

**Religion, Society, and Sacred Space at Baniyas:
A Religious History of Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi, 21 BC-AD 1635**

by

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ABSTRACT

Banias, named for its shrine to Pan, is an ancient site with a rich and varied religious history. It is located at the foot of Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights of Israel. The people of Banias witnessed a procession of religions through the centuries and often adapted by recycling older mythical themes and religious ideas. While Banias' origins lie in the Canaanite world, the Greeks and the Romans left behind the first written historical evidence of settlement, urban expansion, and ritual. Phases of occupation followed with the Jews, Christians, Arabs, crusaders, and the Ottomans and their vassals, all of whom brought their religious uniqueness to Banias. This dissertation examines the interaction between religion, society, and sacred space at Banias. It begins in 21 BC, during the Roman period, and concludes in AD 1635, as the site became historically obscure.

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1. The Grotto of Pan and springs at Baniyas, with cave and niches in background.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: Baniyas, The Haunt of Pan of Many Faces

Awesome places historically evoke strong religious feelings. When people stop at a spectacular location and take notice of their surroundings, they seek a cosmic explanation. Devotees build shrines, temples, churches, and mosques. Pilgrims arrive. Worshippers dedicate their cities to gods. The site of Baniyas provides a case study of how religion can be closely related to sacred space.



2. The Cave of Pan at Baniyas

Baniyas has been a focal point for a procession of different religious traditions, whose adherents often shared ideas. While its zenith was as a Greco-Roman *polis*, the region has been home to a chain of religions, starting long before written records are

available. However, the mythological motifs that reveal themselves in different eras arguably have prehistoric roots. Myths and symbols are the connective threads of the religious history of the Banias region. While scholars have conducted a significant amount of research on specific eras and aspects of Banias' history, they have not heretofore produced a synthetic history of its religious past.

The present study is a religious history of the site and region of Banias, Israel, located in the Golan Heights. Different cultures knew it by many different names. The Greeks gave the name Paneas, for the shrine to Pan which they established there. The Herodians named it Caesarea Philippi after Caesar and Herod Philip. Nevertheless, the original Greek name has proven more lasting, only changing to "Banias" in its Arabic rendering.

This analysis begins with the Roman period, in 21 BC, by which time Herod the Great controlled much of the region of Banias. The following year, Augustus gave the land to him officially.¹ Subsequently, Greco-Roman religions, native paganism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all left their traces. In this dissertation chapters are devoted to studying these cultures and how their religious traditions developed over time. The narrative follows each tradition in its flourishing at Banias, closing with the death of the Ottoman vassal of Lebanon, Fakhr al-Din II in 1635.² Though Banias certainly has a spiritual past extending back before the Romans and beyond the early Ottomans, for the purposes of fostering comprehensive analysis this history will cover the aforementioned time span. The Hellenistic period has a deficit—though not an absence—of historical

¹ John F. Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, The Lost City of Pan* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 9.

² *Ibid.*, 164.

and archaeological data on Banias. It is the succeeding Roman period that offers the first reliable historical material for religion and other elements of Banias society. The seventeenth century is a suitable culmination for this study in that Banias' urban significance and notoriety deteriorate to such a degree as to obscure its presence in the historical record.

In order to fully explore the sacred past of Banias, it is necessary to examine three over-arching elements: religion, society, and sacred space. These components will serve to better illustrate the larger scheme of Banias' religious past. Each of the aspects reveals its connective power and its ability—in concert with the other two—to preserve religious ideas. Religion, society, and sacred space are ideal themes for an area study because, as shall be demonstrated, beliefs and rites, people and ethnicity, and geography all combine integrally at a geographic site.

Religion is the central interest of this study, and is therefore the most specific rubric. It is notoriously difficult to define and perhaps is best explicated in terms of how it is used.³ Philosopher Daniel C. Dennett defines religion as a “social system whose participants avow belief in a supernatural agent or agents whose approval is to be sought.”⁴ Anthropologist Clifford Geertz further places religion in its social context by explaining that religion is “a cluster of symbols woven together into some sort of ordered whole.”⁵ Religious scholar Jonathan Z. Smith further clarifies the definition by

³ Gerald Benedict, *The Watkins Dictionary of Religions and Secular Faiths* (London: Watkins, 2008), 485.

⁴ Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (London: Viking, 2006), 9.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973), 129.

asserting that religion is an anthropological category, and not a theological one, a premise from which this dissertation proceeds.⁶ Therefore, religion can be construed as the beliefs and practices regarding the supernatural espoused by a society. Accordingly, religious studies, history, anthropology, and archaeology all relate to the problem at hand: discerning a synthetic history of the site. While the religions at Banias are distinct over time, recurring themes are traceable. Pan is apparently but one face of many manifested by a regional fertility deity. His traits reappear again and again in later deities and saints at the site, and earlier Semitic religions may even foreshadow him in their gods. For century after century, people—from pilgrims to prophets—sought Banias as a place of revelation. It gained a regional reputation as a place of healing and dreaming. Rite and belief form the religious narrative of Banias, and in them the historian finds the pragmatic “what” in the daunting question of the area’s religious practices and ideas.

Equally integral in the examination of Banias’ religious past is the subject of its societies and thus its ethnicities. In basic terms, a society is characterized by organized life in groups.⁷ The historian Fernand Braudel states that “society and civilization are inseparable: the two ideas refer to the same reality.” He suggested that societies were microcosms of the civilizations of which they were a part.⁸ Ethnologist Jared Diamond posits that state societies, such as that in Baines, are defined by central control, hereditary

⁶ Johnathan Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 269.

⁷ Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Mirror For Humanity: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 287.

⁸ Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, trans. Richard Mayne (New York: Penguin, 1963), 15-16.

leaders, laws, cities, and monuments.⁹ Canaanites, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Jews, Arabs, and Druzes are substantially responsible for the socio-political history of the site, and therefore, because of their presence, its religious history. Thus ethnic groups form part of the study, often because of their affiliation with particular religious traditions. Specific persons of religious significance also contribute, such as Enoch, Moses, Jesus of Nazareth, a priest of Pan named Victor, Khadir, and St. George. While the anthropologist has the luxury of interviewing an informant personally, the historian may bring such methods to the table when examining epigraphy and ancient accounts. As a whole, the people of Baniyas are the answer to the ethnographic inquiry of “who?” so pertinent to this survey.

With the second component of this study—society—it is necessary to draw from anthropological methods of examining history. Historians of the New History and *Annales* schools of thought have shown the merits of anthropological perspectives in history. This religious history of Baniyas is very much an exercise in ancient religious anthropology. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz has long been appreciated by historians for his development of the method of “thick description.”¹⁰ Using epigraphs and archaeology to build this “thick description” is a core feature of this study of Baniyas. Equally, Geertz’s “Religion as a Cultural System” has been of great importance in discerning what role the ethnicities of Baniyas had in the survival of its religions.¹¹ Anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner and their work on religion have also been

⁹ Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 279-80.

¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973).

¹¹ Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” 87-125.

influential. Victor Turner's work suggests that shared religious experiences amongst people mimic the liminal phase of a rite of passage. Therefore, these experiences connect the transcendent directly to a specific group of persons.¹²

The final perspective of analysis in this dissertation is that of sacred space or sacred geography. The concept of sacred space and its creation proceeds from the belief in a supernatural agent who created the world.¹³ As such, sacred space is the result of ritual activity in a particular place, and the traditions that arise from such activity.¹⁴ The *temenos* is a culturally relevant term with regard to sacred space at Baniyas, as it comes out of the same Greco-Roman paradigm. A *temenos* is a sacred place associated with deities, one not confined to a temple, but also the whole area of land containing it. Sacred groves, trees, springs, oracular sites, and enclosures also fall under this rubric.¹⁵

While religion and people make a space sacred, geography itself anchors ideologies and cults. Baniyas' location on the southwest slopes of Mount Hermon is significant in and of itself. The mountain's long-standing reputation as a home of the gods and a place of revelation makes adjacent regions, including Baniyas, religiously significant by proximity. It was Baniyas' geography that inspired the establishment of its oldest known shrine: the Grotto of Pan.¹⁶ Josephus mentions the gaping cave, which inspired awe in the Hellenistic Greeks who recognized caves and caverns as haunts of the woodland god. From the site spring the headwaters of the Jordan River, flowing from a

¹² Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University, 1978); to an extent, Turner's contention that ritual is mythic drama is pertinent here too.

¹³ Sam Gill, "Territory," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 303.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

¹⁵ Benedict, *Dictionary of Religions*, 587.

¹⁶ Andrea Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 315 (1999), 27-9.

fountain fed by the snows of Hermon and underground water. In antiquity, the waters sprang from the cave itself and therefore had additional power to inspire. A vast countryside of vineyards, fields, oak groves, and forests lay beyond the periphery of the city proper. Both fauna and flora served to distinguish this lush and temperate area from far more arid regions of Palestine to the south. Banias was a verdant bower in the shadow of Mount Hermon, and a fitting eastern home for Pan, the god of fertility. It inspired not only the meditations of the pagans, but also messianic revelations, the establishment of the Christian Church, Islamic mystics, and Jews. In Banias many different religions found the possibility of spiritual retreat, meditation, and revelation. Geography heavily influenced the pattern of Banias' religious history by attracting people to its region and enticing them to create permanent sacred space. Banias answers "where?" in the question of sacred space.

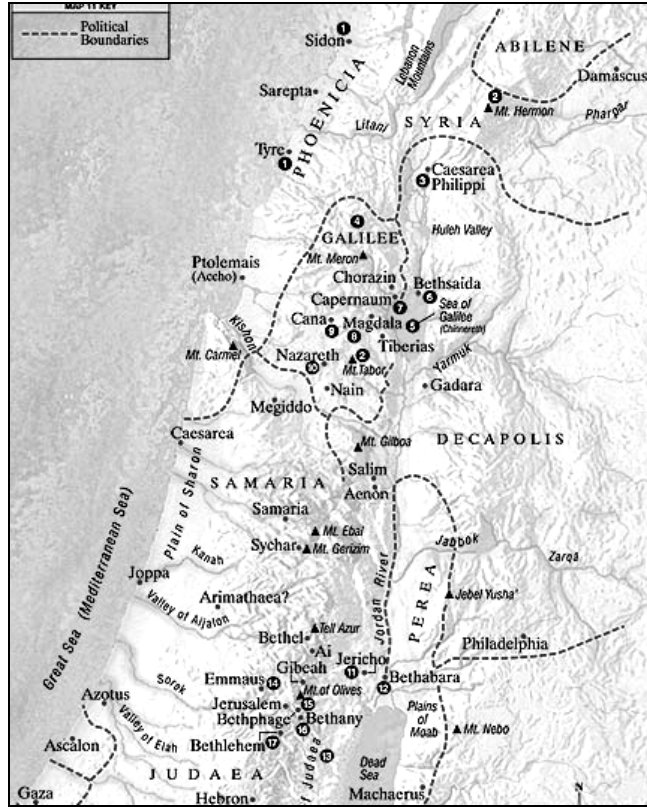
To discuss sacred space at Banias requires a knowledge of the geography of the site and its surrounding region. Banias is located in the Golan Heights of Israel, in Upper Galilee, twenty five miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It was situated in the midst of ancient cities, whose cultural, political, and economic influence the city of Pan felt increasingly over the centuries. To the northwest lay Damascus, and to the west, the Phoenician ports of Sidon and Tyre. Fishing villages, such as Capernaum and Bethsaida on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee, also influenced Banias. Banias was connected and integrated with the region thanks to two of the major ancient thoroughfares. Highways ran through Banias on the north-south axis through the Beth Rehob Valley between Baalbek and the Sea of Galilee, and also east to west between

Damascus and Tyre. This latter route gave travelers access to coastal cities, most notably Caesarea Maritima. Dan is two miles to the west of Banias. Damascus, one of the great cities of the ancient world, lay forty miles to the north east. This geographic orientation became a critical factor in Banias' economic, urban, and religious development.¹⁷

Banias is part of the Jordan Rift Valley and the Transjordan. The Jordan Rift Valley is a fault between two prodigious geological land masses. The northern reaches of this region include the Orontes and Leontes Rivers, and in the south, Mount Hermon, rising some 9200 feet above sea level, feeds with its snows the springs and waterways of the Jordan valley below. These rivers meander their way to the south toward Lake Huleh twelve miles southwest of Banias. They empty from this lake into the Jordan River, which falls sharply in elevation along the contours of the land to the Sea of Galilee, reaching the Dead Sea at 695 feet below sea level.¹⁸ One of the two main sources of the Jordan River issues from below the Cave of

¹⁷ LaMoine F. DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997), 264.

¹⁸ Herbert G. May (ed.), *The Oxford Bible Atlas* (London: Oxford University, 1974), 48.

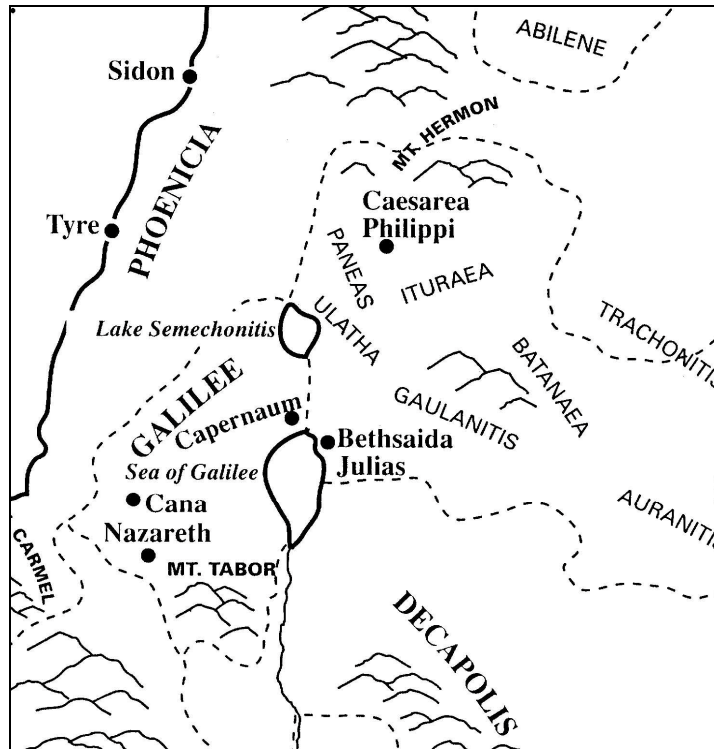


3. Map of Palestine indicating Baniyas (marked as Caesarea Philippi) in the North

Pan at Baniyas, the other has its origins at Dan, to the west.¹⁹ On the eastern reaches of Baniyas territory is the plain of Bashan. Bashan is a wide, verdant steppe dotted with oak groves (Batanea, Iturea, Gualanitis, Trachonitis, and Auranitis of Roman times included parts of ancient Bashan). In the Old Testament period, it was famed for its grains and cattle.²⁰

¹⁹ Charles Foster Kent, *Biblical Geography and History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), 47-8.

²⁰ Deuteronomy 32:14; May, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 48.

