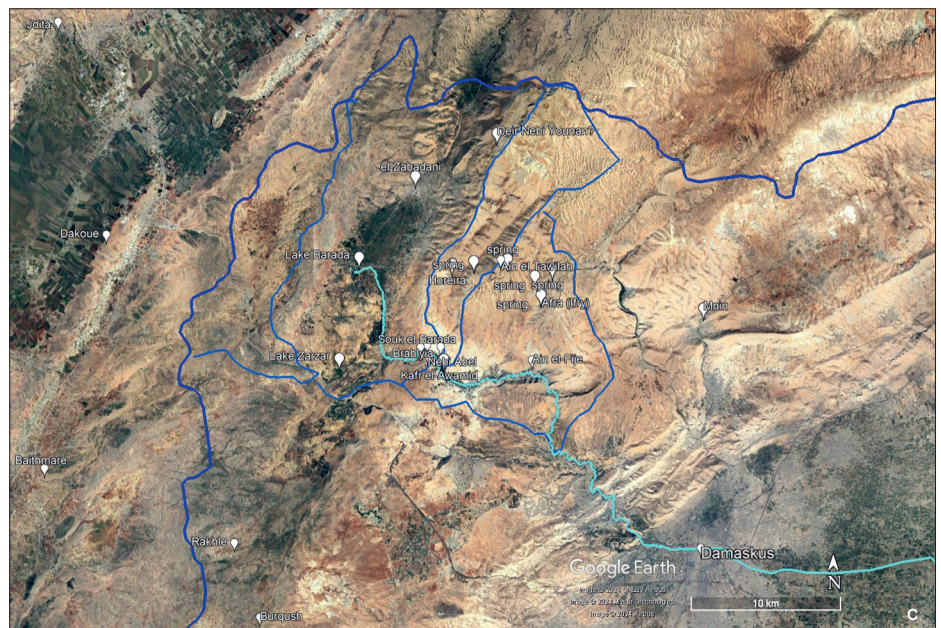
The connection and exchange of information between the upstream and downstream riparians were crucial and based on hard-fact knowledge, control, and observations to guarantee the water provision of the city as well as the agriculture in the highlands, all framed by the divine figures of Adonis and Aphrodite.

⁵⁸ See above p. 90 with note 33.

⁵⁹ Reynard/Dubuis 2015.



Fig. 14 The Chrysorrhoas (Barada) flowing from the Eastern slopes of the Antilebanon to the plain of Ghouta **(a)** with its catchment **(b)** and the sub-basins **(c)**. – (a photo N. Abou Htab, <https://t1p.de/barada-view>; b map A.-K. Rieger based on Google Earth satellite image, credits in map; c same as b with sub-basins based on Abdo et al. 2023, fig. 1).



The Chrysorrhoas (Barada) - Healing Powers of the Water and Collaborative Power of the People

The Chrysorrhoas (Barada) on the eastern slopes of the Antilebanon supplies the city of Damascus and the plain of Ghouta with water. One of its sources, Ain el-Fije, lies at ca. 880 m asl, whereas Souk Wadi Barada shortly after the confluence with another torrent lies at a height of ca. 1,030 m asl. The main source of the river can be located at Abana (Lake Barada) south of the village of Zabadani at ca. 1,150 m asl (figs 1. 14), where no ancient remains are preserved. More springs and non-perennial rivers from the northern and southern slopes feed the river along its course of ca. 65 km.

Along the valley runs an important line of communication from the fringes of the Syrian Desert to the Mediterranean coast, crossing the Lebanon mountains and connecting Damascus with the Bekaa-plain and Heliopolis. The river's importance as life-giving water is reflected in its ancient name meaning »gold river«. Water in image and text features prominently on Damascene coins which show sacred buildings and below the river god, or grottoes with him reclining inside, as well as swimming below a seated Fortuna. Some of the coin inscriptions say *πηγαί*, i. e. sources⁶⁰.

The Chrysorrhoas valley and its sacred places offer insights in resilient strategies of a community of riparians, who control the valley, its traffic and the water supplying Damascus⁶¹. They form a community of (religious and environmental) knowledge and practice having experienced the disastrous power of the river and at the same time ascribing healing power to its waters. Both perspectives foster the resilience of the people and communities living along the river.

