

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

1.1. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Porphyreion is situated on the Mediterranean coast, by the ancient *via Maris* road (Alt 1954), about halfway between Berytus and Sidon [Fig. 1-2]. Remains of ancient architecture are found in the town of Jiyeh, in the Nebi Younes district. Identification of the site with the Phoenician Porphyreion gave grounds for comparing the results of excavations with historical evidence from written sources (see Dussaud 1927: 45–46; Waliszewski and Wicenciak 2015a: 155–157).¹

The Greek name of the town Porphyreion refers to the purple colour of the pigment for the production of which Tyre and Sidon were famous (Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.23; Gratton 2007; Lipiński 2004: 21). However, there is no evidence confirming the production of purple dye in Jiyeh.

The convenient landform sustained settlement for about seventeen centuries. The earliest pottery fragments point to occupation of the area around Jiyeh Bay already in the Late Bronze Age (Waliszewski and Wicenciak 2015a: 161, Fig. 6; Wicenciak 2012: 447; F.J. Núñez Calvo, personal communication). The site was abandoned ultimately in the first half of the 7th century AD.

The estuary of Nahr Damour River (ancient Damouras, also called Tamyras) is located about 6 km north of the remains of Porphyreion, while the mouth of the Nahr Awwali River, ancient Bosterenos, is 9 km to the south [Fig. 1-1]. The slopes of the Lebanon mountain range descend here very gently in the direction of the coastal line, leaving two kilometres of land under cultivation [Fig. 1-4]. South of modern-day Jiyeh, the mountainsides almost reach the sea, forming a tall cape called Ras Nebi Younes. The cape closes in a four-kilometre-long bay where Porphyreion lies, protecting it from southern winds and providing an ideal observation point. Between the bay on

one side and the estuary of the Nahr Awwali River and the borders with the Saida region on the other, the rocks extend almost to the coastline, leaving a very narrow zone that continues to be used, just as in Antiquity, as a traffic route [Fig. 1-5]. On the north the bay is shielded by the Nukkar Saddiyat cape, beyond which the terrain narrows again.

The landscape around Porphyreion was best described by Polybius: “At this part of the coast it is reduced by the slopes of Libanus to a small and narrow zone, and across this itself runs a steep and rocky ridge, leaving only a very narrow and difficult passage along the sea-shore” (Polybius 5.69.1).

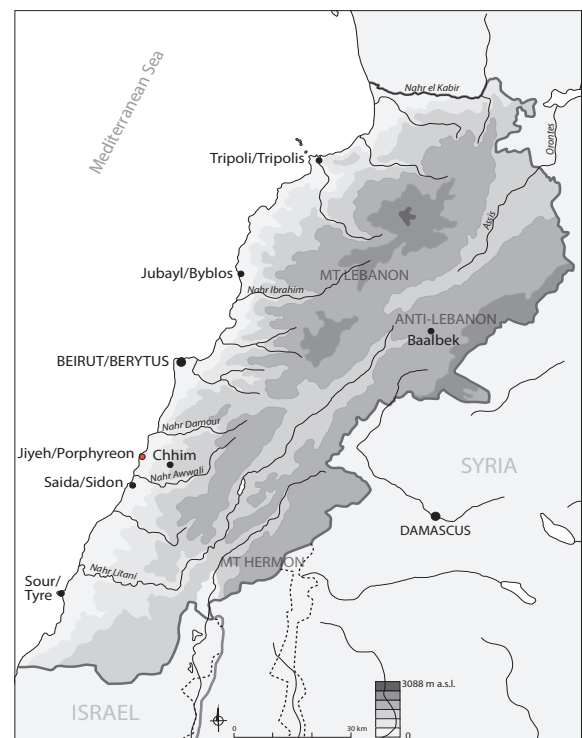


Fig. 1-1. Map of Lebanon

¹ A second town with the name of Porphyreion was located in the region of present-day Haifa (Dar 2009: 217–237, 222; Finkielsztejn 2005).