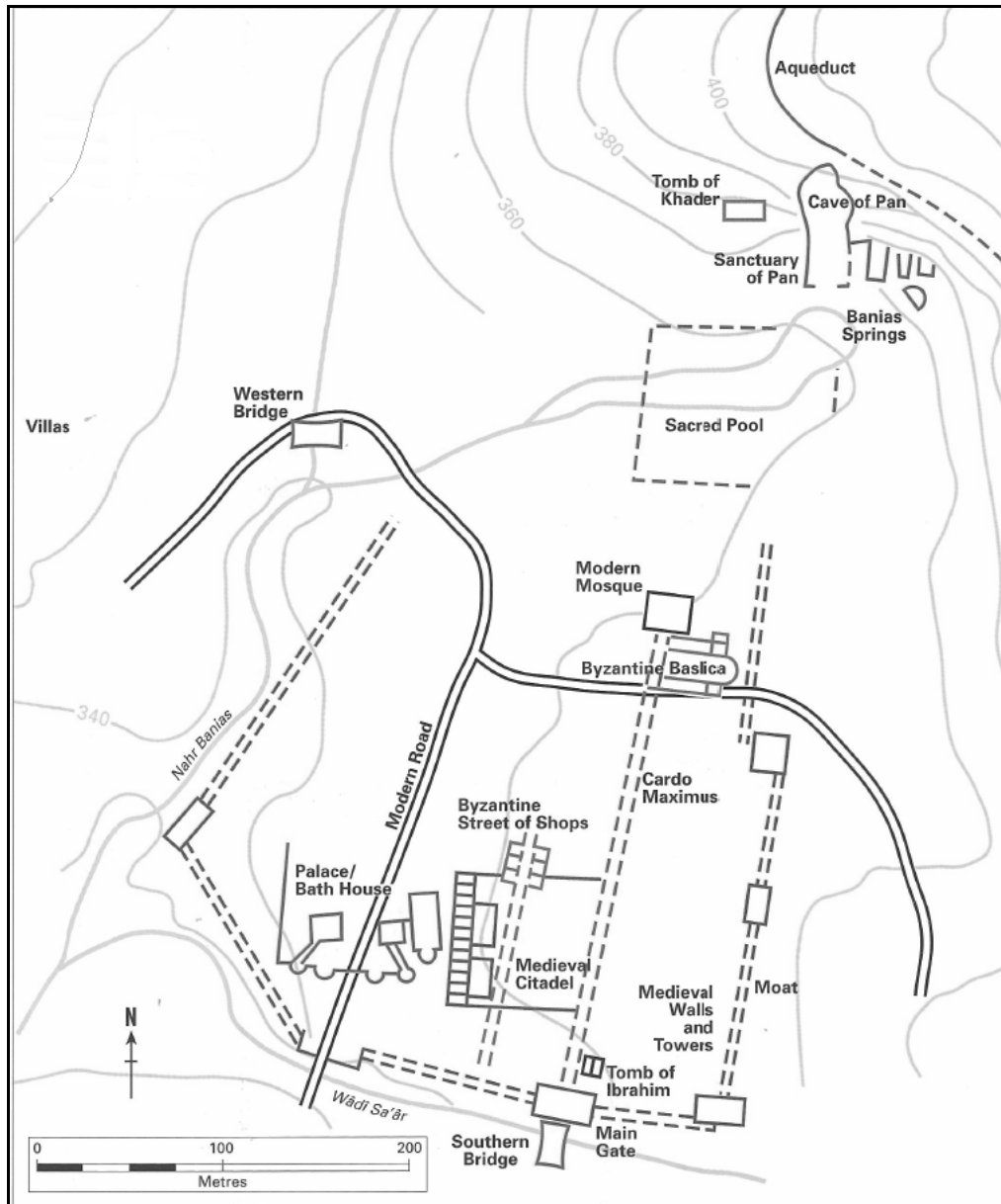


4. Map of the Upper Galilee and the Baniyas Region during the First Century AD

Baniyas is situated at an elevation of 1150 feet above sea level, at the base of a southwestern spur of Mount Hermon. It lies some ten miles to the southwest of the great mountain. A great hill spotted with trees and brush rises 300 feet above the site. Below in a small plain lies the site of Baniyas itself, with no more than a 60 foot north-south slope in elevation. It is bounded on the north, west, and south by rivers and streams. As a result, Baniyas has a generous supply of water.²¹ Below the Cave of Pan, the Baniyas Springs usher forth, collecting in an ancient pool, rushing westward and then southwest around the city as the Nahr Baniyas. A river at its source, it contributes to a waterfall, and further along its course it ends at the confluence of the Jordan River in the Huleh

²¹ DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World*, 264.

Valley.²² Running east to west on the south side of Banias is the Wadi Sa'ar, whose waters meet the Nahr Banias in a confluence at the southwestern corner of the site.²³



5. Site Map of Banias (Courtesy of John F. Wilson)

²² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 1.

²³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, Figure 1.

The greatest physical feature of the site of Banias is a large natural cave, the Grotto of Pan. The historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37-c. 100) described the Grotto of Pan and nearby waters as follows:

This is a very fine cave in a mountain, under which there is a great cavity in the earth, and the cavern is abrupt, and prodigiously deep, and full of a still water; over it hangs a vast mountain; and under the caverns arise the springs of the river Jordan.²⁴

It is quite probable that the springs at one time issued forth from an opening in the cave itself, as Josephus notes, but seismic activity has since shifted the opening of the springs to the area in front of the cave.

Sacred space is also about structures and ritual. This study is not limited to the examination of physical geography and natural beauty; it analyzes the temples, shrines, grottos, niches, and related sacred space that the people of Banias created over time. The ruins of Banias bear mute (though not unwritten) testimony to the procession of cultural influences at this place. Taken as a whole, they represent connections between the historical ages of the city. Until the nineteenth century, they lay largely overgrown and remained quite uninteresting to academics until the Oriental fantasies of western scholars and travelers were stirred by reports from the east. No less a person than author Mark Twain visited the site of Banias with a band of pilgrims in 1867. He gives the following description:

There are the massive walls of a great square building that was once the citadel; there are many ponderous old arches that are so smothered with debris that they barely project above the ground; there are heavy-walled sewers through which the crystal brook of which Jordan is born still runs; in the hill-side are the substructions of a costly marble temple that Herod the Great built here—patches of its handsome mosaic floors still remain;

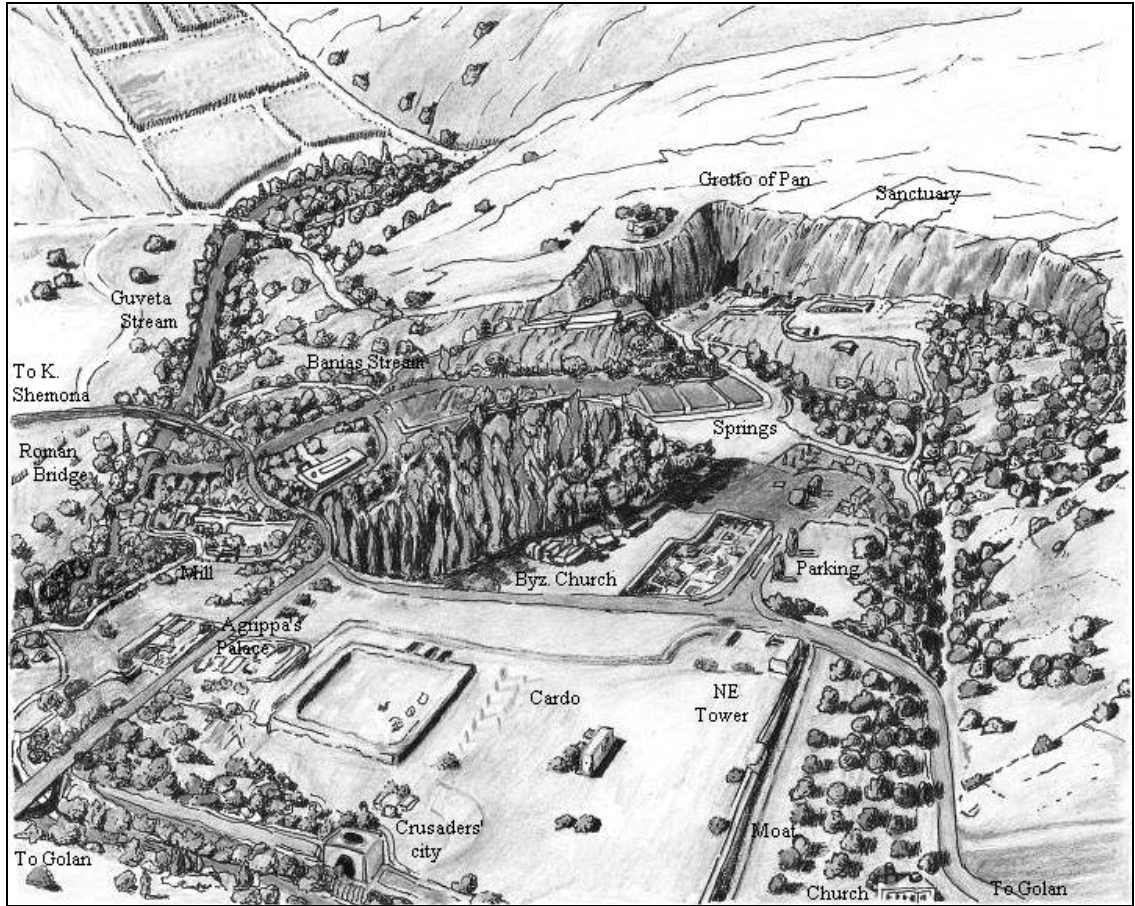
²⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.10.3.

there is a quaint old stone bridge that was here before Herod's time, may be; scattered every where, in the paths and in the woods, are Corinthian capitals, broken porphyry pillars, and little fragments of sculpture; and up yonder in the precipice where the fountain gushes out, are well-worn Greek inscriptions over niches in the rock where in ancient times the Greeks, and after them the Romans, worshipped the sylvan god Pan. But trees and bushes grow above many of these ruins now.²⁵

Twain's description of the ruined city captures the picturesqueness of the site. Thanks to archaeological exploration, however, Banias today is a much more visible and tangible site than Twain saw back in the nineteenth century.

In the north of the city at the base of the red cliffs, the Cave of Pan is truly the beginning of the story of Banias' religious history. It is the most striking feature of the old city, both in its past as a Greco-Roman polis, and today as an archaeological preserve. The cave itself was Pan's home at Banias, functioning as both haunt and temple. Above the cave and to the left sits the small, domed Druze temple dedicated to the saint El Khadir. It stands in watchful repose over the cave, a reenactment of its probable Byzantine function as a chapel near a dying pagan shrine.

²⁵ Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad: or, The New Pilgrims' Progress, Volume 2* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911), 220-21.



6. Artist's rendering of modern layout of Banias archaeological park and preserve (courtesy Biblewalks)

Directly in front of the cave are the foundational remains of some temple of the Roman era. Though the waters of Jordan do not issue forth from the cave as of old, they nonetheless gurgle forth in front of the cave, completing the grand panoply of synthetic and natural sacred space.

Proceeding east from the cave, one comes to the *temenos*, or sanctuary area. This area along the base of the cliffs was the religious center of the old pagan city. Though no temples now stand, their foundations survive. Niches with accompanying inscriptions adorn the cliff face. Here the ancients worshipped a procession of gods including Pan,

the Nymphs, Tyche, Nemesis, Zeus, and Aesclepius. Somewhere in the vicinity, most likely atop the hill above the cliffs, was the Augusteum, Herod's great temple to Caesar Augustus. This was the sacred district of the city, built by the Herodians and utilized by residents until well into the fourth century.

To the south of the pagan temples, on the left of the park entrance, lie the remains of a basilica. Broken walls, foundations, pillar bases, mosaic fragments, and even water basins are all that is left of this once great bastion of Christianity. Along with the chapel atop the Cave of Pan, the basilica constitutes a major effort to maintain a Christian presence at Banias. A modern mosque—now-abandoned—to the west of the basilica abides as both a marker of contrast and as an indication of the varied history of Banias.

Continuing south across the highway, one inevitably comes into direct contact with the civil district of Banias, one which spans several occupations. The only evidence of sacred usage is the remnant of a synagogue. Evidence of crusader fortifications stands east and south of the old Roman city. Here are ruined storage areas with arched openings and a ruined tower, overgrown with trees and brush. The Crusader city encircles the older Roman district. To the west of these are the ruins of the Roman city of Caesarea Philippi. Running from north to south between the crusader ruins and the rest of the city is the *Cardo Maximus*, also visible in this area today, which gave Banias a characteristically Roman layout. The most striking feature is the palace structure of Herod Agrippa II, a vast administrative complex built in Roman style with marble facing, arches, and apses. The spring-fed stream running under the palace is visible, as is evidence of the palace's later use as a bath house: *hypocausts* under the flooring. To the

northwest of the palace, along the Banias stream, is an outlying bridge built in the Roman style by the Herodians. The return from the bridge to the cave, just upstream, completes the perimeter of the old City of Pan.



7. Ruins of the palace of Herod Agrippa II

In considering the religious pasts of Banias, specific questions arise. What mythological motifs survive and why? Why did so many people, century after century, turn to Banias as a place of religious inspiration and meditation? Given the abundance of mystics at the site, what drew them to Banias? How are tradition and belief linked to the land itself? What gods were important to the site and for what reasons? Is the central fertility god archetypal or culture-specific? How is the religious history of Banias similar to other sites in the region and in the Near East? Addressing these questions is crucial to each chapter, and especially to the concluding chapter.

This dissertation attempts to better answer these questions through a multi-disciplinary history. Given the gaps in the textual record, it quickly becomes apparent to what extent one must draw on more than document-based history. Therefore, in addition to primary text-aided analysis, archaeology, numismatics, and epigraphy are essential. Archaeology, in fact, has been critical in retelling a significant portion of the history of Banias. There are relatively few written references to Banias. The people of Banias become mobile, active, deliberate, and ritualistic within the context of archaeology. Likewise, numismatics is a valuable source of information for developing chronologies at Banias and for providing insight into patron gods who often find their way onto coins. Epigraphy is analogous to the anthropologist's transcript. These inscriptions are the words of the so-called well-informed informants at Banias. The ancient ethnographer, unfortunately, cannot choose his interviewees—time, the elements, and movement have done that for him. Nonetheless, surviving inscriptions provide a host of clues about religion at Banias.

This study is truly only possible due to the advent of the scientific study of religion. The history of religions and religious studies provide important analytical methods for studying ritual activity, pilgrimage, sacred space, and mythology. Mythology is at the heart of the survival of religious themes at Banias. It will become clear that mythological motifs, arguably extremely ancient, survived for centuries on end at Banias. At any rate, their preservation and survival can be traced within the time frame of this study.

In addition to religious studies and its methodology, the anthropology of religion is a valuable approach in addressing the religious history of Banias. Archaeology, epigraphy, and text provide the raw materials from which to construct the socio-cultural models of religion at Banias. These sources serve not only to provide voice and personality to the upper echelons of society, but they also reveal the religious habits of other persons living in the city and region. Although the picture is not always complete, it is usually representative. Through the aforementioned sources, discernable cultural schema for the practice of religion at Banias emerge. The value of anthropological approaches to religion in a study such as the present one is apparent in the analysis of a specific tradition, but it also is evident in assessing the components of religion, society, and sacred space over time. There is a longitudinal merit in the implementation of the anthropology of religion, because by examining particular motifs, practices, and beliefs, it is easier—though still challenging—to arrive at precisely which religious elements survive, and which do not.

The underlying argument for the proposed methodology is that an analysis of Banias utilizing a strictly classical method results in an incomplete picture. One loses many of the overarching and long-standing symbols and ideas that survive at Banias if its religious history is reduced to translations of inscriptions and dates on coins, though such evidences are valuable to the scholar. There is, in fact, a more vibrant world just beyond the recounting of deeds and events, a world active with movement, thought, and interaction within the sacred space of Banias. It is thus a central goal of this dissertation

to determine the nature of this symbiosis of religion, society, and sacred space at Baniyas by using a multi-disciplinary historical orientation.

Baniyas and its religions did not operate in a vacuum. The city and her devotees were influenced by other cities and their devotees, and they in turn interacted with other communities, and influenced them and their respective cultures. It will be necessary to employ occasional comparisons with other cities and cultures in order to illustrate similar patterns of development and precedents for the phenomena observable in the religious history of Baniyas. These cities and cultures are generally confined to the Levant and the Near East, but pertinent examples from other locations may be discussed as possible paradigms.

Religious traditions outside the scope of Baniyas also provide comparative insight. In an examination of the deities, religions, and practices at Baniyas, it is necessary to refer to outside diverse religious traditions in order to illuminate points of interest in the religious development there. In keeping with the comparative approach, then, at times it will be necessary to utilize an ethnological method in order to create a more holistic picture of the religions in Baniyas' past.