Souk Wadi Barada/Abila Lysianou

The village of Souk Wadi Barada is located where the Chrysorrhoas turns east and runs through a narrow

stretch of the valley (fig. 14c). Most likely, this place is the ancient city of Abila Lysaniou⁶². The village itself, even though of Hellenistic origins, has only little ancient remains. The Muslim shrine of Nabi Habil (Abel) on the southwestern slopes refers to the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel and stands on a Roman predecessor.

The location is marked by the meandering river in a gorge and a steep butt on its northern side. The morphology and terrain are challenging for any road or track as well as people and animals moving here. Nevertheless, a road as well as canals for diverting water and lessening the inclination of the river were cut in the butt in Roman times (fig. 15a-b). These were labour-intense measures which required knowledge of the site and geology as well as hard and coordinated labour. Two Latin inscriptions incised into the northern rock face tell us (about this endeavour in the same wording) that the road was the result of repair in the 2nd century CE after a rock-slide and flooding, which destroyed the former road running closer to the river (fig. 15c)⁶³. Hence, in the reign of the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (between 161 and 169 CE) the *via publica* obtained a new course, ca. 50 m above the river. Since the water channel runs along the road, both important infrastructural installations seem to have been built at the same time.

On the one hand the twin inscriptions in *tabulae ansatae* represent the common way of the emperor(s) taking care of and financing infrastructural measures (through the *curatores viarum*)⁶⁴. Format, language, and agents in the inscriptions represent or belong to the Roman administration. However, the last two words, *impendiis Abilenorum*, tell us that it was the people from Abila (or the Abilene) who paid for this and appear as actively participating in this smart and sustainable solution against the threats and power (*vi*) of the river, while making the re-

⁶⁰ Aliquot/Piraud-Fournet 2008, 94–96. Specimens are, e. g., RPC IV.3 6967 (acc. to the RPC available at <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/> [5.1.2024]). The coins with the *pegai*-inscription date all to the reign of Philippos Arabs (COL DAMAS METRO ΠΗΓΑΙ, RPC VIII, unassigned; ID 59215; ID 26803; ID 15976). Another one, without naming the Chrysorrhoas, shows on the rv. a temple building on a podium with a staircase in front and a grotto containing water below the temple, on the av. Gallienus (RPC X ID 88399 unassigned). The motif resembles the situation at Ain el-Fije.

⁶¹ The following sacred places belong to this sub-basin of river Barada (see Aliquot 2009, nos 78–86): Qafa el-Qseir, Deir Nebi Younan, Horeira (ISyrie, no. 2556, a building for a god paid with money of the village and the god), Ifry (ISyrie, no. 2557: Ζεύς Βεελεφαρος; Jalabert 1907, 292 and nos 87–88: fragments of altars; Mouterde 1959, 57–60 no. 3, remains of a Roman building under the mosque), Ain el-Hawr, source incorporated in a mosque today, but preserving an inscribed Geison ([Ιε]ροτομίας ἐπὶ τὴν

ἀρχὴν αὐτοῦ, where the administrator took care of the assets of the god, maybe Zeus Beelepharos), Qalat ed-Diwan (settlement and sanctuary) and Dimas (sanctuary, not studied), as well as Nebi Abel, Brahliya, Ain el-Fije, which are dealt with below.

⁶² Gschwind 2004, figs 2–4; pls 12; 13 a. b for the situation of the cut through of the road.

⁶³ CIL III, 199 north and south, 164 CE in a *tabula ansata*: *Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M(arcus) Aurel(ius) Antoninus | Aug(ustus) Armeniacus et | Imp(erator) Caes(ar) L(ucius) Aurel(ius) Verus Aug(ustus) Armeniacus | viam fluminis | vi abruptam interciso | monte restituerunt per | lul(ium) Verum leg(atum) pr(o) pr(aetore) provinc(iae) | Syr(iae) et amicum suum | impendiis Abilenorum*. These inscriptions are positioned at both ends of the cut through.

⁶⁴ See Borsch in this volume on the care of the emperor in situations of crisis.