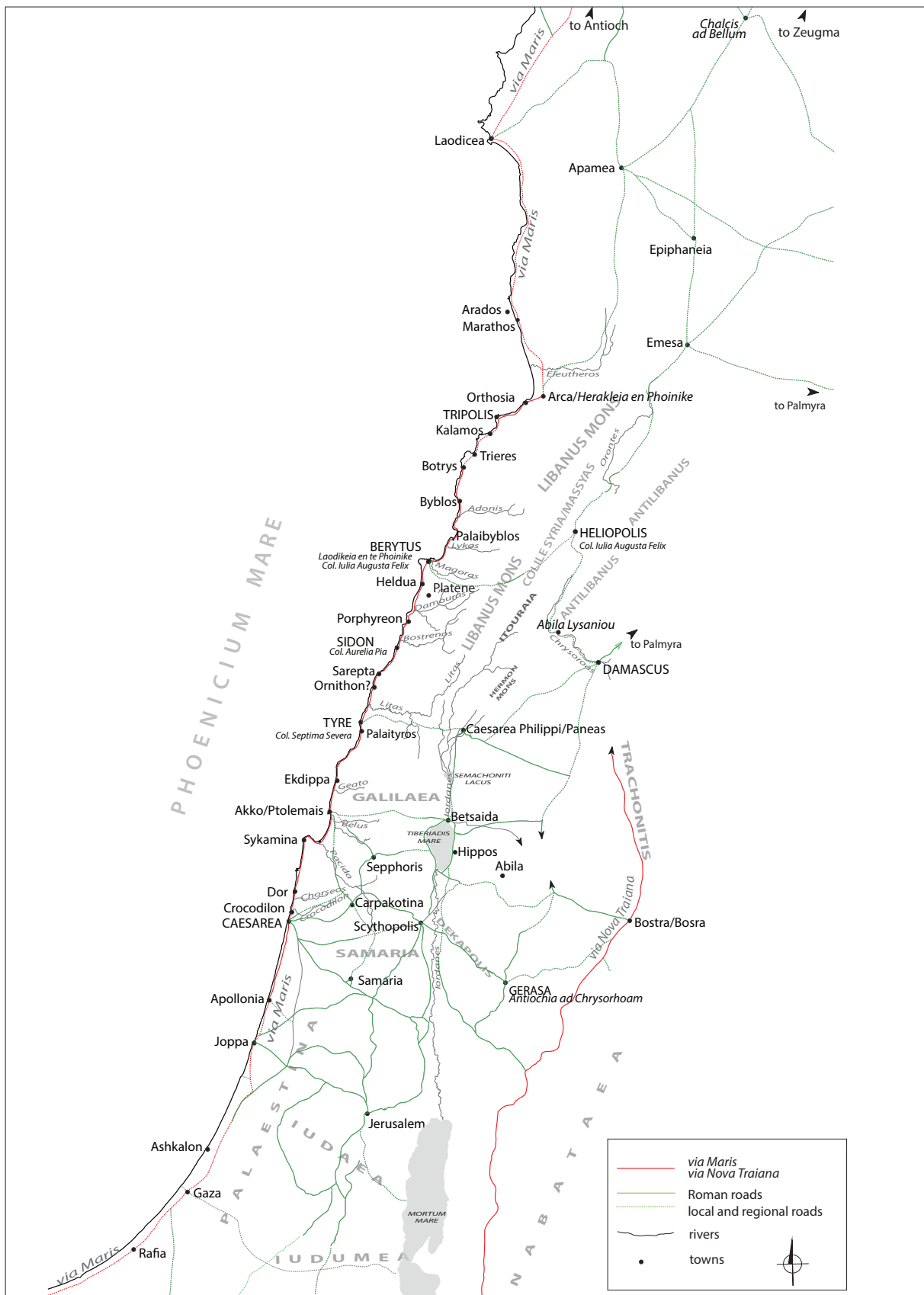


Fig. 1-2. Reconstruction of roads and trails in Roman Phoenicia and neighbouring regions

The location of Porphyreon on the bay and the convenient layout of the coastline suggest that a port may have been situated here in ancient times. However, research so far has failed to identify any remains of port infrastructure (Waliszewski et al. 2008: 21–23). This of course does not exclude the possibility of a harbour existing in Porphyreon in Antiquity, even though the few historical sources mentioning the town are silent on the matter. Pseudo-Skylax (*Periplus* 104), who listed the individual town-ports located along the Phoenician coast, did not make any mention of a port in Porphyreon. However, Polybius, describing the events of the Fourth Syrian War, wrote of an Egyptian fleet being anchored off the coast of this town in 218 BC at some distance from land.