In many ways, this analysis is a religious ethnohistory. With the exception of the Druzes, who still live in the Baniyas area, the societies that produced the religious culture of Baniyas are either no longer in the region or do not exist any longer as cohesive cultures. As ethnohistory is the study of an ethnic group or ethnic groups that have vanished or are on the brink of vanishing, often involving the study of cultural change, its methodology is well-suited to the present task. In ethnohistorical analysis, every

prospective aid for reconstructing a culture's history is brought to bear on the problem: documents, artifacts, maps, oral culture, interviews, music, art—virtually anything that assists the ethnohistorian.²⁶ “Ethnohistory applies to the history of any *ethnos*,” as ethnohistorian Shepherd Krech III states. In the case of Baniyas, the *ethnos* is a Semitic population under the influence of several outside cultures during its history.²⁷ Given the multi-disciplinary approaches already outlined, coupled with the need to examine localized religious rites and beliefs, ethnohistory is yet another logical methodology.

Another perspective the present work brings to bear on Baniyas is that of microhistory. Microhistory focuses on a community in order to construct a history of that settlement that extends beyond local interest. In fact, without microhistorical orientation and a cognizance of Baniyas' importance to larger historical trends, the research might be an exercise in antiquarianism. The pertinent sources form a narrative of Baniyas, and those sources also reveal important cultural data concerning the religions of its past. Each chapter of this study functions as a religious microhistory based upon available sources. As the microhistorian attempts to tease out hidden and sometimes exotic aspects of society, so does this study seek to reveal some heretofore hidden elements of the religion and mythology of Baniyas and to explain the region's ability to attract mystics, prophets, and religious eccentrics. By concentrating in part on “the contradictions of normative systems and therefore on the fragmentation, contradictions and plurality of viewpoints which make all systems fluid and open,” each topical analysis in this

²⁶ James Axtell, “Ethnohistory: An Historian's Viewpoint,” *Ethnohistory* 26.1 (Winter 1979): 2.

²⁷ Shepherd Krech III, “The State of Ethnohistory,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20 (1991): 364.

dissertation makes use of microhistory in order to illustrate how those “fluid systems” perpetuate certain religious ideas.²⁸

Although a significant amount of scholarship on Baniyas exists, most studies are extremely narrow in their chronological focus. For instance, scholars have produced academic analyses on the Semitic, Hellenic, Herodian, Roman, Christian, Jewish, Byzantine, and Arab phases of the site. A substantial portion of this research is excellent and insightful, but very few works feature extensive cross-cultural or longitudinal orientation. This dissertation differs from other investigations in that it combines elements of previous scholarship on religion with original studies of the site in order to produce a broader narrative of the religious history of Baniyas.

The key to the religious history of Baniyas is the longevity of its religious ideas. This dissertation is designed to demonstrate the individual nature of religious traditions, and to illustrate how certain beliefs and mythological themes survived at the site for so many centuries. Religion is the point at which Baniyas begins, and the locus wherein it perseveres. Its establishment as a shrine at a time now lost to us, its dedication as the City of Pan, and its very life as a community were all centered on religious belief and action. If religion is demonstrably the reason for the city’s existence, then historians and scholars must continue to return to the religion of Baniyas in order to extrapolate its culture. The religious history of Baniyas is not merely an epiphenomenon of other historical factors, but rather is the basis for the history of the site.

²⁸ Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory,” *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1991), 107.

Banias, in many ways, is very much like other Near Eastern cities. Its zenith was as a Greco-Roman polis, and later peoples recycled its structures and institutions for their own purposes. Banias was also unique. Even in the ancient world, cities with lengthy religious histories were exceptional. Many of them were substantial in size, population, and influence, such as Jerusalem, Damascus, Palmyra, Antioch, and Alexandria. Yet, when a smaller city such as Banias exhibits the ability to retain, develop, and adapt its religious identity for millennia, then historians must take notice, not only because of its significance to history but also because of its implications for our own societies and religious traditions. They must look into the many faces of Pan.

That the Greeks were conflating Pan with a Semitic deity will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters. Though the identity of this god is now lost to us, it was likely a Baal or, more reasonably, the Amorite and Assyrian Azzaga. Whatever the name, many of the attributes were similar or identical. It is not until the Greek and later Roman periods that Pan makes an indelible mark on the cultural landscape of Banias. Only then do statuary and coins begin to bear his likeness. Even with the decline of paganism at the site, it is evident that the very idea of Pan—the mythological concept—remained connected to the cave and in broader terms, the region of Banias. As Pan's influence waned, St. George took up the mantle of nature divinity. His very name, which meant “farmer” or “gardener,” continued the agropastoral and fertility qualities of Pan. If the structure directly above the mouth of the Cave of Pan was indeed a Byzantine chapel, it would seem that George continued to embody the forces of nature at Banias. During the Byzantine period the “Tomb” of St. George, more a monument than a literal tomb, served

to enshrine in Christian guise the memory of a pagan god. Even with the coming of Islam, this motif's significance did not fade, but merely adapted to suit the cultural needs of the times. As mystics began to pour into Banias, George became Khadir, the "Green One" or "ever-living one." Likewise, his enclosure became the Tomb of Khadir under the auspices of the Druzes, who continue to pay homage to Khadir at the site every Thursday to this very day. The phenomenon of the Georgic cults present elsewhere in the Levant, in which practitioners revered George and Khadir as the same person, often at the same shrines, serves to illustrate the mechanisms for the transition between Byzantine and Islamic traditions. The archetype has longevity, as evinced by its survival today not only in the minds of devotees but also in the sacred geography of Banias itself. Here it is hard to miss the implications of Joseph Campbell's monomyth.²⁹ Though Campbell utilizes the monomyth in describing the universality of the hero's journey in diverse cultures, that same ethnological exercise proves useful in examining the god of Banias, a fertility deity, and its many faces. This fertility god, like Campbell's hero, is archetypal, as expressions for such deities exist firmly entrenched in the myriad pantheons of world mythology. Whereas Campbell was interested in the hero archetype over broad space and time, I am interested in extensions of the monomythic approach as it applies to mythical elements other than the hero, in this case, Pan and his analogous incarnations over time within the context of Banias' sacred space.

As the survival of mythological motifs is a focus of this dissertation, the works of Mircea Eliade and Karen Armstrong are equally valuable. Eliade, noted for his ethnological approach to religion, yields a scheme for examining the prospect of a

²⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949).

universality of certain religious and mythological themes.³⁰ In the case of Baniyas' fertility god, such methodology's merit is evident. Eliade's *hierophany* and his work on its location are also of great value to this study. The *hierophany* is essentially a manifestation of the sacred, and can therefore have a significant impact on the establishment and development of sacred geography.³¹ This phenomenon takes place as a reality not of this world, and those who experience it ensconce its value in structures and natural features.³² In this dissertation, I derive my approach to examining the recycling of the fertility god at Baniyas in part from Eliade's *hieraphany* and Campbell's synthetic approach to mythology. Lastly, in terms of comparative approaches and those methods that yield similarities between religious traditions, Karen Armstrong is a competent theorist. Her work in studies such as *A History of God* and *A Short History of Myth* suggest that archetypes and ritual activity find analogues in many traditions.³³

Arguably, the core religion never truly left the site, it only changed to suit various traditions. Only its superficial elements were subject to change. That the original Semitic population never left Baniyas is significant. It must have some bearing on the perpetuation of mythological motifs. If that is the case, then cultural memory was a vehicle for the temporal mobility of archetypes, and likewise, their constrained movements within the space of Baniyas itself. Granted, there were Greeks and Romans

³⁰ Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas, Volumes 1-3* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985).

³¹ Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 124-5.

³² Ibid.

³³ Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (London: Ballantine, 1994); Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005).

and peoples from other ethnicities at Baniyas, but most of the population remained Semitic despite some superficial Hellenization.

Even the Jews seem to provide their own connections with the pre-existing tradition of Pan at Baniyas. Azazel, the most criminal of the Watchers who landed on Mount Hermon in *The Book of Enoch*, was related to the goat in form. He later appears in the Levitical laws as the scapegoat. The demons of Jewish lore also bear resemblance, if only in demonized form, to the lusty and uncontrollable Pan. The *seirim* and the *shedim* were satyr-like and thus also goat-like. The ubiquitous presence of Pan at the site and a proximity to Mount Hermon would not have gone unnoticed by a Jewish population familiar with apocalyptic currents within their own religion. Devotees of George and Khadir sometimes acknowledged them as a variant of Elijah. This notion too, would not have been lost on the Jews of Baniyas.

Classical pagan education cannot be emphasized enough as a mechanism for the preservation of the aforementioned pagan ideas. It was the most basic way to transmit pagan religious traditions in the Greco-Roman polis, high-culture paganism. Certainly, the presence of pagan teachers, priests, and philosophers at Baniyas contributed greatly to the survival of public pagan rites. Those rites lasted for over 600 years and were the very blood of religious life at Baniyas. So strong were the influences that the ideas themselves outlasted the old Sanctuary of Pan to continue a veiled existence among the occupants of the city and region during Christian and Muslim times.

Several aspects of Baniyas' sacred geography illustrate its ability to incubate religious ideas. For instance, the region of Mount Hermon has long been famous as a

place of revelation. The Canaanites sought the insight of Baal and his avatars on the peaks of its ranges. According to Jewish tradition, Enoch, the antediluvian patriarch, sought the will of Yahweh and the strength to live a righteous life near Hermon. Conversely, the Watchers had followed their own desires in search of a new carnal revelation after descending in rebellion to Mount Hermon. The Danites pursued a revelation apart from Yahweh in their temples at Dan. With the coming of the Greeks, Pan—a god of prophecy and oracles in addition to fertility—fit nicely into the niche of special revelations in the shadow of Hermon. His priests looked for his will in dreams, as their inscriptions reveal.

In the first century AD, Banias and Mount Hermon came to the attention of a young Jewish rabbi and his students. Jesus sought revelation in the shadow of Mount Hermon, and in turn revealed his messiahship to Peter and his disciples. Again, his transfiguration is sometimes claimed to have occurred on Mount Hermon itself, though Mount Tabor is the more accepted tradition. Mystical and heterodox sects of every kind found a home on the slopes of Hermon and often at Banias. Later Muslim Sufis sought peaceful reflection in the forests around Banias and Hermon. Here Druzes and Assassins would also seek revelation from Khadir and Allah. With the advent of the Crusades, Templars sworn to defend holy places brought their attentions to bear on Banias and Mount Hermon. Their military aims were quite clear, but the oracular draw of Mount Hermon itself—as with Jerusalem—was enough to merit the attention of hundreds of their order, to the extent that in defending this region they lost they not only knights but also two Grandmasters. Hermon's capacity to offer divine revelation and Banias'

willingness—more often than not—to welcome seekers have contributed, at a fundamental level, to the longevity of religious ideas and sacred space at Banias.

The natural splendor of the region also functioned as a medium for the preservation of sacred space and religious ideas. So many of the religious elements associated with the Banias region were connected to those natural features. They inspired religious awe in ancient peoples of the region. The Greeks saw the cave as a haunt of Pan, and the adjoining forests were likewise held to be his environs. Thus fairly early in the site's history the natural features found resonance with the person of Pan. The cave surely held the symbolism of the underworld for the Greco-Roman elements of Banias society. The Jews believed that Azazel was bound hand and foot like a sacrificial victim and thrown into a cavern, an abyss. Jesus himself likely made use of this imagery in stating the gates of hell—with the connotation of a dungeon gate—would not prevail against the church. The waters running from the cave into the Jordan River have special significance, not only to the pagans but also to Jews and Christians. The deified river has been the main artery of water running through the Holy Land for millennia, and as such is intimately connected with the very narrative of Judeo-Christian history in the Near East. Even the pagans were amenable to the possibility of a water spirit dwelling in the headwaters, as has been suggested. Nearby Mount Hermon preserves that connection between heaven and earth, between gods and men, for good or ill. Mystics sought revelation on or near it, as the examples of Enoch and Jesus show, but the mountain also harbors the tradition of the rebellion against Yahweh. Regional people associated the land with their religions early on, and this is a trend which continues into the modern era.

The actual construction of religious buildings on the site was a significant step in the transformation of the site into sacred space. Statuary too contributed to this movement toward permanence. Beginning with the Augusteum, citizens built a number of temples in what became known as the Sanctuary of Pan. Permanent buildings honoring the gods helped make the site sacred. It had to be sanctified so that priests and worshippers could perform religious acts within them, reenact the stories of their gods, and present their sacrifices and offerings. Pagans were the first to build such structures, but later Christians, Jews, and Muslims in turn built churches, chapels, synagogues, and mosques at Baniyas, each completed project altering the nature of sacred space within the city but also ensuring that it remained sacred.

Johnathan Z. Smith argues that ritual is not an expression of or response to the sacred, but a way to make people sacred by ritual.³⁴ Ritual takes place within space that religious officials or holy people have made sacred. Therefore, the religious history of Baniyas is in some respects the story of its occupants creating and shaping sacred, ritual space. Every action within the sacred space is thus a ritual.³⁵ Each tradition has accomplished this feat by molding Baniyas to its own norms, retaining elements of earlier traditions deemed important, and discarding those that were irrelevant.

Outside of calendrical observances, time seems to be a mute participant in most historical treatments of Baniyas. However, just as Smith argues that actions within sacred space are ritual in nature, time observed or time passing within the sacred space must also be sacred. Whether these be the long communal meals at shrines, or church services, or

³⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 105.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-3.

the fleeting moments involved in depositing a votive lamp, sacred time existed in abundance at Banias. Banias as a city of religious life also has never ceased to have sacred time, and as such, time has been a vehicle for the survival of religious ideas and practices.

Smith argues that by going to and remaining in a space for the purposes of religious activity people turn sacred space into sacred place.³⁶ His model for the creation and maintenance of sacred space is the most applicable model for sacred geography at Banias. Smith's thesis of search for space, putting in place, the replacing of ritual, and the conducting of ritual as integral to sacred space, is as simple as it is original. He suggests that story, ritual, and place are all united as one in examples of sacred space such as Jerusalem.³⁷ It quickly becomes apparent how such theory can be applied to a site such as Banias. The body of theory outlined above will aid the examination of the religious history of Banias. While classical methodology is employed, this study obviously implements approaches outside the strictly historical. Banias is certainly a subject that has garnered the attention of other scholars, but narrow studies need to be meshed in an effort to distinguish the connective tissues of the region's history. This dissertation is therefore a point of departure from previous studies in that it engages in a multi-disciplinary analysis of the relation between religion, society, and sacred space in the history of Banias.

Another intriguing aspect to Smith's arguments concerning sacred space is that myth and ritual are quite opposite but are nonetheless symbiotic. Myth is passive and

³⁶ Smith, *To Take Place*, xii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

rests in the study of belief and thought.³⁸ Conversely, ritual is active and designed as a process of marking interest in an event or occurrence.³⁹ This symbiosis is necessary to the survival of any religion, and can be observed in the history of Banias, as in the event of the fertility deity, its story, its cults, its associated structures, and its worshippers.

William Cronon's model of the city as overlapping layers of natural and metropolitan interaction is an apt one in the case of Banias. Although Cronon looked at middle nineteenth century Chicago, much of his methodology is sound for ancient cities such as Banias. Cronon argues that cities must be rethought, and that terms such as "urban" and "rural" are not mutually exclusive. Cities are composed of rural and urban layers, existing in tandem and often in concert. The city does not push the wilderness aside: it simply becomes part of the wilderness, altering aspects of it to suit its needs.⁴⁰ This model fits Banias. It begins as a country shrine, known only for the Cave of Pan, a striking natural feature. The city grows in the first century AD, but manages to maintain its proximity to its beautiful environs. The spring waters from the cave fed a fountain. The river ran through parts of the city. The forests were visible from the city. Religious, political, social, economic, and natural layers all overlapped in this Greco-Roman polis. While such relationships seem to crumble after the Byzantine era, when the city converts to a *madina* model, the theory seems sound for much of Roman and Byzantine Banias. It is also, therefore, crucial to a more comprehensive understanding of sacred space at

³⁸ Smith, *To Take Place*, 101-3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991), 18, 149, 278.

Banias, as so much of the area within the city proper and the region could be considered sacred.