Fig. 15 The situation at Souk Wadi Barada: **a** a water channel was cut in the rockface of the slopes of the Chrysorrhoeas in Roman times. – **b** the view from the shrine of Nebi Habil to the river valley. – **c** the inscriptions CIL III 199 and 200 reporting the collaborative work and fulfilling a vow. – (a photo D. Darke, <https://t1p.de/barada-rockface>; b–c after Aliquot 2009, figs 14–15).

source still accessible⁶⁵. The emperors show their care and *munificentia* explaining why and what they did⁶⁶, whereas the local community apparently had taken over at least a share of the financing of restoration and relocation of the street. They might not have liked the investment; however, they seem to have played an influential role, being able to get their community added to the official inscription. This might have been possible because of their local knowledge, being the most experienced regarding the natural conditions at the gorge, which also the Roman administration knew and made use of⁶⁷. The Roman official in charge, the *centurio*, whose military unit provided physical work force and might

have had relevant technical equipment, offered in two other inscriptions an altar, cut as relief in the rock face, where he fulfilled his *votum* for the successful work – whether to the river, the rock, and their gods remains open. Competences seem to be split up, but in the four texts all aspects of the power of the *mons* and the river, about the joint forces to completion the work as well as the religious thanking⁶⁸.

It is a collective effort on the level of the community and the Roman administration by those who live and know the river and environment best, who take care of the resource management with divine support. This situation is comparable to the case of

⁶⁵ The northern inscription contained the line from the beginning, at the southern it was added in a second step (cf. fig. 15c), most likely on initiative of the people of the Abila. *impendiis* is in most cases connected with *suis*, which means that mentioning the community of the *Abileni* is exceptional (I am grateful to Andreas Hartmann who brought this to my attention). For *viae publicae* the nearby communities could be forced to invest in, see Kissel 2002, esp. 134–138. The irrigation of higher areas, mostly terraces, by diverted water, kept at a certain height is only referred to by Wirth 1971, 128–129 in the adjoining Wadi ad-Dargag and Wadi an-Nasub.

⁶⁶ The renovation of this road might have also been part of a greater endeavour to move troops to the Eastern border because of the Parthians. I am grateful to Andreas Hartmann bringing this issue to my attention.

⁶⁷ A road, initiated by the Roman authorities meant not only advantages, but first a financial and physical investment, second, could also foster undesired movement of people, influx of people and competition, e. g. in economic regards.

⁶⁸ CIL III, 201 (southern one) in the shape of an altar, in this case in a niche with a second above which could have also contained a statuette: *Pro salute I Imp(eratorum) Aug(ustorum) Antoni I ni et Veri M(arcus) Vo I Iulius Maximus I (centurio) leg(ionis) XVI F(laviae) Firm(ae) I qui operi in I stit(uit) v(otum) s(olvit)*. The northern one (CIL III, 200) has slight differences.

the river Adonis, where all riparians had to act in concert to make life possible along the river – in an environment with many adversities.

Nebi Habil

Whereas down at the river the powers and their control are documented and religiously framed by the inscriptions, two sacred places existed in Roman times on a prominent hill on the southern side of the valley, monitoring it. The Muslim shrine of Nebi Habil, the presumed tomb of Abel, was erected on the walls of Byzantine church which sits on a Roman building, most likely a temple (figs 14; 16a). A second temple is documented to have been situated on the northern slopes close to a grotto. We only get an impression of the Roman building on top of the hill through drawings of a British traveller in the 18th century (fig. 16a-b)⁶⁹: It seems to have been a small and compact shrine incorporated in the courtyard of the Ottoman mosque, later relocated to its internal. An inscription still visible at that time, mentions Kronos as the god of the place⁷⁰. A second inscription with an almost identical text further down the hill at a grotto points to the more divine owner(s) of the place in a hierarchical relation: A freedman of the tetrach Lysanias reports about his dedications to Kronos according to the oracle of Zeus and Apis of Abila (fig. 16c)⁷¹.

Comparable to the source Apheca people relied on the oracular powers of the deities Zeus and Apis, who seem to have been important in the Chrysorrhoas valley. Not only the people, but also the deities form a community of environmental and religious knowledge: Kronos is only addressed after Zeus and Apis have said so. Moreover, both inscriptions deal not only with the erection of the temple, but also with the construction work of a road and the initiative to make gardens and areas of cultivation in the area (»planted all the orchards«)⁷². A third inscription to Kronos is located below the one close to the grotto. It has a similar text but gives an additional detail which ties in with the »gardens«⁷³: The twelve peo-

ple dedicating an altar seem to be connected through proprietary relations: it consists of the name of the god surrounded by six arrows, probably indicating the direction of their land or properties.