“He [Nicolaos] had occupied with part of his forces the pass of Platanus, and with the rest, which he commanded in person, that near the town of Porphyreon, and here he awaited the

king’s attack, the fleet being anchored along shore to support him” (Polybius 5.68.6).

Edward Lipiński estimated the sailing distance along the coast from Porphyreon to Berytus as being around 35 km, which in his opinion suggested the existence of a port at the location as a stopover in keeping with ancient seafaring practices (Lipiński 2004: 289).

The negative results of underwater surveys might be due to constant shifts of the sea bottom caused by modern construction activities and systematic silting caused by strong sea currents. A stone anchor was the most significant find from underwater surveys in this area, aside from over a dozen vessel fragments, mostly imported amphora sherds of the Late Roman Amphora 1 (LRA 1) type. However, the simple shape of the anchor precluded a precise dating of the item. This type of anchor has been observed for periods from the Bronze Age straight through the Byzantine era (Waliszewski et al. 2008: 22, Fig. 23).

1.2. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Porphyreon was mentioned in four ancient sources, dated from the 7th century BC to the 4th century AD. These are: a Neo-Assyrian inscription of Asarhaddon, the *Periplus* by Pseudo-Skylax (104), Polybius’ *The Histories* (5.69.1) and an itinerary by an anonymous Pilgrim from Bordeaux (*Itinerarium Burdigalense* 18, 21).

The oldest mention is the inscription of a Neo-Assyrian ruler Asarhaddon (680–669 BC) (Borger 1956: 48, Episode 5, col. III, 1–7), which lists 16 towns belonging to the territory of Sidon, which were conquered by Asarhaddon in 676 BC. The text was intended presumably to glorify the ruler’s conquest. The town ^{umu}Gi-’ listed in this text has been identified securely with Porphyreon/Jiyeh, even though the two existing interpretations of these inscriptions, one by Edward Lipiński (1993) and the other by Hassan Salamé-Sarkis (2005), differ with regard to the identification of other localities on the list and the subsequent evaluation of the territory in question [Fig. 1-3; see Table 1-1].

Lipiński based his interpretation on the assumption that the towns were listed in the order of location along the coast, from south to north.

Thus, the territory subordinated to Sidon would have extended in the 7th century BC from the vicinity of the town Ma’rub on the river Nahr al-Qasimiye/Litas in the south to Al-Mina (the present-day Trablus as-Sham/Tripoli port) in the north [see Fig. 1-3].

According to Salamé-Sarkis, the Kingdom of Sidon during Asarhaddon’s reign occupied an area much smaller than the one suggested by Lipiński. Salamé-Sarkis pointed to the towns of Adloun or al-Chartum as the southern borders of the kingdom, located respectively 21 and 25 km south of Saida. The northern border would have been by the town of Heldua/Khaldeh, located 12 km to the south of Beirut. In turn, the borders of the realm to the east would have been demarcated by towns currently identified as Aïn Bâl and al-Bireh. As a result, the territory of Sidon would have covered an area within a 20–30 km radius of the city, which amounts to about one thousand square kilometres, rather than practically the whole coast located within the boundaries of present-day Lebanon, as suggested by Lipiński.²

Salamé-Sarkis argues that Asarhaddon could not have travelled the route along the coast from

² Discussing Phoenician cities in the Persian period, Josette Elayi drew attention to the fact that inland areas subordinated to the coastal centres were never extensive, their chief task being to ensure a supply of agricultural products for the city that the coastal zone could not manage in full. Elayi quoted Tyre as an example of a city which developed in the 10th century BC and which had an economic hinterland not exceeding a radius of about 15 km at the time (Elayi 1980: 16).

south to north. Wanting to weaken the kingdom the Neo-Assyrian ruler would have focused on cutting the city off from its economic hinterland by destroying its largest centres.