While Banias exhibits all the valid markers of a settlement with religious longevity, there is also a tenuous quality to its sacred space. In a manner of speaking, Banias itself is liminal for many of the people who journey there for religious purposes. Banias was at the very northern reaches of the sacred geography of Palestine, and was therefore on the margins of religious travel in the region. Its function as a hospital of sorts guaranteed that most of the infirm who made their way to Banias did not stay long. Even the Israelite spies sent into Canaan did not tarry at Beth Rehob for long. The Hellenistic assemblages near the Cave of Pan suggest that the shrine was visited primarily by passers-by. The city lay on the Damascus road and was therefore a stop for many travelers. Jesus sojourned with his disciples for only one winter, long enough to make his revelation, and that point marks a crossing over the threshold, or departure from that liminal phase in his ministry. Later pilgrims visited Banias as the last stop on the pilgrim trail from Jerusalem. A return from Banias marked the end of liminality in the pilgrimage experience. For the Isma'ili, their tenure in Banias was very brief in the early twelfth century, as was that of the Franks, Templars, and Hospitallers. It is worth noting that Victor Turner posited that if mysticism is an interior pilgrimage, the pilgrimage is exteriorized mysticism.⁴¹ This contention is significant in the context of Banias, whose spiritual past is filled with mystics and pilgrims.

⁴¹ Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University, 1978): 7.

CHAPTER 2

Banias Scholarship: Materials Toward a Religious History

The history of Banias has interested scholars from many fields and has been the focus of scholarly publications dating back to the nineteenth century. The variety and number of publications attest to the importance of the site in Biblical and Western history, and collectively form the corpus of pertinent scholarship. In preparation for writing this dissertation, it was necessary to review a substantial portion of works by scholars whose interests led them to conduct research on Banias' past, in particular its religious history. This chapter surveys the scholars and works with the most bearing on the present study.

The rediscovery of Banias by scholars, travelers, and explorers from the west marked the beginning of academic interest in the site's religious history. With that attention came a series of travel reports and studies which were primarily geographical, historical, and epigraphical in nature. Banias reopened the western mind to the site's role in Biblical, Roman, Jewish, and Christian history.

An occasional monk or traveler from Russia or Eastern Orthodox lands made his way to Banias during the eighteenth century, but visitors to Palestine most often took routes that kept them from Banias. It was not until the early nineteenth century that visits from westerners began to bear scholarly fruit. German explorer and Collegian-Assessor of the Emperor of Russia Ulrich Jasper Seetzen arrived in the small village of Banias on 27 January 1806. He came to Palestine more on a mission of exploration than on an errand for the emperor. Seetzen gave a general description of the region through which he passed, remarking on its flora and fauna, and noting that its abundance of game would

be a delight to the hunter. His narrative of the ruins at the site testifies to his knowledge of its antiquity, as he cited the city's connection to Pan, former names such as Caesarea Philippi and Paneas, and he noted the absence of Herod's Augusteum. Seetzen had an immediate grasp on the interaction between religion and sacred geography so crucial to Banias' past. Most pertinent to the body of scholarship on Banias is the fact that Seetzen stopped by the Grotto of Pan to satisfy his intellectual curiosity in an epigraphic exercise: "I copied some ancient Greek inscriptions, dedicated to Pan and the Nymphs of the fountain."¹

On the heels of Seetzen came noted Swiss explorer John Lewis Burckhardt. Burckhardt reached Banias in 1810, as part of his journey through the villages of the Hasbeyah territory. He arrived in Banias on 13 October 1810 after a journey of several hours in pouring rain. Once the hospitality of the local sheikh had warmed his spirits, he—like Burckhardt—recognized the significance of the city's past. He remarked "The district of Banias is classic ground; it is the ancient *Caesarea Philippi*."² A lack of money seems not to have hindered Burckhardt in his exploration of Banias and its environs. He visited the castle of Subaybah and the Greco-Roman ruins of the city; he also made careful notes on the ethnicities he saw, including Arabs, Turks, Greeks, and Druzes. Also included in his descriptions were the natural and geographical features of the site, including waterways, and especially the fountain near the grotto which fed the Jordan. Burckhardt devoted several pages to the analysis of the old Sanctuary of Pan, one which was certainly antiquarian but perhaps also proto-archaeological. Here, he

¹ Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, *A Brief Account of the Countries Adjoining The Lake of Tiberias, The Jordan, and The Dead Sea* (London: Bath, 1810), 15-16.

² John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: John Murray, 1822), 36-7.

recorded the dimensions of niches on the rock face and rendered a drawing of the temple district, then partially covered by earth.³ Burckhardt embarked on what epigraphic work he could and recorded the only inscription visible to him under a crusting of earth, one



8. Drawing of niches on the *temenos* from John Lewis Burckhardt's description of Baniyas

left by a priest of Pan.⁴ His command of the site's history is demonstrated in his citations of Josephus and Eusebius (c. 263-339). His survey endeavors are important to the archaeology of Baniyas, as is illustrated by his hypotheses concerning the contents of the niches, the possible use of proximate hewn stones in the Augusteum, and the general description of the site.⁵ Though he made the mistake of his forebears in conflating Baniyas with ancient Dan, his survey narrative is no less valuable to the scholarship of the site. The last of his descriptions included the Tomb of Khadir and its significance to Druzes and Eastern Christians, the bridge on the west side of the city, the general profusion of hewn stones, architectural remnants, and several columns of granite.⁶

Though western travelers continued to trickle into Baniyas, the next great contribution to its study was Reverend W. M. Thomson's expedition to the site in 1843.

³ Burckhardt, *Travels*, 37-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

Thomson's article "The Sources of the Jordan, the Lake El-Huleh, and the Adjacent Country," was an extensive geographical, archaeological, and historical treatment of the outlined region, with great emphasis placed on the region and city of Baniyas. Thomson gave a detailed description of the contemporary state of the city and of its ancient condition. His narrative expanded upon the work of Seetzen and Burckhardt, and was much more extensive. He not only handled ancient sources such as Josephus and the Bible well, but also applied such knowledge to the extant ruins. Thomson's report on Roman, crusader, and Muslim ruins was detailed and his conclusions reveal an insightful and measured assessment.⁷ Thomson's methods also illustrate the marks of thorough archaeological pedestrian survey, and are therefore crucial to the development of scholarship at the site. On 21 September 1843, Thomson spent a portion of the day recording four inscriptions from the rock face over the *temenos*. At this point in his work, he noted the worship of Pan at the site, and put forth a hypothesis that residents may have celebrated the Lupercal honoring the god in a grove of trees to the east of the city. Thomson's epigraphical field work, his contemplation of Roman Baniyas, and connection of Baniyas with the region of Dan are all valuable to the study of religion at the site.⁸

In 1851 a French archaeologist, Louis Félicien Joseph Caignart de Saulcy—one of the founders of Biblical archaeology—visited Baniyas on an expedition to survey the antiquities and geography of Palestine and Syria. His narrative, like those before it, was a substantial contribution to Baniyas scholarship. He too surveyed Baniyas and also recorded

⁷ W. M. Thomson, "The Sources of the Jordan, the Lake El-Huleh, and the Adjacent Country," *Bibliotheca Sacra and Theological Review*, Volume 3 (Andover: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 187-206.

⁸ Thomson, "Sources of the Jordan," 193-5.

inscriptions from the site. Perhaps one of the most important services de Saulcy provided was to establish a clear historical and geographical distinction between Dan and Banias.⁹ De Saulcy was a capable classicist, masterfully handling sources such as the aforementioned Josephus, as well as Eusebius, Philostorgius, and Benjamin of Tudela.¹⁰ Even at that early stage, de Saulcy was confident in the archaeological value of Banias and the feasibility of its excavation, stating “the site of Banias promises valuable discoveries to any explorer who may have time for his valuable operations.”¹¹ For his use of additional sources to comment on the religious past of Banias, and for his geographical clarifications, de Saulcy’s work is invaluable and indeed marks a turning point in the literature.

Additional French expeditions occurred from the 1850s to the end of the century. These ventures were archaeological and epigraphical in nature, and continued the work of scholars such as de Saulcy. W. H. Waddington and Philippe Le Bas produced the results of their epigraphical expedition to Syria, which included Banias, in the 1870 report *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie. Recueillies et expliquées*.¹² It contained one of the more comprehensive collections of Banias’ Greek and Latin inscriptions at that time. French scholar M. Victor Guérin published his *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine* in 1880, and included observations on Banias from his 1854 visit of the site.¹³ In particular, Guerin observed that the Tomb of Khadir

⁹ Louis Félicien Joseph Caignart de Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea and the Bible Lands; in 1850 and 1851, Volume 2*, ed. Edward de Warren (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), 494-5.

¹⁰ De Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea*, 495.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² W. H. Waddington and Philippe Le Bas, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie. Recueillies et expliquées* (Paris: Frères Didot, 1870).

¹³ M. Victor Guérin, *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine. Troisième partie. Galilée 1* (Paris: Librairie de la Société de Asiatique, 1880).

still displayed attributes that led him to believe the structure had at one time been a Byzantine chapel.¹⁴ In 1885, André Pératé published his findings on the ruins in “Note sur le groupe de Paneas.”¹⁵ Orientalist and archaeologist Charles Simon Clermont-Ganeau also contributed to Baniyas scholarship under the auspices of the British archaeological expedition to Palestine. He produced a number of works based on his research concerning the inscriptions and ruins of ancient and Muslim Baniyas, including



9. Cave of Pan and Tomb of Khadir in 1887 (picture by Frank De Hass)

“Inscription Arabe de Baniyas” and “Les seigneurs de Baniyas et de Soubeibe” in 1888, and “Le Mont Hermon et son Dieu d’après une inscription inédite” in 1902.¹⁶

¹⁴ Guérin, *Description*, 308; see also Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 107.

¹⁵ Andre Perate, “Note sur le groupe de Paneas,” *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire* 5 (1885): 303-12.

¹⁶ Charles Simon Clermont-Ganeau, “Inscription arabe de Baniyas,” *Recueil d’archéologie orientale* 1 (1888): 241-52; “Les seigneurs de Baniyas et de Soubeibe,” *Recueil d’archéologie orientale* 1 (1888):

Scottish clergyman Cunningham Geikie traveled to Palestine in the late 1880s. He devoted an entire chapter to Banias in the second volume of his 1888 work, *The Holy Land and the Bible: A Book of Scripture Illustrations Gathered in Palestine*.¹⁷ In it, Geikie was prone to the same type of ethnographic digressions found in earlier travelogues, but his attentions were clearly on the geographical and religious elements of the site. Congruent with the object of the book, Geikie adeptly utilized the ruins, the natural setting of Banias, and his knowledge of ancient sources such as Eusebius, to illustrate the biblical text, in particular Christ's visit to Banias described in Matthew 16 and Mark 8. Hence, the work is valuable to the development of a religious history of Banias and an understanding of its sacred geography.¹⁸

During the early twentieth century, other scholars produced reports on the inscriptions and Roman, Byzantine, and other ruins of Banias. Archaeologist André de Ridder published his findings on a collection of marble statue fragments from Banias in a 1906 study.¹⁹ Ecclesiastical historian Henri Leclercq's analysis came in 1929 in the form of a report entitled "Paneas."²⁰ Robert Eisler examined the sources and alleged nature of the statues of Christ and the woman with the issue of blood in "Le prétendue statue de Jesus et de l'hémorroïse à Paneas," published in 1930.²¹ In 1932, German theologian and

253-76; "Le Mont Hermon et son Dieu d'après une inscription inédite," *Recueil d'archéologie orientale* 5 (1902): 346-66.

¹⁷ Cunningham Geikie, *The Holy Land and the Bible: A Book of Scripture Illustrations Gathered in Palestine, Volume 2* (New York: James Pott and Company, 1888), 393-399.

¹⁸ Geikie, *The Holy Land and the Bible*, 393-399.

¹⁹ André de Ridder, *Collection de Clercq. Catalogue publiée par les soins d'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres 4: Les Membres, les vases peints et les ivoires* (Paris: 1906).

²⁰ Henri Leclercq, "Paneas," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed. Fernand Cabrol et al, 15 vols. in 30 (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907-1953), vol. 8. cols. 1737-41.

²¹ Robert Eisler, "Le prétendue statue de Jesus et de l'hémorroïse à Paneas," *Revue archéologique. 5th ser.*, 30 (1930): 18-27.

Bible professor Joachim Jeremias made a study of Baniyas including an inscription from the necropolis, in “Ein Grabepigramm aus Caesarea Philippi.”²²

The second half of the twentieth century marked the beginning of more detailed studies of Baniyas, as well as the development of broader histories. Numismatic studies, such as Adolf Reifenberg’s “Unpublished and Unusual Jewish Coins,” expanded the knowledge of Baniyas’ religious past. Reifenberg’s report includes a study of the coin with Tiberius’ portrait on the obverse, and the Auguestum on the reverse.²³ However, it



10. Coin with Tiberius and Auguestum minted by Herod Philip II, C. AD 30/31
(Courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group)

was Arie Kindler who later correctly identified the face on the obverse of the earliest coin of similar make as Philip in the 1971 report “A Coin of Herod Philip—The Earliest Portrait of a Herodian Ruler.”²⁴

The second half of the twentieth century and first decade of the twenty-first century has been marked by detailed archaeological and historical investigations of Baniyas. Zvi Ma’oz was the first archaeologist to conduct any significant excavations at

²² Joachim Jeremias, “Ein Grabepigramm aus Caesarea Philippi,” *Palastinajahrbuch* 28 (1932): 81-2.

²³ Adolf Reifenberg, “Unpublished and Unusual Jewish Coins,” *Israel Exploration Journal* [hereafter *IEJ*] 1 (1950-1951): 176-78, pl. 32.

²⁴ Arie Kindler, “A Coin of Herod Philip—The Earliest Portrait of a Herodian Ruler,” *IEJ* 21 (1971): 161-63, pl. 32.

the site of Banias. His work centered around the Cave of Pan and the Sanctuary of Pan. As the rationale for Banias' existence lay in the founding of the shrine at the cave, large scale excavations there are logical. Ma'oz produced a number of reports on his excavation efforts in the 1980s and early 1990s. The rites and structures associated with the worship of Pan were central to his research at the sanctuary and also contribute to the understanding of religion at the site.²⁵ Ma'oz is also responsible for a significant portion of the numismatic analysis on the coins retrieved from Banias. As images of gods and temples adorned coins from the Banias mint, this contribution by Ma'oz is integral to a better understanding of religion at Banias.²⁶ He has also recently completed a history of the site from the Hellenistic to the Roman periods based on his field excavations.²⁷

Vasillios Tzaferis, a retired archaeologist with the Israel Antiquities Authority, is another scholar who has been crucial to recounting the story of Banias. He was the principal investigator of the site during the late 1980s and 1990s. Tzaferis' research and archaeological investigations dealt with a number of areas in the site, some of religious importance and some of political importance, including the so-called palace of Herod Agrippa II. Under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority, he has recently published the excavation reports for the site of Banias. Likewise, Tzaferis' other scholarship speaks to an intimate knowledge of the various aspects of the site. Of particular import to this dissertation is "Cults and Deities Worshipped at Caesarea Philippi-Banias," an article which illustrates the religious elements of Greco-Roman

²⁵ Zvi Ma'oz, "Banias, Temple of Pan (1988)," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* [hereafter *ESI*] 7-8 (1989): 11; "Banias, Temple of Pan-1990," *EIS* 10 (1990): 59-61; "Banias, Temple of Pan-1991/1992," *ESI* 13 (1993): 2-7.

²⁶ Ma'oz, "Coin and Temple: The Case of Caesarea Philippi-Paneas," *Israel Numismatic Journal* [hereafter *INJ*] 13 (1994-1999): 90-102.

²⁷ Ma'oz, *Banias in the Greco-Roman Period: A History Based on Excavations* (Tiberias: Golan Antiquities Museum, 2007).