The sacred place of Kronos on top of the hill together with the grotto and its rock inscriptions, oversaw the valley and the river at the dangerous and later repaired passage at Souk Wadi Barada. It is located at the crossing point of the sub-basins of the river (fig. 14c) – hence, hydrologically an important spot to control the overland flows from the slopes and wadis to the north with high water yields⁷⁴. From Nebi Habil one could see the villages of Hureira and Ifry with its springs on the opposite slopes, and Ain el-Fije in the valley. So, observations of the river's state, any changes of the water level or damages of the embankments and the road were possible from Kronos' sacred place. This finds its reflection in the inscription instigated by gods for a god about the infrastructural investments.

Brahliya

At Brahliya, the northeastern part or the settlement of Souk Wadi Barada, the two deities Zeus and Apis appear again in two inscriptions, where also the resource water comes into play. Their names with the specification τοῖς κυρίοις are also inscribed on an altar showing the bull with a sun disk in a niche on one side, and a head of a Tyche with a youthful river-god below her as well as a pine tree and *caduceus* on another side (fig. 17b-c)⁷⁵. Another text, dated to 245 CE refers to the same deities as πατέροις θεοῖς, the ancestral gods, to whom someone offered a candle⁷⁶. This specification points to former times and generations, covering a long stretch in which they already have been supporting people, so that relying on them seems a reasonable (re-)action for the people living in the wider area.

Intriguing is the text of a younger inscription on an altar, dated to 321/322 CE, where Anianos together with his brothers and friends dedicated an altar to Zeus ἀκτιπηγέος and Apis⁷⁷. This dedication

⁶⁹ Pococke 1745, 115–116 pl. 22 (after p. 136); Aliquot 2009, no. 82. See Dentzer-Feydy 1999, figs 16. 18.

⁷⁰ Pococke 1752, 1.

⁷¹ Savignac 1912, 534–536. Both texts can be dated to the 1st half of the 1st c. CE.

⁷² [τὰς φυτείας πάσας ἐφύ[τευσεν].

⁷³ SEG 39, 1565,2, mentioned by Rey-Coquais 1997, 935 note 18; Mouterde 1951/1952, 78–84 no. 17: [Ἐ]τους ἡ[ο]υ[υ] - - - Κρόν[ω] κυρί[ω] κατὰ [χρησ]μ[ο]ν θεῶν [Διό]ς καὶ Ἀπιδος Ἀβίλης, ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας | τῶν κυρίων, Διόδωρος [- - -] καὶ Κλήμης Μοκίμου | καὶ Μερκούριος Σιμουντιω[νο]ς καὶ Μάρκος Λυσισμάχου | καὶ Αννιανος Μοκίμου καὶ Σα[ρ]πηδῶν Ἡρώδου καὶ | Ἡρόφιλος Ἀμμωνίου καὶ Διόδωρος Ἀβιδοταρου | καὶ Μαῦρος Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Κλαύδιος Μερκουράλιος | καὶ Διόδωρος Ζωῖλου τὸν βωμόν ἐποίησαν | ἐπὶ ἱερέας διὰ βίου Σοαίμου Διοδότου. Its date in the time of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius

Verus suits the time when the building work down at the river was conducted.