The identification of the third settlement on Lipiński's list, ^{uru}Gi-' (Lipiński 2004: 17–36), with Jiyeh/al-Giyye, accepted by Salamé-Sarkis (2005: 141), is derived from the Neo-Assyrian term Gi-' which according to Lipiński may correspond to the western-Semitic noun gy', meaning "valley". The present-day topography of the terrain around Jiyeh corresponds with this term [Fig. 1-4]. The next listed towns are ^{uru}Bet-(^m)Su-pu-ri, identified with the ancient Ornithon, and the modern-day town of Tell Burak or Adloun [see below, Table 1-1], and of ^{uru}S/Sik-ku-u/Leonton, which so far has not been identified securely in the field. Catherine Apicella proposes the present-day town of Nameh/Na'imé, located about 15 km south of Beirut (Apicella 2002).

Recent archaeological research in Jiyeh has yielded pottery that may be assigned to the Late Bronze Age, moving back the commonly accepted date of settlement in this area by at least nine centuries (Wicenciak 2012: 446–447). There is no doubt, therefore, that the settlement existed already in the times of Asarhaddon's inscription and the name preserved in the Neo-Assyrian inscription was used probably throughout the whole period of the functioning of the centre. It has survived to the present day, being transcribed usually in French in various forms: Jiyeh, Jiyé or Giyyieh.

Together with the neighbouring En Nabi Younes (today a suburb) Jiyeh has been identified with the port of Porphyreon in a sailor's guide-book probably from the mid 3rd century BC, listing ports and characteristic features of the Mediterranean coast from the Iberian peninsula to Italy, the coast of western Africa and the Phoenician coast (Lipiński 2004: 289–290, see also Robinson 1856: 487; Thomsen 1907: 97; Honigmann 1924: 33, no. 379a). The Pseudo-Skylax placed Porphyreon between Leonton and Sidon, both these towns being in the territory of Sidon (Pseudo-Skylax, *Periplus* 104). Strabo, presumably making use of Pseudo-Skylax's text, situated Leonton between Berytus and Porphyreon. Lipiński located Leonton in the area between the river Bostrenos/Awwali and Sidon. However, the localisation is not secure and there is no archaeological evidence that could be linked with the ancient settlement of Leonton.

If the above-presented identification of the settlement ^{uru}Gi-' is correct, then it should be assumed that the Hellenistic name Porphyreon/Porphyreonpolis was a later invention, an official name used in texts from the Hellenistic and Roman periods that may not have been used by the local inhabitants. In any case, in view of the archaeologically confirmed antiquity of Jiyeh, there can be no question of Porphyreon being founded *ex nihilo* during Ptolemy's reign in the 3rd century BC, as suggested by some researchers (Hölscher 1955).

A third mention of Porphyreon is found in *The Histories* of Polybius (5.68–69), where it is listed in the context of preparations for a battle, which took place in 218 BC between the Seleucid armies led by Antioch III and the Ptolemaic armies commanded by Ptolemy IV himself. According to Polybius' description, the battle itself took place south of the town (Bar-Kochva 1989: 122, Fig. 5). The coastal belt, which constitutes a natural traffic route, narrows here significantly (Polybius 5.68–69), making the area around Jiyeh ideally suited as an observation point for surveillance of the region and as a bottleneck where approaching enemies from either the north or south could be blocked (Waliszewski et al. 2008: 9–12) [Fig. 1-5]. This was the place manned by Nicolaos, the commander of the Ptolemaic forces, in the hope that he could stop Antioch III's army from entering Sidon, which was occupied by Ptolemaic garrisons (Grainger 1991: 95).

The identification of Porphyreon with modern Jiyeh is also confirmed by its position with reference to the ancient river Tamyras/Damouras, currently Nahr Damour, which lies about 6 kilometres north of the archaeological site [Fig. 1-2]. This river was also mentioned by Polybius in his description of battle preparations. In Antiquity, the river Tamyras/Damouras might have also formed something of a natural obstacle seasonally, making it more difficult to enter Sidon over the land route from the north in certain parts of the year. The crossing would have been difficult in spring, when the river, replenished by melting snow from the mountains, changes into a tumultuous and dangerous river (in the summer it is a small stream at best). However, Polybius did not indicate in his *Histories* that Antioch III had any difficulty crossing the Tamyras river, even though the battle took place in spring.