Banias as revealed in archaeology.²⁸ A series of articles by Tzaferis and several other scholars also appears in the journal *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, and these articles provide additional insight into Banias.²⁹

More numismatic analyses on Banias' coins come from Ya'akov Meshorer. Meshorer's work predates other numismatic work on the site and therefore sets the foundation for later work. He published several articles on Banias in particular, and a number of works on Hellenic, Herodian, and Roman coins of Palestine. Meshorer's research has been particularly valuable to the Herodian and Roman phases of the site.³⁰

A significant contribution to the religious history came in the form a thesis written by Hardin-Simmons University graduate student Jimmy R. Watson. Watson wrote a religious history with a theological focus entitled "The Religious History of Banias and Its Contribution to an Understanding of the Petrine Confession."³¹ The document surveys some of the prominent religions at Banias between the Roman and crusader periods. The main focus is, however, on the theological implications of Peter's confession that Jesus of Nazareth was the messiah, as recounted in the gospels of Matthew, chapter 16, and Mark, chapter 8. Watson's work reflects Wilson's in scope, as he attempts a broader history of the site.

²⁸ Tzaferis, "Cults and Deities Worshipped at Caesarea Philippi-Banias," *Priests, Prophets, and Scribes: Essays on the Formation and Heritage of Second Temple Judaism in Honour of Joseph Blenkinsopp*, ed. Eugene Ulrich et al (Sheffield: Continuum International, 1992), 190-201.

²⁹ Tzaferis and M. Peleg, "Banias Excavation Project-1988," *ESI* 7-8 (1988-89): 10-11; Tzaferis and Rina Avner, "Banias-1990," *ESI* 10 (1991): 1-2; Tzaferis and Shoshana Israeli, "Banias-1993," *ESI* 16 (1997): 9-11; Ibid, "Banias-1994," *ESI* 16 (1997): 11-14.

³⁰ Ya'akov Meshorer, *Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period* (Tel Aviv, 1967); Meshorer, "A New Type of Coins of Herod Agrippa II," *IEJ* 21 (1971): 164-65; Meshorer, "The Coins of Caesarea Paneas," *INJ* 8 (1984-85): 37-58.

³¹ Jimmy R. Watson, "The Religious History of Banias and Its Contribution to an Understanding of the Petrine Confession" (Hardin-Simmons University, Master's Thesis, 1989).

Additional specialized archaeological research illuminating the history of Banias has appeared in the last two decades. In 1999, archaeologist Andrea Berlin produced a ceramic analysis on artifacts from several phases of the Sanctuary of Pan. In “The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Banias/Caesarea Philippi,” Berlin examined votive remains from the Hellenistic, Roman, and Early Byzantine strata near the Grotto of Pan.³² Her scholarship is valuable in that it provides a context for the sort of ritual movement and establishment of sacred space that concerns this dissertation. Elise Friedland examined the marble statuary fragments from Greco-Roman Banias in a published dissertation, “Roman Marble Sculpture from the Levant: The Group from the Sanctuary of Pan at Caesarea Philippi (Panias),” that analyzed the various sculptural fragments from the site, many of which were dedicatory and therefore of religious interest.³³ Israel Antiquities Authority archaeologists, including Howard Smithline and Moshe Hartal, continue to survey parts of the site and conduct small-scale excavations. During a 2006 project, Smithline excavated the remains of a structure on the hill above the cave dating to the Roman and Byzantine periods.³⁴ In 2008, Hartal surveyed and excavated a crusader tower³⁵, part of the aforementioned cemetery³⁶, and a tomb dating to Byzantine and Muslim periods.³⁷

John Wilson has been a fixture in the work on Banias during the last two decades. He took an early interest in the site and its history. Wilson, as a representative of

³² Andrea Berlin, “The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Banias/Caesarea Philippi,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 315 (1999): 27-46.

³³ Elise Ann Friedland, “Roman Marble Sculpture from the Levant: The Group from the Sanctuary of Pan at Caesarea Philippi (Panias)” (University of Michigan, PhD Dissertation, 1997).

³⁴ Howard Smithline, “Banias, Final Report,” *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* [hereafter *HA*] 118 (2006).

³⁵ Moshe Hartal, “Banias, The Southwestern Tower,” *HA* 119 (2007).

³⁶ Hartal, “Banias Final Report,” *HA* 120 (2008).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Pepperdine University, has been actively involved in a number of phases of excavations at Banias. His latest work, *Caesarea Philippi: Banias, The Lost City of Pan*, is a comprehensive history of the site from its inception as a shrine to Pan to the present day. He treats the Hellenic, Herodian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Crusade, Mamluk, Ottoman, and modern periods of the sites social, political, and cultural history. In writing this study, Wilson was the first scholar to draft a broad narrative of the site's past, as opposed to the procession of period and topical studies which preceded it.³⁸

Wilson is also the author of a number of other studies related to Banias. These vary in focus, but are no less important to the construction of Banias' history. *Rediscovering Caesarea Philippi: The Ancient City of Pan* is a brief historical treatment of the site and a catalogue of artifacts written by Wilson and several scholars who have worked with him at Banias, including Vassilios Tzaferis and Shoshana Israeli.³⁹ Although it accompanied an exhibit of Banias artifacts, it is still a valuable piece of scholarship, especially for its analysis of artifact types and their contributions to the history of Banias. An article, "Banias Dig Reveals King's Palace," appearing in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, outlines Wilson's involvement in the excavation of the Herodian phase of the city.⁴⁰ It is important for its historical sketches of the Herodian phase.

Historian and epigrapher Benjamin Isaac has also been integrally involved in retelling the history of Banias. His work on the inscriptions in the Banias region has been helpful in understanding the religious history of the site. Isaac's work builds on the work

³⁸ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*.

³⁹ Wilson, Vassilios Tzaferis, Shoshana Israeli, Elias Khamis, and Yael Gorin-Rosen, *Rediscovering Caesarea Philippi: The Ancient City of Pan* (Malibu: Pepperdine University, 2001).

⁴⁰ Wilson, "Banias Dig Reveals King's Palace," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (January/February 1998): 57

of earlier travelers and historians who have recorded inscriptions beginning in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ His translations and especially his commentary provide important insight into the people who made the inscriptions.⁴²

The above scholars and their work form the corpus of scholarship directly related to the aspects of Banias treated in this dissertation. It is evident that history, archaeology, anthropology, numismatics, religious studies, and epigraphy are amongst the disciplines necessary for a comprehensive understanding of Banias. Specific narrow studies outnumber large-scale synthetic examinations. It has only been in the last decade that a broad history of Banias was produced. In order to connect the area studies to a larger context, it was necessary to draw on the work of scholars whose methods and theories reflect a wider and more inclusive approach, and whose topics bear on the present study.

Fergus Millar provided valuable orientation for this study. His work on the Roman Near East relates directly to several chapters in this dissertation. In particular, his *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* provided a narrative on the larger world of which Banias was a part during its zenith as a city.⁴³ With its comprehensive survey of the Near East under Roman authority, this work contained a great deal of bibliographical data as well as information on other cities that might be compared to Banias.

As the worship of Pan was central to the history of Banias, it was necessary to consult the proper literature on that subject. Without a doubt, the most pertinent and comprehensive work available is Philippe Borgeaud's *The Cult of Pan in Ancient*

⁴¹ Many of which are found in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum, Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, and other epigraphical records, as noted in the following chapters

⁴² Benjamin Isaac, "The Inscriptions from Banias," unpublished report (forthcoming).

⁴³ Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993).

*Greece.*⁴⁴ Borgeaud examines the nature of the religion of Pan, primarily in Greece, but also elsewhere in the Mediterranean Basin. As such, it is best-suited for comparative analysis of the rites at Banias.

For the most part, area studies have abounded in the literature of Banias. While Wilson and others have produced larger narratives encompassing a substantial portion of the recorded history of Banias, a synthetic history of its religions has yet to be produced. There are themes within its history which necessitate closer evaluation, not the least of which is the fertility god motif. While Wilson, Watson, and others have suggested that such a motif exists and is perpetuated, the nature and mechanism for its survival has not yet been fully examined. The sacred geography of Banias also requires further study. The question as to why so many sought revelation in the area has yet to be fully explored. The role of ethnicity as a vehicle for religion has been briefly treated, but it too is in need of rethinking and revision. One of the main purposes of this dissertation is to explore at length these remaining questions about the nature of religion at Banias. No scholar has written a comprehensive, synthetic history of Banias which focuses solely on its religious past and the reasons for its ability to sustain so many successive traditions.

⁴⁴ Philippe Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan in Ancient Greece*, trans. Kathleen Atlass and James Redfield (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988).

CHAPTER 3
At The Feet of Baal-Hermon: Religion in the Territory of
Canaanite and Hellenic Banias

The power of any given site to attract people of a religious tradition is worth the attention of scholars. One of the most careful ways to examine such attraction is to chart the history of religions present at the site. For millennia, adherents of numerous religions have worshipped at the place known today as Banias. Situated at the foot of Mount Hermon, some two miles to the east of the site of ancient Dan (Laish), and at the headwaters of the Jordan River, Banias demonstrates that the alluring qualities of a site could persuade persons that it was a dwelling place of their god or that it was at the very least a suitable place to worship him or her. The lush environs provide an inviting sacred space in which worshippers of all sorts have practiced their respective religions. The cave and its rushing stream seem to have so impressed ancient viewers that they presumed the area was sacred and that deity surely resided herein. For those of the polytheistic bent such as the Canaanites, Greeks, and Romans, Banias was a natural temple with supernatural residents.

Banias is the modern name of the site. It is the Arabic name for the Greek designation of location: Paneas. Yet the site antedates the Greek period. Historians, philologists, archaeologists, and religious scholars of all types have plied their craft in the hopes of uncovering clues left in writing and in the soil that might reveal the origins of the city and its people.

The first clues to the earliest religion in the region are provided by the Bible and the material remains of Canaanite society. There is no direct evidence for Canaanite religion at the site of Banias itself. However, an abundance of circumstantial evidence in

the region suggests that the Canaanites were worshipping their gods there. The Canaanites were a Semitic people living in the regions of ancient Palestine and Lebanon. As the Hebrews had to contend with the Canaanites during their conquest of the region, and later coexist with them, the Bible contains a number of passages about Canaanite religion, including some that relate to the region of Banias.

During the period of the Old Testament, the region in which Banias is located was known by various names. The Hebrews knew Mount Hermon by its Amorite name, Senir (a name which survives to this day in the form of Kibbutz Snir). In an account of the defeat of Og of Bashan, who ruled over Mount Hermon,¹ Deuteronomy relates that “Hermon is called Sirion by the Sidonians; the Amorites call it Senir.”² Describing the allotments for the half-tribe of Manasseh, the author of 1 Chronicles reveals more of the Canaanite presence in the region by stating that “The people of the half-tribe of Manasseh were numerous; they settled in the land from Bashan to Baal Hermon, that is, to Senir (Mount Hermon).”³ Here, the name of the primary Canaanite deity, Baal, in the name of a settlement, suggests the religion of the region. The book of Ezekiel also contains an account of Senir, recounting its economic significance in the form of timber: “They made all your timbers of pine trees from Senir.”⁴ Another shrine site to the north of Banias further illustrates the fact that Baal worship existed in the immediate vicinity. Biblical authors listed Baal-Gad amongst the regions of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. It lay south of Mount Hermon in the Lebanon Valley.⁵

¹ Joshua 12:5.

² Deuteronomy 3:9.

³ 1 Chronicles 5:23.

⁴ Ezekiel 27:5.

⁵ Joshua 11:17.

Dan was a nearby Israelite city whose affinity for the religion of the Canaanites was quite evident. It had been a significant municipality, as it marked the northern boundary of Israel.⁶ After the disintegration of the United Kingdom of Israel, the Northern Kingdom sought to distance itself socially and religiously from its Hebrew origins. As a result, the religion of Israel was anything but uniformly Judaic. King Jeroboam, the first king of Israel (late tenth century BC) instituted the worship of the golden calf at Dan and Bethel. Although he had been a trusted official in the court of King Solomon, he chose to revolt against Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, and to follow the indigenous religions of Canaan. In a maneuver that put even more space between Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Jeroboam presented his people with gods other than Yahweh, so that they need not rely on the public religion of the Jews in Jerusalem. In addition, he banished the Levites, the priestly caste, and appointed priests from other families.⁷ He built the high places characteristic of Canaanite religion at which people could worship and bring sacrifices, and also initiated a festival to accompany the new cult.⁸ The golden calves Jeroboam unveiled as images of the "gods...who brought you up out of Egypt,"⁹ were more likely shrines to Baal, whom the Canaanites often associated with the bull.¹⁰

Beth Rehob is the most likely candidate for a pre-Hellenic Semitic settlement at the site of Banias. It lay three miles east of Dan, at the foot of Mount Hermon's

⁶ 1 Samuel 3:20.

⁷ Michael Avi-Yonah, *A History of Israel and the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing House, 1969), 81.

⁸ 1 Kings 14:26-33.

⁹ 1 Kings 14:28.

¹⁰ Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

southwestern slopes, which is approximately the site of Baniyas.¹¹ It was a settlement of Canaanites and Arameans which sided against King David and Israel.¹² The Arameans were a semi-nomadic Semitic group of people who eventually divided themselves into city-states.¹³ Through their efforts as a confederacy, they seem to have absorbed many of the northern Canaanites by the advent of the Iron Age, and evidence suggests that they adopted some of the tenets of Canaanite religion, as evinced in Syrian inscriptions detailing burial rituals similar those in the Ras Shamra Texts.¹⁴

The religion of the Canaanites was polytheistic, and like many such systems functioned in concert with the seasons of the year and the processes of nature. The Canaanites had a wide pantheon of deities including El, Baal, Mot, Anat, Asherah, and Astarte. Only after the Canaanites became more sedentary during the Bronze Age did Baal increase in importance and gain prominence. He was originally the god of the winter storm and rain—a testament to his earlier sky-god origins. With the advent of large-scale agropastoralism in Canaanite society, he quickly became associated with fertility and vegetation.¹⁵

Baal means “Lord” in the Semitic dialect of the Canaanites. There were actually numerous *baals*, usually peculiar to their geographical locality. However the most renowned of these was Baal-Hadad, the god of rain, fertility, and storms: he made his abode to the north of ancient Ugarit, on Mount Saphon, and his followers sometimes

¹¹ Herbert G. May, *Oxford Bible Atlas* (London: Oxford University, 1974), 61, 62, 65, 124; DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World*, 264-5; George Foot Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of Judges* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 399.

¹² 2 Samuel 10:6-19.

¹³ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary* (Tarrytown, New York: Revell, 1984), 48.

¹⁴ John Gray, *The Canaanites* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 51, 103, 116.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 120-21.

referred to him as “The Lord of the North.”¹⁶ “Saphon” actually came to mean “north” in Hebrew.¹⁷ He is certainly the most active deity in the pantheon, regularly engaging in the battle against disorder. He is a warrior and his worshippers portrayed him as young, vigorous, wearing a kilt, and bearing an axe and a lightning spear.¹⁸

The lightning spear would serve Baal well as a most imposing and ferocious weapon. In a battle which typified his struggle against disorder, Baal put the weapon to good use against a monster. He slew the sea serpent Lotan (or in some reports Yam or Leviathan), who had asked the father god El to crown him king.¹⁹ El agreed but only if Lotan could defeat Baal. Baal discovered the plot against him and he prepared for battle with magic weapons made by the gods, including the lightning spear. He was successful and defeated Lotan, scattering his remains.²⁰ The belief in Baal’s use of lightning is evident in the iconography of the Canaanites. The incised depiction of Baal holding his lightning spear over his head at the Fosse Temple of Canaanite Lachish is typical, and decorative scarabs from the same site displaying Baal killing a serpent with his spear are reminiscent of this myth.²¹ Upon his triumph over Lotan, Baal ascended to prominence in the Canaanite pantheon.

Baal’s association with fertility and vegetation becomes clear in the myth of his battle with Mot, the god of death. Baal forced Mot into the wastes of the region, away from the fertile areas of Canaan. Angered by his banishment, Mot then challenged Baal to come underground to his realm, and offered Baal a test of his might: he dared Baal to

¹⁶ Arthur Cotterell and Rachel Storm, *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Mythology: An A-Z Guide to the Myths and Legends of the Ancient World* (New York: Hermes House, 1996), 271.

¹⁷ Gray, *Canaanites*, 122.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Jonathan N. Tubb, *Canaanites* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1998), 75.

²⁰ Cotterell and Storm, *Encyclopedia of Mythology*, 271.