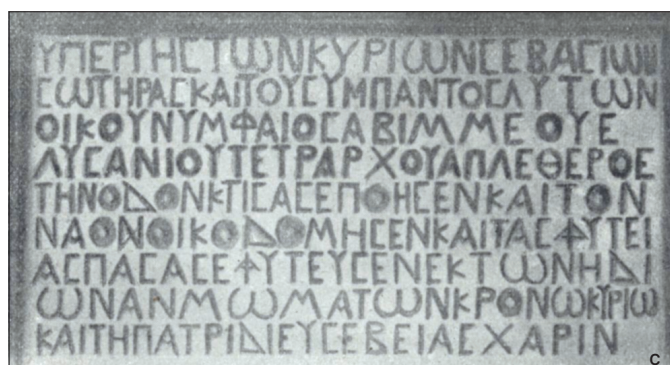
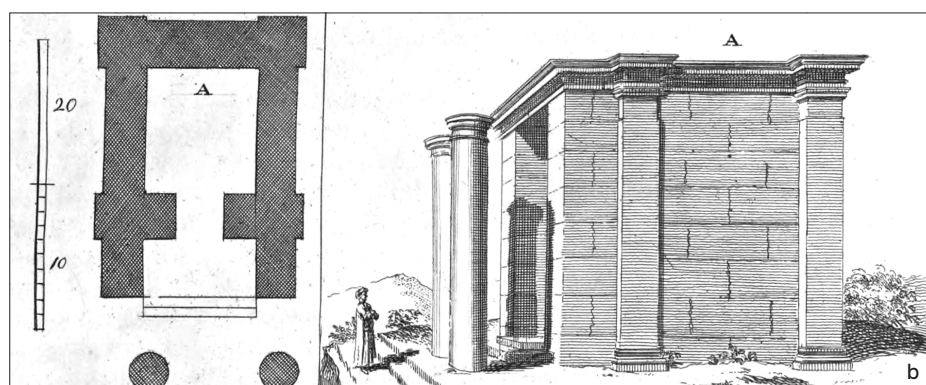
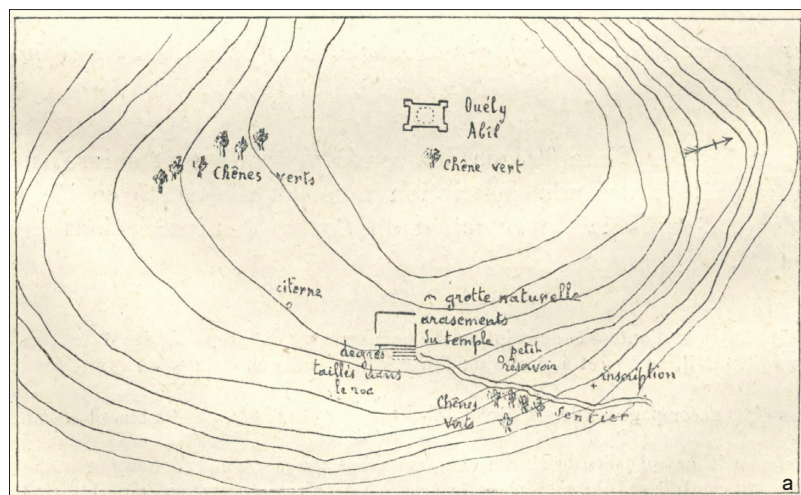
⁷⁴ Abdo et al. 2023.

⁷⁵ SEG 31, 1383, 187/188 CE; Hajjar 1977/1978, 195. The inscription contains again the *pro salute*-formula for the Roman emperor, which shows the will among the class able to dedicate inscriptions to appear as »Roman« and as loyal.

⁷⁶ SEG 39, ad 1565; Rey-Coquais 1997, 935–936: Διὶ καὶ Ἀπιδι, τοῖς πατέροις θεοῖς.

⁷⁷ SEG 39, 1565,1; Rey-Coquais 1997, 936 and BE 1998, 499: ἔτους γλχ' | βωμόν Ἀκτιπηγέω Διὶ καὶ Ἀπιδι Οὐρανίω | Ἀνιάνος Ἡλιοδῶρου παῖς σὺν | ἀδελφοῖς καὶ φειλοῖς εὐξάμενος | ἀνέθηκεν ἅμα | τῷ [— —]ΥΣΜΑ|ΤΙ πηγῶν ζ' εὖ | ἀναδιδόντων | πεδῶς καὶ μη|τέρας ὠθεόν[των — —] | ἐπὶ ἀρχῆς Ἡροφίλου.

Fig. 16 The shrine of Nebi Habil: **a** in a sketch of the mountain with the shrine of the saint on top, most likely sitting on a Roman temple, and the temple further down the slope at a grotto. – **b** the plan and reconstruction of this temple drawn in the 18th c. – **c** the inscription mentioning Kronos. – (a. c after Savignac 1912, figs I. 4; b detail from Pococke 1745, 136 pl. XXII).