It is possible that modern research has placed too much emphasis on the descriptor "polis" used

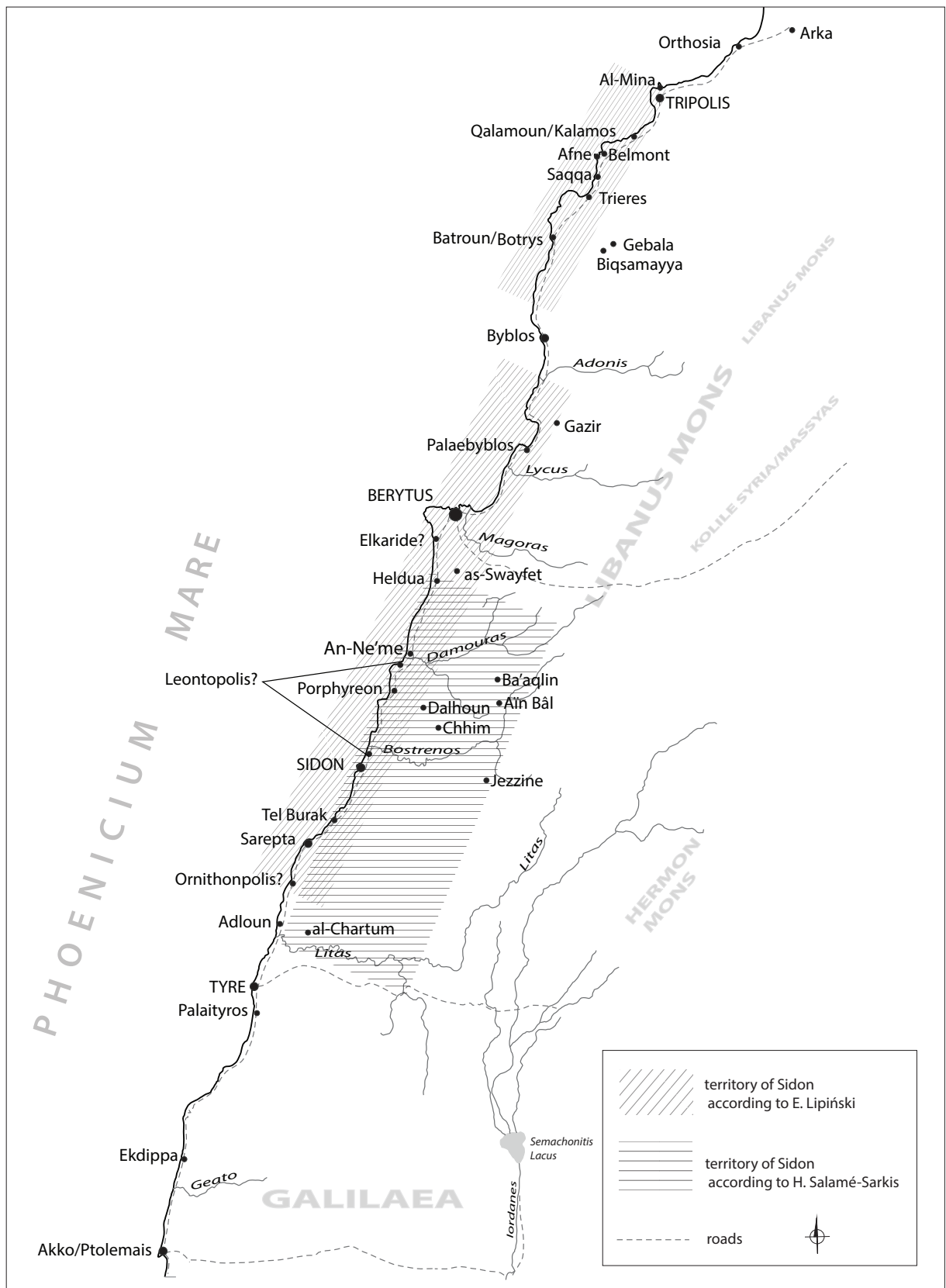


Fig. 1-3. Reconstruction of the Kingdom of Sidon in Phoenicia based on an interpretation of Asarhaddon's inscription