²¹ Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 76.

eat mud, the food of the dead. Not wanting to tarnish his reputation, Baal accepted, ate the mud, and died. All the gods mourned his death, and his wife Anat journeyed to the underworld to recover his corpse. She found the lifeless body of Baal, and appealed in desperation to Mot, pleading with him to revive Baal. He refused, and in a fit of berserker-like fury, Anat killed Mot. Upon Mot's death, Baal awoke from death. Thus, after agriculture became a regular part of Canaanite society, Baal became increasingly important to the industry's sustenance. Like the cereals and other crops, Baal descended into the underworld and returned to life.²²

Certainly, the Canaanites worshipped a host of other prominent deities. They included El, the father of the gods who was the final authority in all matters, mortal or immortal.²³ His wife was the goddess Asherah, whom King Ahab and his wife worshipped in the Kingdom of Israel.²⁴ Astarte was a consort of Baal and functioned as a goddess of fertility and war.²⁵ Another consort of Baal, and also a goddess of war and fertility, was Anat, whose taste for gore is evident in her iconography. She often appears with human heads at her feet and severed hands tied to her belt.²⁶ The presence of Canaanites at Banias suggests that these gods might have been worshipped there.

One minor Canaanite deity who may have some bearing on the Canaanite history of Banias is Aliyan. Aliyan, the god of fountains, was the son of Baal. The authors of the Ras Shamra texts mention him in conjunction with the story of Baal. His duty was to

²² Cotterell and Storm, *Encyclopedia of Mythology*, 271.; also, the dying god risen to life is a common mythological motif, as in the cases of Osiris and Persephone

²³ Gray, *Canaanites*, 120-21.

²⁴ Werner Keller, *The Bible As History* (New York: Bantam, 1980): 245, 285.; see also 1 Kings 16:31-33).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

keep vigil over and control springs and underground waters.²⁷ In the 1930s, the historian and scholar René Dussaud made the connection between Aliyan and the cults of the sites of Dan and Banias, both of which have tributaries that feed into the Jordan River. He suggested that the Phoenicians made this connection long before Pan was a part of cult rites at Banias. At any rate, Pan seemed the logical successor to whatever Canaanite fertility god kept watch over the spring-fed river at Banias.²⁸

These Canaanite deities were part of an active and complex religion, whose specialists included all manner of priests, votaries, and temple prostitutes. The latter are associated with themes of fertility, the central feature of that religion. Sacrifice of sheep, goats, other animals, and even humans were part of Canaanite rituals. Devotees consulted oracles and utilized divination. In particular, the examination of the liver of sacrificial animals was believed to provide insight into the will of the gods, much like divination in ancient Rome.²⁹ Ritual miming of the gods also seems to have been part of local liturgical activity. As historian John Gray notes “the Canaanites were very liberal with their religion, seeking by imitative magic in rite and myth to predispose Providence in nature.”³⁰ Since many people in Canaanite society were farmers or herders, the agricultural year was of the utmost importance. Their fertility cults were directly related to the crises of the agricultural year. In the Canaanite religious calendar the most

²⁷ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 2.

²⁸ Ibid.; see also René Dussaud, “Cultes cananéens aux sources du Jordan, d’après les textes de Ras Shamra,” *Syria* 17 (1936): 283-95.

²⁹ Gray, *Canaanites*, 125-27.

³⁰ Ibid., 136.

important festival was the autumnal new year, celebrating the victory of Baal over chaos.³¹

If one is to know anything of the religions of a place, one must begin at the beginning. For this reason have I elaborated on the Canaanite religion. Places such as Dan, the Baal-Gad, and Baal-Hermon were neighbors to Banias. These cult sites were active, and it stands to reason that Banias, especially if it was the site of Beth Rehob, would have been similar during the period of the Canaanites. Taking into account the presence of Pan—a horned fertility deity—coupled with the location of his Greek shrine in Canaanite territory, it is logical to conclude that a Semitic deity of similar traits was present in a shrine at Banias.

Archaeology verifies the existence of the cult site at Dan. Archaeologists have discovered massive stone foundations at the site. The data suggests that they were indeed part of an altar of Jeroboam's high place.³²

While any direct linkage of the cults of the Baals and the later Greek cult of Pan is difficult to prove at this stage of research on the site, it is nonetheless worthwhile to examine similarities between the cult of Pan and previous local Canaanite cults. Semitic people lived at Banias for much of its history. They were present during subsequent invasions by the Assyrians (8th century BC), the Babylonians (6th century BC), the Persians (6th and 5th centuries BC), and the Greeks (4th century BC). They remained there under Roman administration (1st century BC-fifth century AD) and for centuries

³¹ Gray, *Canaanites*, 137-38.

³² P. R. S. Moorey, *Idols of the People: Miniature Images of Clay in the Ancient Near East* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 51.

thereafter.³³ One can assume Semitic influence on the shrine site of the cult of Pan. It is difficult to miss the similarities between Pan and Baal, especially the baals associated with fertility and agricultural renewal. Until scholars are able to conduct further research and excavation at the site, this historical probability must suffice for introducing the pre-Hellenic phase in the religious history of Banias.

If extravagance and largesse were later to define paganism at Banias in the Roman period, modesty and austerity aptly describe the earlier religion at Banias in the Hellenistic period. As a locale associated with Pan, Banias first enters the historical record in an account of the Battle of Panium, which occurred in 200 BC.³⁴ Polybius relates in his *Histories* that Scopas, the Ptolemaic general, and Antiochus III, the Seleucid general, pitted their armies against each other in a struggle near Mount Panium. The Ptolemies ruled Palestine from their courts in Egypt, and the region of Panium was yet another bone of contention among the successors of Alexander (356-323 BC). The victory of Antiochus III solidified Seleucid control not only of the Panium, but also of Phoenicia and Palestine.³⁵ While there is little way to know if Polybius gave the region its name, it does seem unlikely. The name “Panium,” or Πάνειον in Greek, is curiously suggestive of an established cult. The suffix “-ειον” implies that a shrine of some sort existed prior to the Battle of Panium, and that it had influenced the name the Greeks gave the region. The establishment of the Panium likely occurred during the Ptolemaic reign of the Levant, at some point in the third century BC.

³³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 2, 50-59, 85, 111.

³⁴ Polybius, *The Histories*, 16.18.1-6; see also Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 4.

³⁵ Polybius, *Histories*, 19; Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 6.

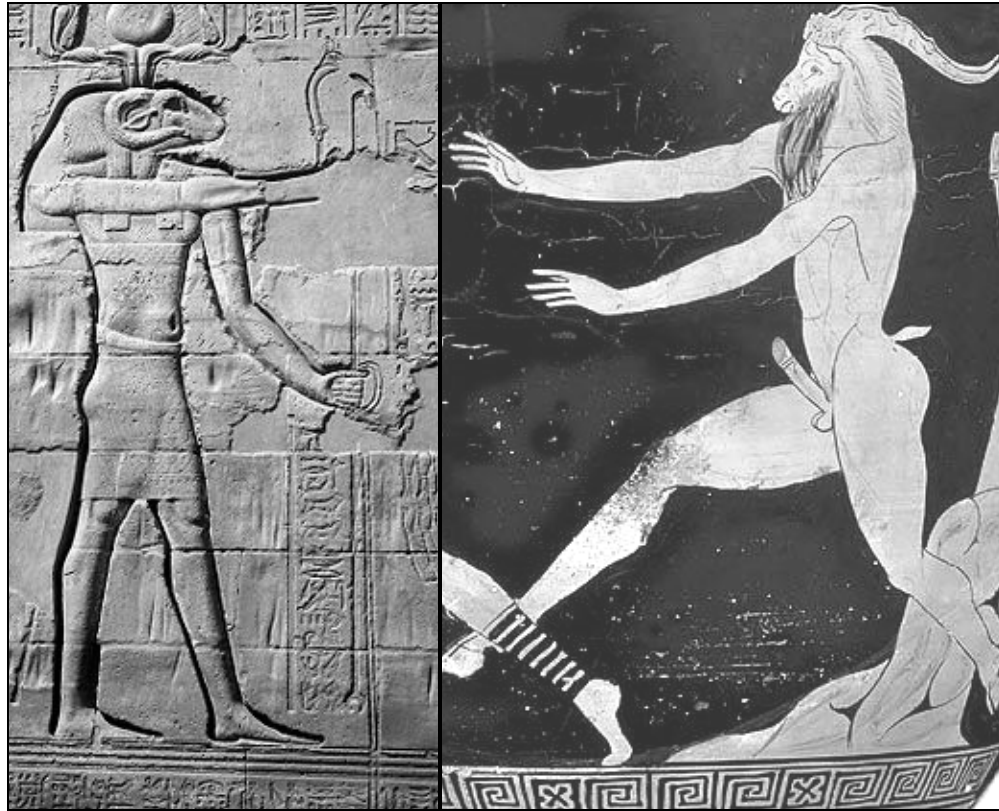
During the third century BC, the Ptolemies had inaugurated shrines to Pan in Egypt, such as the one at Panopolis, the ancient Egyptian city of Khent-min, or Abu. The city was a center for the worship of the Egyptian ram deity, Khnemu (also known as Min, or Mendes), from whom the city took its name.³⁶ Interestingly, Khnemu was most likely a pre-dynastic tribal god representing the most elemental of natural characteristics such as virility and fertility.³⁷ The Greeks, like the Romans, were perfectly comfortable with syncretism and conflation, therefore they identified the god with Pan. In like manner, the Ptolemies identified the Semitic deity at the cave of Baniyas with Pan, a fellow nature god. When the Seleucids acquired the region, the shrine remained, and continued to receive visitors.

If the Panium did indeed have Ptolemaic origins, it follows that those who dedicated the cave would adhere to Ptolemaic patterns. It has been widely accepted among scholars that the Panium was simply a continuation of the local Baal cult. While that is certainly possible, it is far more likely that the Ptolemies would follow prior synthetic patterns, as in Panopolis and Alexandria.³⁸ We know that in Egypt, Khnemu was the analogue utilized for Pan, because he, like Pan, had the head and leg features of a goat (or ram). Therefore, it is logical that they would follow a similar strategy in the

³⁶ Lewis Spence, *Myths and Legends of Egypt* (London: George Harrap and Sons, 1915), 152; see also Herodotus, *The Histories*, 2.46.

³⁷ Spence, *Myths*, 21.

³⁸ Robert Morkot, *The Egyptians: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 31.



11. Khnemu, (left) Temple in Esna, and Pan (right), *Name Vase of the Pan Painter*

Golan. This approach, of course, calls into question previous contentions that Pan's presence at Baniyas is the succession to the local baal. The candidate who is more appropriate in form and character is the Semitic (specifically, Akkadian) goat deity *Uz*.³⁹ *Uz* could mean "goat" or "mountain," and finds a phonetic cousin in *Az*, and likewise *Azazel*, who was also associated with the goat, and who descended on to nearby Mount Hermon.⁴⁰ Such connotations bring to mind the sure-footedness of the goat on mountain paths. It is known that the great Akkadian ruler Sargon extended Akkadian political and cultural influence into the Hermon Mountain range and the Golan in the twenty-fourth and twenty-third centuries BC. This action forged a lasting link between Mesopotamia,

³⁹ Jack Mackinnon Robinson, *Christianity and Mythology* (London: The Rationalist Press Association, 1900), 345.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 345-6; 1 Enoch 7.

and the Lebanon region (including the Amorites), for Akkadians (and later Assyrians and Babylonians) imported cedars from the region. Furthermore, the Amorites who lived in the Hermon, Golan, and Syrian regions spoke a dialect of Akkadian, traded with Akkad, and served the empire as mercenaries.⁴¹ If a goat god did not exist among pastoralists at the time, then Akkadian influence surely brought one in the form of *Uz*, and left its linguistic mark in the Semitic tongues of the region.⁴²

Azazel bears mention at this point due to his niche in the larger Semitic world and as a possible point of connection between the local Semitic goat god and the Pan of Banias. Azazel's story also foreshadows Judaic and Christian elements of Banias' past that will be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

Azazel was one of the chiefs—he was one of the original fallen angels.⁴³ Two hundred of them descended on Mount Hermon in the days of the patriarch Jared, an event from which the earthen behemoth takes its name.⁴⁴ The Book of Enoch states that he was instrumental in the corruption of humanity. “Hermon” can mean “pact,” “cursed,” or “to devote to religious purposes for destruction.”⁴⁵ There is some debate about the name Azazel, and its possible conflation with the leader of the rebellion, Semyaza.⁴⁶ This is

⁴¹ Robert William Rogers, *A History of Babylonia and Assyria* (New York: Abingdon, 1915), 75; Oscar Browning, *A General History of the World* (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), 21-2

⁴² The conflation of a Semitic goat deity with Pan presents some possibilities contrary to convention. The orientalizing influence of Phoenician culture on Greek art and thought is well-attested and treated. Banias/Paneas was well within the sphere of Phoenician influence. Consider the aforementioned phonetic similarity between Az/Uz/Azazel, and Atξ.

⁴³ 1 Enoch 7

⁴⁴ 1 Enoch 6:6

⁴⁵ See *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon*, 2763-64

⁴⁶ Paul D. Hanson, “Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96.2 (June 1977): 195-233; Leo Jung, “Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian, and Mohamedan Literature: A Study in Comparative Folk-Lore,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 16.2 (October 1925): 183-84; Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, Including Fallen Angels* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 265.

certainly possible, especially given phonetic similarities and the fact that Azazel's name does not appear in the listing of the chiefs of ten. However, debate on this issue is outside the scope of this study and I will treat the entity in question as Azazel and allude to Semyaza only where appropriate.

Azazel, like his Watcher kin, took a human mate (whether by consent or by force, we are not certain, but the implication is by force, which is certainly true to their wicked nature). According to the text, he also fathered a number of Nephilim children, the giants of the antediluvian world. As gruesome as these unions and their products must have been, humankind is nevertheless said to have agreed to a bargain: knowledge for genetic access. The Watchers bestowed some of their knowledge, which seems to have been a mixture of science and magic.⁴⁷ Azazel taught the science of metals and minerals, and their use as weapons and cosmetics. As 1 Enoch 8:1 states “And Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals (of the earth) and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures.” Yet Azazel's gifts were not limited to metals and rocks. Indeed, if Semyaza taught enchantments, then Azazel seems to have imparted the vilest form of magic and witchcraft by revealing and perverting angelic knowledge. In denouncing the Watcher atrocities to God, the archangels stated in 1 Enoch 9:6 “Thou seest what Azazel hath done, who hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were (preserved) in heaven, which men were striving to learn.”

⁴⁷ 1Enoch 8-9

The very name “Azazel” reveals more about his probable connection with Pan. Azazel is most often associated with goats, especially the scapegoat of Jewish atonement sacrifice.⁴⁸ One goat was given to Yahweh and another to Azazel, the scapegoat for all sins. The connection between Azazel and the goat was further preserved in the Levitical tradition of Azazel. Leviticus 16 relates the rite of atonement for the sins of the Israelites. In the ritual, priests sacrificed one goat to Yahweh, and the other, which takes on the sins of the Israelites, they sent into the wilderness. Specifically, the priests were to take the goat to a precipice, tie its horn to a sizeable rock, and push the goat over the edge. The tumult destroyed the goat’s body incrementally until it reached the bottom, by which time it was dying or dead.⁴⁹ Azazel with his goat characteristics is textually linked to the *seirim*, a species of goat demons which the Israelites were wont to worship with some frequency during their tenure in Canaan.⁵⁰ Indeed, Azazel is likely another Near Eastern incarnation of a goat deity, whose identity is now lost to us. Clues remain in the aforementioned Semitic roots such as the Akkadian “uz” or “az,” meaning “goat.”⁵¹ And so, Azazel appears to have been the father and leader of goat demons.

Mount Hermon and its immediate environs are significant to Azazel and the fallen angels. It is where they first touched the earth. They also received their sentence from Enoch in the region. 1 Enoch 13: 6-10 offers very specific geographical information for

⁴⁸ Leviticus 16:8-10.