attests that people in the valley considered the water of the river and its sources as something special, even though the interpretation of the epitheton is not easy: Either they addressed Zeus as the one of the »radial sources« or the »sources of rays«, the latter not putting sources in the sense of springs centre stage. However, the fragmented text goes on, saying that the dedicator of the altar oversees seven sources, which could explain the ray-like distribution. Their water may have worked as a curing drink and medi-

cation for children and mothers (εὐ ἀναδιδόντων πηγῶν). To guarantee fertility or health of the offspring as a very basic concern in families is another ability ascribed to the water of the Chrysorrhoas, which just some meters upstream at the gorge posed a danger to life and limb. A second inscription (fig. 17a), addressed to Aphrodite is from two dedicants offering a hydria »to Zeus and the other gods«. A *hydria* carries water, so that this dedication shows once more the religious meaning of the river's water⁷⁸. Whether

⁷⁸ SEG 47, 1919; Rey-Coquais 1997, 937 (168–169 CE): Θεῶν Ἀφροδίτῃ | Ἑτους πν' | ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν | κυρίων Σεβαστῶν | σωτηρίας Ζηνᾶς | καὶ Ἰλάρως | Τιβερίου ὕδριαν ποιήσαντες Διὶ ἀνέθηκαν καὶ θεοῖς ἄλλοις.



Fig. 17 The findings at Brahliya: **a** the inscription to Aphrodite mentioning a *hydria*. – **b** the altar with an inscription to Zeus and Apis and an image of the bull in a niche. – **c** the bust of a Tyche in a wreath on one side of the altar. – (a–b after Rey-Coquais 1999, figs 5–6; c after Aliquot/Piraud-Fournet 2008, fig. 17).

only people from the villages in the river valley and the adjoining mountains or also Damascenes – as they do today – went up to the mentioned sources and places in the Chrysorrhoeas valley to find fresh, healthy, and even healing water, remains open. It would have been a day trip comparable to the situ-

ation in the valley of the Adonis between coast and source. At both places, people invented practical and religious measures to deal with the river and the water, so that the water could be used individually and communally to everybody's best without doing harm⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ *theos keraunios* in an inscription from Deir Qanoun between Souk Wadi Barada and Ain el-Fije cannot given a resource-related meaning, ISyrie, no. 2557a.

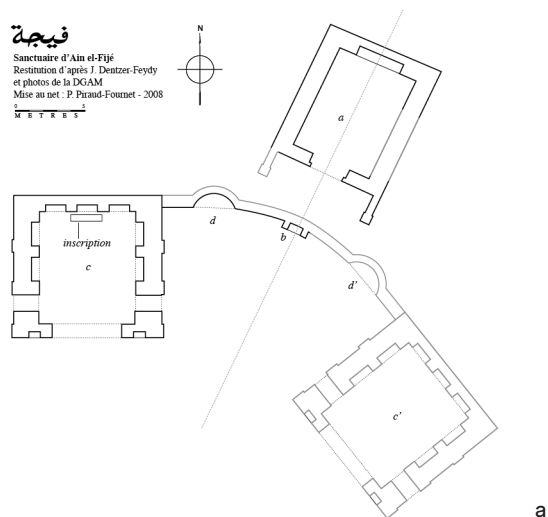
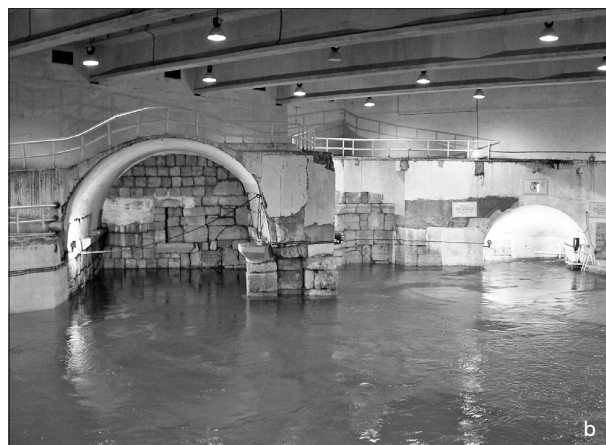


Fig. 18 The source of Ain el-Fije: **a** the two chambers with niched walls. – **b** the view into the chambers. – **c** a Roman(?) basin and gutter from the buildings at the source. – (a–c after Aliquot/Piraud-Fournet 2008, figs 5, 8, 12).



In all this, we may not forget how prominently the Roman emperors who have helped build this road and have an interest to appear as benevolent as possible feature in the inscriptions. Their names, however in the genitive after a *pro salute*-formula demanding loyalty and hence, aiming at acceptance and stability, appear in one of the inscriptions⁸⁰.