with the name of Porphyreon by both Pseudo-Skylax and Polybius (Grainger 1991: 11). The idealised model of the Greek “city-state” established by historians of ancient Greece (Carlsson 2010: 248–249) fails to find equivalents in all parts of the ancient world. Many cities of the Hellenistic period in the eastern regions of the ancient world would not have fulfilled the premises of this model. Archaeological research conducted so far at the site in Jiyeh (although the known remains are modest and there is no way to estimate the original size of the locality) indicates that Porphyreon also did not correspond to this model. The available mentions in historical sources do not allow the conclusion that it was one of the important centres in the central Phoenician area. Pernille Flensted-Jensen and Mogens H. Hansen have also demonstrated that in many cases Pseudo-Skylax used the term *polis* in an exclusively urban sense (Flensted-Jensen and Hansen 1996: 167).

It should therefore be assumed that the name of the centre in the Hellenistic period might have been changed or extended to include the term *polis*. However, the question remains whether this

might also have been connected to the granting of certain privileges to Porphyreon along with the new foundation. According to G. Hölscher, such practices of the bestowal of names were characteristic of cities of the Levantine coast established during the reign of the Ptolemies, e.g., Leonton *polis*, Ornithon *polis*, Krokodileon *polis* (Hölscher 1955). Ake/Akko/Ptolemais constitutes a slightly different example, as its name was completely changed twice, first by the Ptolemies and then by the Seleucids (Pliny the Elder, *NH*, 5.57; Schürer 1891: 196; Kashtan 1988: 46).

Porphyreon is not mentioned in any of the sources surviving for the Roman period. As a result, it can be assumed that it no longer performed a significant role at that time. It was probably a small-village, a port presumably, and a pottery production centre as established by archaeological excavation (Waliszewski et al. 2008: 51–56; Domžalski et al. 2005).

The last source to mention Porphyreon is an itinerarium from AD 333 left by an anonymous Pilgrim from Bordeaux (*Itinerarium Burdigalense* 18, 21). The list of towns includes *mutatio* Parphi-



Fig. 1-4. The seacoast near Jiyeh, view to the north

tion (*mutatio*, Latin for ‘change’), situated about 8 km (VIII *miles*) north of Sidon (Jiyeh is 10 km from Saida/Sidon), about half a day’s march from Birito (Beirut) and from Sidon. More detailed conclusions concerning the location of the settlement cannot be drawn based on this source. The mention of the *mutatio* that existed here does not signify that Porphyreon during this period had lost its significance and only served as a type of posting station, *mutatio*, wherein pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land would stop in order to replenish their water supply or change their means of transport. This is especially true if we take into account the remains of a large Christian basilica from the 5th/6th century with fine mosaics, which to this day continues to be the largest known Byzantine church from the Phoenician area (Waliszewski et al. 2008: 33; 2015). It should be emphasized that this is so far the only settlement on the coast, between Saida and Khaldeh (near Beirut), where remains of a church from the Byzantine period have been discovered.

More attention is paid to this settlement in the journals of 18th- and 19th-century travel-

lers who stopped in Jiyeh on their way to Palestine. A *khan*, or a stopping place, was located in the town, much the same as in the ancient period (de Bruyn 1725; Chahine 1989: 169, Fig. 191; Buckingham 1825: 435–436; Renan 1864: 509–514; Monmarché 1932: 399; Thomson 1872: 67–69, 73). Itineraries from this period give an idea of what the site looked like and which of its remains were at that time visible on the surface.

The diaries also mention the Islamic tradition connected to the settlement. The archaeological site as it stands today is situated in the district of En Nebi Younes, which is translated from Arabic as the Prophet Jonah. According to local legend Jonah was spat out by the whale on the shore in this area. Tradition has it also that it was his place of burial (one of many), which is why one of the districts of Jiyeh bears the name En Nabi Younes to this day. A small mosque was built in honour of the Prophet Jonah probably in the 11th century; architectural elements from the Christian basilica (located in sector Q of the archaeological site, see Fig. 1-6) were used in its construction.



Fig. 1-5. The seacoast near Jiyeh, view to the south from Ras Nebi Younes