⁴⁹ Michael Rodkinson (trans.), *Babylonian Talmud* (Boston: The Talmud Society, 1918), 94; William Robertson Smith and John Sutherland Black, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1907), 418.

⁵⁰ Leviticus 17:1-7, this passage follows the description of the goat for Azazel; see also 2 Chronicles 11:15, 2 Kings 23:8, and Isaiah 13:21; 34:14; Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of Spiritual Forces at Work Today* (Grand Rapid: Kregel, 1994), 60.

⁵¹ Archibald Henry Sayce, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1888), 284-5, 558; Jack Mackinnon Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology* (London: The Rationalist Press Association, 1900), 345.

this event where Enoch himself records the plea of the Watchers and meditates on it in

Dan:

Then I wrote out their petition, and the prayer in regard to their spirits and their deeds individually and in regard to their requests that they should have forgiveness and length (of days). And I went off and sat down at the waters of Dan, in the land of Dan, to the south of the west of Hermon: I read their petition till I fell asleep. And behold a dream came to me, and visions fell down upon me, and I saw visions of chastisement, (and a voice came bidding [me]) to tell it to the sons of heaven, and reprimand them. And when I awaked, I came unto them, and they were all sitting gathered together, weeping in Abelsjail, which is between Lebanon and Seneser [Senir], with their faces covered. And I recounted before them all the visions which I had seen in sleep, and I began to speak the words of righteousness, and to reprimand the heavenly Watchers.⁵²

Dan, Lebanon, and Senir, the old Amorite name for Hermon, are all very specific locations in and around the Mount Hermon area.⁵³ Azazel, as noted, was part of the process in which the Watchers revealed certain secrets of heaven.⁵⁴ Mount Hermon, as its name suggests, carries the legacy of the Watchers and the Nephilim. The area was the base of operations for the fallen angels.

The author of 1 Enoch also mentions some interesting details regarding the punishment of Azazel, including the area of his imprisonment, recounted in 1 Enoch

13:4-8:

And again the Lord said to Raphael: 'Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light. And on the day of the great judgement he shall be cast into the fire. And heal the earth which the angels have corrupted, and proclaim the healing of the earth, that they may heal the plague, and that all the children of men may not perish through all the secret things that the Watchers have disclosed and have taught their

⁵² 1 Enoch 13: 6-10.

⁵³ Deuteronomy 3, Ezekiel 27.

⁵⁴ 1 Enoch 9:6.

sons. And the whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin.'

Not only is this reminiscent of the atonement ritual, but the name of region is given: the wilderness of Dudael. Some scholars have speculated that this is a site called Beth Hadad east of Jerusalem, where priest performed the ritual.⁵⁵ However, if the record of Enoch is based on an earlier—much earlier—oral tradition, then the location must be reconsidered. Azazel is bound and consigned to darkness, in an “opening” in the desert. Near Hermon, the most noticeable opening is the Grotto of Pan at the site of Banias.⁵⁶ It is therefore significant in tracing any continuity of form and character between Semitic and Greek traditions, especially in light of its religious connection to Pan.

Pan is a near perfect counterpart for Azazel or one of his Semitic analogues. The first apparent similarity is of course, that they both are associated with the goat. Like Azazel, some elements of Greek mythology imply that Pan was an archaic god, perhaps the oldest. Primal lusts drove Pan during his pursuit of and assault on the nymphs. Similar behavior may be deduced from Azazel’s habits, as he lusted after females and took human women for mating purposes. Both Pan and Azazel are adept at war craft as well. Pan fought alongside the gods, and the Greeks attributed the victory at Marathon in 490 BC to him (having induced panic). Azazel, likewise, taught men martial sciences and the usage and making of weapons.⁵⁷ With regard to the mystical and oracular powers, Pan and Azazel were also kindred spirits. The Greeks associated Pan with

⁵⁵ Kelley Coblenz Baultch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17-19: “No One Has Seen What I Have Seen”* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 138-39.

⁵⁶ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1.21.3.

⁵⁷ 1 Enoch 8:1.

divination and prophecy,⁵⁸ and Azazel himself took an active role in revealing the mystical knowledge of heaven to humanity. It takes only a spark of imagination to discern just how similar these two deities were, and how simple a matter it would be for the cult to be recycled through the ages.

Taking the Enochic accounts as a record of the antediluvian past, it would seem that Azazel (or *Uz/Az*) was the first god worshipped at Banias. The tradition of Azazel appears not to have died with his imprisonment, but to have endured. As noted, scholars have posited that the Grotto of Pan may have been a shrine to Baal, the Canaanite fertility and storm god. Pan was simply a continuation of this motif. Goats were even thrown into the cave as sacrifice, in the same manner in which Azazel was thrown into a dark opening (and also the goat in the atonement ritual). While this scenario is possible, and Baal may have been part of the chain of gods sacred to the cave, it seems far more likely that the cave of Pan actually began as a shrine to Azazel, *Az*, or *Uz*. It was Azazel who fell on Hermon, who took human female mates, produced giant progeny, taught men steel and sorcery, became father of the *seirim*, and forever affiliated himself with the goat. The cult of Pan at Banias is a logical successor to this tradition, and the cave is possibly a memorial to Azazel's imprisonment in Dudael. Given that the population of Banias in antiquity was overwhelmingly Semitic, albeit overlaid with Greco-Roman culture, the cult of this goat deity—by whatever name, be it Azazel, *Az*, or *Uz*—was surely known to them, as it was certainly known to Mesopotamians and Amorites, who influenced and lived in the region of Hermon and Banias.

⁵⁸ *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* [hereafter *CIG*] 4539; William Smith, William Wayte, and G. E. Marindin, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, Volume 2* (London: John Murray, 1891), 290.

An intriguing possibility is that the cult of Pan in the ancient Mediterranean may owe its origins, or at the very least some related ideas, to Semitic religion. It is safe to say that the two peoples found points of connectivity, as in the case of the goat cult in question. If the cult of a goat god existed in Mesopotamia, and Mesopotamians had brought it to the Semitic peoples of the Levant, could their religious ideas not have traveled elsewhere? Was it truly the Greeks who established the shrine to Pan at Banias, or were Azazel, Az/Uz, and the *seirim* exported to Greece centuries earlier, where they became Pan and the satyrs? This idea certainly flies in the face of convention, as scholars have long contended that Pan originated in Arcadia. However, other peoples of the Peloponnese quite probably emigrated from the Levant to the peninsula in second half of the second millennium BC. Mount Hermon and Banias are situated in the old Israelite province of Dan, whose people were traders and mariners. These people are even mentioned by Homer in his works as the Danoi. They were mariners and skilled warriors, and they distinguished themselves in the Trojan War. The connection between ancient Greece and the Levant is well established. The Phoenicians—a name the Greeks gave the Canaanites for their main export, a purple dye called *punis*—had trade relations with both Italy and Greece, and culture exchange may be observed in art and language. The Near Eastern influence on Mediterranean culture is known as orientaling, which had two phases, one in the Late Bronze Age followed by another in the Early Iron Age.⁵⁹ The Greeks derived their alphabet from the Phoenicians because of this influence. During the 8th and 7th centuries BC elite and affluent members of the Greek middle class adopted some eastern rites, adding a layer of meaning to their society that connected it to

⁵⁹ Trevor B. Bryce, “Anatolian Scribes in Mycenaean Greece,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 48.3 (Third Quarter, 1999): 263-4.

the Levant.⁶⁰ Would it be surprising if other cultural elements, such as religion, found their way to Greek shores? It is feasible that the Danoi exported to the Peloponnese the worship of a goat god, along with their trade goods, and established the cult firmly in Arcadia, before spreading to other regions of mainland Greece—the heart of Mycenaean civilization. A diaspora of Levantine craftsmen, merchants, seers, and poets also began in the Late Bronze Age, and these persons acted as agents of east-west cultural transmission.⁶¹ This phenomenon, too, should come as no surprise, as the Greeks believed their gods came from the East, in places such as Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt. Furthermore, excavations at Dan have revealed Mycenaean-style burials at the site, along with grave inclusions of Mycenaean make such as ceramics and beads.⁶² Danite coastal cities have also shown remarkable evidence of Minoan and Mycenaean influence, via the Philistines,⁶³ who themselves came to Palestine from Crete. That there was great cultural exchange between the Levant and the Greek world is beyond contest. It is, therefore, no stretch of the truth to suggest that Pan's cult could have originated in northern Israel, or at least in the Levant, as a religion devoted to the goat god, whose name was Azazel, Az, Uz or some variation thereof. Such a cult and its subsequent spread to Greece could explain why one legend said that Pan was the son of Hermes, whose name is phonetically similar to "Hermon," and whose position in relation to

⁶⁰ Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Culture History: Words and Things in Iron Age Greece* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 182-84, 278.

⁶¹ Bryce, "Anatolian Scribes," 263-4; Sarah P. Morris, *Daidolos and the Origins of Greek Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1995), 115; Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, trans. Margaret Pinder (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1998), 6.

⁶² Avram Biran, "Tel Dan," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 37.2 (May 1974): 33-5.

⁶³ Trude Dothan and Alexander Zukerman, "A Preliminary Study of the Mycenaean IIC:1 Pottery Assemblages from Tel Migne-Ekron and Ashdod," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 333 (February 2004): 31, 39-40.

Banias is higher in elevation, and thus appears as a type of “father.” As further linguistic evidence, the shield of Zeus (who is also connected with Pan), the *Aigis* (Αιγίς), was covered in goat hide and is derived from *Aix*, (Αιξ) which means “goat.”⁶⁴ As such, it is near identical in terms of meaning and phonetics to *Az* and *Uz*, as well as “Azazel.” Consequently, the Aegean Sea also takes its name from the words *Aix* and *Aigaion* (Αιγαίον, sea goat). At the very least, the Levantine merchants would have found an element of similar culture if the cult of Pan and that of a Semitic goat god were independent inventions, one of many points of contact in the exchanges taking place between Palestine and the Aegean, both regions with the pastoralism of goats.⁶⁵

With an established goat cult, or at least the high likelihood of one, the Ptolemies would have been more likely to conflate Pan with this deity, which had several names during Banias’ history. In Egypt the Ptolemies were careful to interpret gods according to their forms and attributes, as in the case of Pan and Khnemu. Therefore, if the Ptolemies did establish the shrine in the manner of Panopolis, then it seems more probable that they selected the goat god⁶⁶ associated with the Banias region, rather than a local baal or other deity.⁶⁷ The baals, particularly Baal-Hadad and his proclivity for riding the storms, had more in common with Zeus and his association with the sky and lightening than with an earth-bound fertility god like Pan. When one considers that the Semitic peoples of the Banias region believed that the baals inhabited the regional

⁶⁴ Herodotus, *Histories* 4.189; see also Noel Robertson, “Myth, Ritual, and Livelihood in Early Greece,” in *Ancient Economy in Mythology: East and West*, ed. Morris Silver (Savage, Maryland: Littlefield, 1991), 9.

⁶⁵ Patricia L. Fall, Lee Lines, and Steven E. Falconer, “Seeds of Civilization: Bronze Age Rural Economy and Ecology in the Southern Levant,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88.1 (March 1998): 107-125; Timothy Howe, *Pastoral Politics: Animals, Agriculture, and Society in Ancient Greece* (Claremont, California: Regina, 2008), 73-4.

⁶⁶ Uz, Az, Azazel, or related deity

⁶⁷ Of course the title of “Baal” may have been used with this deity

mountain peaks, it becomes increasingly more feasible baals had more in common with Zeus, reigning from his abode on Mount Olympus.

That there was a cult of Pan and respective shrine at Baniyas in the Hellenistic period, cannot be disputed. The aforementioned passage from Polybius provides the linguistic evidence; and archaeology supports it. Most of the ceramic fragments of the era, indeed more than 95%, were deposited below the areas that became the Court of Pan and the Nymphs and the Temple of Zeus and Pan.⁶⁸ While exact dating is problematic because of blurred stratigraphy, dating by typology gives a general context of the third century BC and later. These potsherds date from the earliest Hellenistic presence, before occupants erected buildings and sanctuaries. Over 90% of the ceramic assemblage consists of cooking vessels and therefore speak to the plausibility of communal meals and ritual.⁶⁹ Some 84% of the vessels are of local make, giving general provenience for the industry, and suggesting the geographical context of worshippers, namely that they were Greeks or Semites who resided in the Golan and upper Galilee.⁷⁰ Imported wares were all of Phoenician make, except for two Greek Island amphoras.⁷¹ However, the presence of Phoenician wares seems to undergird the assertion of a Semitic (or in small numbers, Greek) identity for worshippers at the Panium.

The following chapter will discuss at length dining with the gods, but this custom and its associated votive ceramics was well known in the Hellenistic world. This rite is also, not surprisingly, an integral part of the rites of Pan. Homage to Pan might

⁶⁸ Andrea Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 315 (August 1999): 30.

⁶⁹ Louise Steel, "A Goodly Feast...A Cup of Mellow Wine: Feasting in Bronze Age Cyprus," *Hesperia* 73.2 *Special Issue, The Mycenaean Feast* (April-June 2004): 297.

⁷⁰ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 30-1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

accurately be called a reveling picnic. Key elements of the *thusia* (θυσια), the ritual worship of Pan, included a sacrifice, drunkenness, and sexual license.⁷² Libations of wine and orgiastic rites followed the sacrifice of what classical authors always describe as an uncastrated goat or sheep.⁷³ Adherents also presented cheese, milk, honey, and cakes around an altar.⁷⁴ Ancient sources, in particular Menander's *Dyskolos*, provide details about the *thusia*, and corroborate the nature of the aforementioned rites. With all the trappings, what emerges is the core is a ritual meal: "They bring food boxes, jugs of wine...not for themselves. Incense is pious, so is a flat cake. This the god takes—all of it—when it is put on the fire."⁷⁵ Though the finds within the Hellenistic phase of the site have a somewhat vague provenience, the artifacts present overwhelmingly suggest that rituals were taking place. Archaeology has revealed bowls, cooking pots, and casserole dishes with various types of lips in this context.⁷⁶ No doubt, the cult of Pan at Banias in the Hellenistic period closely resembled worship of Pan established elsewhere in Greek territories.

Other Greek gods do not appear at Banias in records until the Roman era. One may infer that some, probably those associated with Pan, gradually filtered in. However, their cults and rites did not flourish until later centuries, which are treated in the following chapters.

⁷² Borgeaud, *The Cult of Pan*, 163.

⁷³ Ibid.; Lucian, *Dialogues: Namely the Dialogues of the Gods, the Sea-gods, and of the Dead*, trans. Howard Williams (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 6; sheep is also suggested in Menander, *Dyskolos* 393-401.

⁷⁴ Thespis, "To Pan." in *The Universal Anthology: A Complete Collection of the Best Literature, Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, with Biographical and Explanatory Notes, Volume 4* (London: The Clark Company, 1899), 277.

⁷⁵ Menander, *Dyskolos*, 448-51.

⁷⁶ Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 31-33, figure 5.

CHAPTER 4

Pan, the Emperor, and their Sacred Company at Greco-Roman Banias

Banias has been a city of many names since antiquity, many of those names originating in its Greco-Roman history: Paneion, Panium, Panlure, Caesarea Paneas, and Caesarea Philippi. The name reveals the significance of the location as a cult site. After Alexander's passage through Palestine, Hellenism followed on his heels, and with that came travelers who quickly marveled at the gaping cave for which the region is so famous. Influenced by local Semitic prototypes for fertility deities, the Greeks promptly associated it with the Arcadian woodland deity Pan because of the awe and *panic* it instilled in them, thus making this recognition the defining hierophany for Greco-Roman religion at Banias. The cave developed as a simple natural shrine, and its stewards kept it so for much of the Hellenistic period (c. 323-30 BC). It remained very much a rural sanctuary below the cliffs of Mount Hermon, at which passers-by could pay homage to the agrarian god Pan.