Ain el-Fije

Ain el-Fije further downstream (figs 14, 18) is the richest and easiest accessible source feeding the Chysorrhoeas⁸¹. For practical reasons, the gushing water from the northern rock face of the river valley must be captured and directed to places where it is needed. For symbolic reasons, the »tamed« water can be »staged«, as it seems to be the case with the installations at Ain el-Fije in front of the rock face: The water is collected in two vaulted chambers with deep basins abutting the rock and seven niches in the walls⁸². They are connected by a semi-circle of the smoothed rockface with two niches in and one set

in front of the rock (fig. 18a–b). No fragments of statues were found, even though the niches might have contained some. Finds like *louteria*, circular fountain or washing basins, rectangular basins and conduits etc. attest to the utilization of the water (fig. 18c). Two *epimeletai* oversaw building work in the 2nd or 3rd century CE⁸³, an office which allows assuming a local administration of and at the source, responsible for the organisation of the water availability and distribution and most likely also for the financing and functioning of the religious place. Above the rock face with the vaulted chapels in front stood a small temple, so that the visitors found themselves in a symmetrical complex with many water facilities.

The sacred places, the inscriptions as well as the infrastructure in this stretch of the river cover aspects of the resources water and religion, and, if one will, an emic insight into the organisation of common labour and the relation to the environment and resources as well as the common interest in health issues, i. e. the perpetuation and reproduction of the communities.

⁸⁰ See SEG 47, 1919; SEG 31, 1383.

⁸¹ In 2018, attacks on the water supply of Damascus destroyed parts of the building and the village.

⁸² For a detailed description see Aliquot/Piraud-Fournet 2008; Dentzer-Feydy 1999 for the drawings by W. H. Bankes.

⁸³ See SEG 58, 1772; Aliquot/Piraud-Fournet 2008, 88–89. 94–96; Aliquot 2007.

Ain el-Fije presents a case for the guiding questions of this contribution, where resource management, social and individual well-being as well as maintenance of infrastructure co-incides in sacred places, the deities, and the communication with them. Whereas the relations upstream downstream people as well as the entire catchment organised via

infrastructure and religious installations and practices are clearer in the case in valley of river Adonis; in the Chrysorrhoeas valley the evidence foregrounds the powerful river, which was tamed by the communal infrastructural measures, the deities, one of them with a references to the sources of the river, and the healing and fertility aspects of the water.

Religion as Fostering Resilience of Communities

In the attempt to bridge the economical and the religious explanations of the locations and numbers, of sacred places in the Lebanon mountains, the focus was on their relationships and their role in social, economic, and religious networks. Applying the concept of resilience took us beyond the state of the research: The diverse and challenging natural environment of the Lebanon mountains requires a high degree of resource control, coming along with collaborative action. The focus in the case studies lay on the water, which is very dynamic and abundant, which is closely related to cultivable soil, which in steep and mountainous areas often implies much preparation and maintenance work (terraces, irrigation, and care because of short growing periods).

It was about the immense abundancy and power of the water as well as its seasonal variabilities being a permanent stressor. Hence, resilience of the communities in the river valleys is at stake since this resource implies uncertainty and risks for the socio-economic systems – from an individual field and the road everybody used the water supply of coastal cities such as Byblos. A valley-wise equilibrium had to be obtained and maintained, peaks had to be mitigated to foster stability on a community level. This transgressed not only also an individual's capacities, but also individual life spans. Intergenerational organisation, i. e. the transmission of techniques, knowledge etc. had to be guaranteed (**fig. 2**).

Here, religion comes into play. Religion is about as much about communication with divine agents as with one's social group. People address the gods and their competences as guarantors and testimonies, which bases on shared values and ideas, agreements on socio-economic activity, as well as shared traditions and knowledge. Religion is, hence about stabilisation and cohesion (of course also about control and inequality), which are essential when living in natural environments full of risks, where concerted action and fast reaction is key for managing the liv-

ing conditions. The more communities are exposed to situations of stress, potential conflict, and shared or diverging interests which must be solved coactively, the more religious practices can cater for their resilience.

Religion in its manifestations in rituals, gatherings, and sacred places in the two river valleys in Graeco-Roman Lebanon turns out to be not only an institution which offers a set of narratives or symbols to interpret the stressor water. Rather, religion itself can be understood as a resource which offers strategies in form of routines, rituals and shared stories (i. e. memories). These help reduce complexity of situations, enhance social cohesion by shared practices and knowledge, and to enable people in charge, most likely religious specialists, to exercise control and manage the available resources. Religious gatherings provide on a very practical level of institutionalized time one spends with others, the opportunities to communicate and exchange information, to organise work and to negotiate resources distribution⁸⁴.

Resilience of the communities along the Adonis and the Chrysorrhoeas is about the long-term strategies people developed in relation to the highly dynamic landscape and powerful water resources, life-giving and destructive at the same time. Religious institutions and practices turned out to be relevant for bettering ecological, social, and economical resilience: At the source Apheca the temple is part of the land-administering authority, the sanctuary at the confluence of the two torrents at Yanouh controls this point, continuing downstream with the sacred places of Machnaqa, Yahšuš and el-Ginéh, who connect also to the adjoining valleys. From the source to the limits of the catchment area, from the downstream riparians depending on a controlled water flow coming down the river Adonis, the sacred places and communal rituals were existing longer than individuals and generations and were the plac-

⁸⁴ See above notes 16 and 17.

es, where information and observations about the river were collected; anticipation and retrospection are both present here (fig. 2). The number and the dense network of the sacred places are a result of the number of rivers, people relied on and lived with. The shared myths, practices, and environment fostered the cohesion in communities, since potential conflicts and necessary communication were channelled via the veneration of deities such as Aphrodite and the (semi-)god Adonis in the Adonis valley. In the valley of the Chrysorroas, the renovation of

the road and the canal as crucial infrastructure attest to agreements and collaborative action when it comes to utilising the valley and the river⁸⁵. The resource water is in the hands of deities – Kronos, *theoi patrooi*, or Aphrodite. At the individual and family level, the healing and oracular competences ascribed to the water and its deities are the prospectively functioning aspects of religion and this resource: People look for a means to influence their future to the better – being healthy and reproduce is here the most effective resilient strategy.

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⁸⁵ Of course, as common in Roman inscriptions with references to the emperor or Roman authorities, the aspect of loyalty and political stability through care and *providentia* (see the contributions by Borsch and Delp in this volume) which is expressed and should be pushed, is another, may-

be the more prominent aspect of these textual sources. However, the resource-related aspects I connect with resilience in my argument is in the case studies the locally relevant sub-layer.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Vielzahl der Heiligtümer aus dem 1.–4. Jahrhundert n. Chr. im wasserreichen Libanongebirge werden oft als Teil einer »heiligen Natur« beschrieben. Diese Sicht auf Religion und Umwelt greift sowohl aus kultur- als auch aus umweltgeschichtlicher Sicht zu kurz. Der Beitrag geht von den Flüssen Adonis und Chrysorroas sowie ihren heiligen Stätten aus und untersucht aus der Perspektive der Resilienz, wie Religion und Lebensweisen der Menschen am Adonis von der Quelle Apheca bis Byblos und entlang eines Abschnitts des Chrysorroas bei Abila zusammenhängen. Dabei werden die Verflechtungen zwischen wirtschaftlichen und religiösen Aspekten der Heiligtümer vor dem Hintergrund von Risiken, Stressoren und Resilienzstrategien sowie ihre Rolle innerhalb sozialer, wirtschaftlicher und religiöser Netzwerke und Gemeinschaften diskutiert. Die Resilienz, so das Argument, wird in dieser herausfordernden Umwelt durch das geschickte Bewirtschaften der Wasser- und Landressourcen gestärkt; dies wird durch die Religion als stabilisierende Kraft erleichtert, die den sozialen Zusammenhalt und die Weitergabe von Wissen fördert – entscheidende Faktoren für die gemeinschaftliche Organisation und Verteilung der Ressourcen auf lange Sicht. Religiöse Einrichtungen, Heiligtümer, Mythen, Kollaboration und religiöse Praktiken fördern die Solidarität der Gemeinschaft, reduzieren Komplexität von Aufgaben, helfen bei der Bewältigung von Konflikten und stärken die ökologische und sozioökonomische Widerstandsfähigkeit dieser Gemeinschaften. Das Konzept der Resilienz ermöglicht somit eine umfassende Perspektive auf technische Infrastruktur, Umweltgegebenheiten, soziale Institutionen und religiöse Praktiken.