Syncretism, however, typically defines the polytheism of Roman-era Banias. While Greek influence is evident at the site, the Romanization¹ of Paneas and its religion was tremendous. Noted historian and religious scholar John F. Wilson observes that "It is important to remember that while we may describe Banias as 'Greco-Roman,' far greater stress must be placed on the second element in this designation than the first."²

¹ The term "Romanization" has been the subject of some academic criticism, notably from archaeologist Richard Hingley, who contends that the concept is too constricting and elitist, representing the spread of only one aspect of Roman culture. I concur with Hingley on this point and echo his proposal of a more nuanced approach to Romanization, one which takes into account the breadth of social and cultural influences at work in a process of Romanization, and suggest that such a process is far from monolithic. See Richard Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture: Unity, Diversity and Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 14-18; see also Sian Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), 29-38, 130-33.

² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 50.

Such a characterization, however, need not obscure or trivialize the subtle cultural variations in the antique past of Baniyas, ones which exceed the limits of terms such as “native” or “Roman.” Roman Baniyas was a multicultural setting, evinced by its society and its religious expressions, and there was room for the “other” in its Greek and Roman environment.

The ethnic make-up of Baniyas at this time illustrates the complexities of Greco-Roman culture in the Roman Levant. No doubt some Greeks, Romans, and other peoples from the Mediterranean lived there. However, the population was overwhelmingly Semitic. The Itureans, long famed for their military prowess, lived in the Baniyas region.³ They were an Aramaic-speaking people who had become Hellenized. Bedoins also resided in the area, as did the Jews by the early first century AD.⁴ Greco-Roman Baniyas was a nexus of cultural interchange.

Rome had a long tradition of interaction with the Greeks that had begun during its days as a monarchy and continued during the Republic. Greek gods often found counterparts or at least kindred spirits in the *numena* and gods of Roman aboriginal and civic religion.⁵ Romans took their cue for mythologizing their own history from the Greeks. For example, elements of the story of Romulus and Remus, such as twins who survived exposure by being suckled by a wild animal, are common motifs in Greek folklore.⁶ The Etruscans, who like the Romans had diverse contacts with the Greeks,

³ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.10.3; E. A. Myers, *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East: Reassessing the Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 14-17, 45; Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 9-10, 20

⁴ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 20.

⁵ R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and Their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969), 12, 25.

⁶ T. J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c. 1000-264 B.C.)* (London: Routledge, 2003), 8.

leave to us a host of mythological scenes etched into their artwork that have been influenced by Greek mythology, and by process of time and diffusion, shared with the Romans.⁷ Terra cotta reliefs from the Regia in Rome portray the Minotaur, which art historian Susan B. Downey contends is suggestive of common usage of Greek mythological themes in art and religion as early as the sixth century BC⁸ These precedents of adaptation, interchangeability, and blending can present a daunting task to the historian and religious scholar attempting to discern what is truly Greek or truly Roman, especially in a provincial city. In this context, it is evident that constructs such as “Greek” and “Roman” are not altogether stable concepts, but are dynamic cultural characterizations.⁹ One must keep in mind that the deities of Roman origin present at Baniyas were not altogether Greek or Roman—they were something else. However, by a combined use of textual, archaeological, and analogical evidence, at the very least, it is possible to illuminate some characteristics of rite and belief that are more *Roman* than others.

The Greeks gave Baniyas (Paneas) its name, but the Romans left an indelible mark on its people, primarily the aforementioned Itureans,¹⁰ on the region, and on the site itself. In 63 BC, the Roman general Pompey attempted to carve out eastern holdings for Rome. This endeavor resulted in the annexation of regions of Syria and Palestine. Administration was anything but seamless, as evinced by the rebellious factions who chose to hide in the mountains. Rome, therefore, maintained a strong military presence

⁷ Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome*, 160-62.

⁸ Susan B. Downey, *Architectural Terracottas from the Regia: Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome*, vol. 30 (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1995), 26.

⁹ Hingley, *Globalizing Roman Culture*, 9-10, 15; Greg Woolf, “Beyond Romans and Natives,” *World Archaeology* 28.3 (February 1997): 339-50; Jane Webster, “Creolizing the Roman Provinces,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 105.2 (April 2001): 209-225.

¹⁰ Myers, *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East*, 45.

in the Golan in order to dispense justice and quell any revolts against its administration.¹¹ Roman presence was no less in the following century. Indeed, with the Jewish-Roman War, a Roman military and political presence was more necessary than ever. During the summer of AD 67, in an attempt to curry further favor with the Romans, Agrippa II invited Vespasian and his armies, then on their way to contend with the Jewish Revolt, to encamp and rest at Paneas.

But Vespasian, in order to see the kingdom of Agrippa, while the king persuaded himself so to do (partly in order to his treating the general and his army in the best and most splendid manner his private affairs would enable him to do, and partly that he might, by their means, correct such things as were amiss in his government) he removed from that Caesarea which was by the sea-side, and went to that which is called Caesarea Philippi and there he refreshed his army for twenty days, and was himself feasted by king Agrippa, where he also returned public thanks to God for the good success he had had in his undertakings.¹²

The great Jewish historian of classical antiquity, Flavius Josephus, gives careful attention to the religious activities of Vespasian at Paneas. In this passage, he relates that Vespasian made offerings to God, to Zeus/Jupiter, and perhaps even to Pan in order to gain help for the battles.¹³ Paneas remained hospitable to Vespasian's military successor, Titus, and to the legions that Rome stationed in the region for centuries to come.¹⁴

Rome's control over Paneas gradually increased until after the first century AD it was total and direct. The local rulers and tetrarchs were loyal to Rome. A line of Herodians ruled the region, beginning with Herod the Great (20-4 BC), his son Herod Philip (4 BC-AD 34), Agrippa I who ruled despite a brief imprisonment (37-44), and

¹¹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 3.9.7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 34.

Agrippa II (53-c. 93), who took over after an interregnum that lasted from 44 to 53.¹⁵

After the death of Agrippa II, the Herodian dynasty ended and Paneas came under direct Roman control.¹⁶

Philip, who along with the Roman bureaucracy at Paneas built the city proper, left a distinct Roman touch on the city, as seen in the map of the site in Chapter 1. Under Philip's direction the city became a Greco-Roman *polis*, and in Baniyas, as in other such cities, the structure of the *polis* became a framework for religion.¹⁷ Certainly the city and street plan, with its *Cardo Maximus*, reflected Roman—and Greek—influence. The location of cemeteries to the north, east, and west outside of the city proper also reveals a Roman civic pattern.¹⁸ A recent archaeological excavation of tombs to the west of Baniyas, near Kibbutz Snir, further illustrates the division of *polis* and cemetery. Most of the grave inclusions consisting of ceramics, glass, coffin handles, and nails date the tombs to the first century AD.¹⁹ The *pomerium* was the dividing line between the city and its outlying territory. It functioned also to separate the profane spaces from the sacred city area, within which no one could construct a tomb or erect an army camp.²⁰ While the *pomerium* is typically a term reserved for describing this division in the city of Rome, or perhaps in other large cities of the Empire, the similar division of sacred and profane space at Baniyas at least reflects Roman thinking and city planning.

¹⁵ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 18-25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷ Mogens Herman Hansen, *Polis: An Introduction to the Ancient Greek City-State* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 118.

¹⁸ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 55.

¹⁹ Moshe Hartal, "Baniyas Final Report," *HA* 120 (2008):1-12.

²⁰ John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Bloomington: Indian University, 2003), 61-63.

Under Philip and his successors, the Sanctuary of Pan, or *temenos*, began to expand gradually. They built permanent structures, both religious and civil. Temples arose along the *temenos* in the vicinity of the Cave of Pan. The building of these monuments invested the natural beauty of Banias with additional layers of religious meaning, and altered the way in which citizens of Banias experienced their shrines.²¹

Further evidences for a Roman presence and Romanization may be found in Latin inscriptions. A substantial number of these appear at Banias, as many as one might find in a Roman colony. This feature suggests not only men of local pedigree serving in the Roman army but perhaps also Romans serving in Palestine at or near the city of Pan.²²

There would be no Banias were it not for Pan. Pan's cult during the Roman period is attested by extensive textual and archaeological evidence. He was of course the half-man, half-goat pastoral deity of the Arcadian woodlands. Despite the Hellenistic origins, the cult of Pan during the Roman period was essentially a Greco-Roman cult supported by an ethnically mixed local population.²³ Pan was very much like Faunus to the Italian farmer. He was the *numen* of the *pagus*, a god to be reckoned with by the country folk of old Roman society.²⁴ He had power for good or ill over crops and also had the gift of prophecy.²⁵ This latter trait may account for the emergence of an oracular shrine in the vicinity of Banias during the second and third centuries AD.²⁶ According to Berlin, the increase of lamp deposition in the archaeological record of the Late Roman

²¹ Richard Bradley, *The Archaeology of Natural Places* (London: Routledge, 2000), 104-7.

²² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 50.

²³ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁴ Fowler, *Religious Experience*, 80-81.

²⁵ Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, 257-61.

²⁶ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 36.

Period denotes an introduction of new rites and styles of worship.²⁷ Faunus' capacity for prophecy and this shift in worship suggest an oracle existed at Banias. This scenario is certainly in keeping with the region's reputation for revelation and prophecy.²⁸ Further evidence of this association may be seen in a dedicatory inscription for a statue, found a scant ten meters from the Court of Pan, near a niche:

Agrippas, son of Markos, archon, in the year 223, having received divine instructions in a dream, dedicated the goddess Echo, together with Agrippias, his spouse, and Agrippinos and Markos and Agrippas, bouletai, and Agrippine and Domne their children.²⁹

As for Rome proper, Pan originally moved into the realm of civic religion in second century BC Rome, when the Romans built a temple dedicated to him on the Tiber Island. Hence, it was not a difficult transition for the rural cult of Pan at Banias to become the civic cult of Pan in Caesarea Philippi.



12. Ruins of the *temenos*, near the Cave of Pan

²⁷ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 36.

²⁸ George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100.4 (December 1981): 575-600.

²⁹ *CIG* 4539.

The Romans regarded natural features as abodes of the gods, particularly if they were striking. Huge caves and ponds inspired fear and awe in ancient peoples and as such, were locations where the gods chose to dwell.³⁰ The cave and springs at Baniyas were just such a place, and the Romans—like the Greeks before them—recognized the awesome terror such sacred space held. One need only recount Josephus’ description:

This place is called Panium, where is a top of a mountain that is raised to an immense height, and at its side, beneath, or at its bottom, a dark cave opens itself; within which there is a horrible precipice, that descends abruptly to a vast depth; it contains a mighty quantity of water, which is immovable; and when any body lets down any thing to measure the depth of the earth beneath the water, no length of cord is sufficient to reach it. Now the fountains of the Jordan rise at the roots of this cavity outwardly; and, as some think, this is the utmost origin of the Jordan.³¹

Such a feature as this at Baniyas would have instantly struck a Roman with the same feelings of awe and reverent fear that affected the Greek immigrants centuries before.

There are also a number of other reasons the citizens of Roman Baniyas conflated Pan with Faunus and his attributes. Wilson states that “It is important to remember that during its best-known period the cult as practiced at Baniyas was essentially a Roman version of the Greek cult and seems to have been encouraged and supported by the imperial household itself.”³² Also, as already noted, Roman religion had been influenced by Greek religion through multiple channels. Some diffusion and assimilation was inevitable. The poet Ovid (c. 43 BC-AD 18) offers a further insight into the Roman association of caves with Pan in an episode with Faunus and a young man and a maiden passing by:

³⁰ Scheid, *Roman Religion*, 73-74.

³¹ Josephus, *Wars*, 1.21.3.

³² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 59.

Faunus saw them both from a high ridge...Now had she reached the grove of Bacchus and the vineyards of Tmolus, and dewy Hesperus rode on his dusky steed. She passed within a cave, whereof the fretted roof was all of tufa and of living rock, and at the mouth ran a babbling brook.³³

This passage from the *Fasti* contains a sacred cave setting that is strikingly reminiscent of the Cave of Pan at Banias. Such an association would hardly have been lost on the Romans, nor on Romanized and Hellenized Semites. Finally, the kindred characteristics of Pan and Faunus, and perhaps even phonetic similarity between their names, may provide a clue about shared origins, or at least influences. It is plausible that Faunus is from *fari* (to the Greek φωνη, for “voice,” or “sound”) which means “speaker,” or “foreteller.” Faunus, like Pan, was a composer and reciter of verses but he was also a wise man and seer whose transcendent knowledge invoked respect and dread in the farmers and shepherds who consulted him.³⁴ As a speaker and poet, albeit one of prophetic and divine nature, he could relate to his subjects, who were primarily a people of oral and not written tradition.

When the Greeks brought the religion of Pan to Upper Galilee, it was primarily a folk religion. Romanization at Banias resulted in the urbanization of the cult. Such conversion was certainly typical of Roman civic practice. Greco-Roman religion sought to legitimize any *superstitio*—popular or peasant religion. Doing so helped elevate the cult into the realm of civic elites, a social structure Rome encouraged in provinces and vassals.³⁵ Despite very little direct evidence of the nature of the cult at Banias, the rites

³³ Ovid, *Fasti*, 2.306-316.

³⁴ Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, 259; Edwin L. Brown, “The Divine Name ‘Pan’,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974) 107 (1977): 57-61.

³⁵ Richard Gordon, “Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and Its Limits,” in *Pagan Priests*, ed. Mary Beard and John North (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1990), 237, 245-52.

of Pan surely remained much as they had been in the old country: orgiastic revelry in order to sustain the favor of the god and the fertility of both crops and people.³⁶

Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60-7 BC) and Ovid wrote about some of the rites of Pan. Dionysius states that “The youths were going to celebrate in honor of Pan the *Lupercalia*.”³⁷ Ovid recounts something of these rites as well:

Why then do the Luperci run? And why do they strip themselves and bear their bodies naked, for so it is their wont to run? The god himself loves to scamper, fleet afoot, about the high mountains, and he himself takes suddenly to flight. The god himself is nude and bids his ministers go nude.³⁸

Hence, the link between the *Lupercalia* and Faunus/Pan is a longstanding one, and it is prudent to conclude that the festival was a regular part of the local Roman calendar.³⁹

Romans commemorated the *Lupercalia* on February 15. In the main rite as celebrated in Rome, adherents sacrificed goats to Faunus. Then, two young men, the *Luperci* (possibly from two colleges devoted to the worship of Faunus), removed their clothing to prepare for a run down the Palatine hill. An official took the sacrificial knife, still dripping with the blood of the victims (goats and a dog), and smeared the foreheads of the *Luperci* with the blood. Upon finishing, the official wiped the blood from the blade using a piece of wool dipped in milk. The *Luperci* then took strips of the victims’ skin in hand, ran down the hill, and struck with them all women who offered themselves, in order to ensure fertility.⁴⁰ *Lupercalia* originally seems to have been a rural and non-patrician rite, though eventually absorbed into civic religion as in the case of the cult of

³⁶ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 57-58; this was likely true in later centuries especially as Pan became associated with Dionysus: see Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 307-13.

³⁷ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, 1.80.1.

³⁸ Ovid, *Fasti*, 2.267-85.

³⁹ Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, 258.

⁴⁰ Fowler, *Religious Experience*, 53, 106.

Pan at Baniyas. The *Lupercalia* originated in the culture of shepherds who once occupied the Palatine, and the original *Luperci* most likely came from two clans (*gentes*) who charged them with defending flocks against wolves.⁴¹ The *Lupercalia* rites also served to ward off evil spirits, which may have originally been connected with a lycanthrope from pre-Roman folklore. So the festival was important not only for fertility but also for ensuring that dangerous spirits were held at bay.⁴² Baniyas, with its sublime cliffs and hills, afforded the environs for such activities and observances. Also, if one is to believe the archaeological evidence, all the *ex-voto* ceramic offerings testify to an increasing amount of sacrifice at Baniyas. With Pan/Faunus as the central focus of the site, and the subsequent thorough Romanization of the city, it is difficult to imagine a Baniyas without some version of the rites of *Lupercalia*. Indeed, there can be no doubt that for the Romans and for the residents of Baniyas, who also likely celebrated the *Lupercalia* and related rites, the god of the *Lupercal* was Pan.⁴³

Archaeology at Baniyas bears out the fact that during the Roman period votive offerings to Pan were the most common homage by far. They form both an assemblage and a context that link those strata back to religious actions and events.⁴⁴ Despite their overwhelmingly fragmentary conditions *in situ*, all manner of lamps, cooking vessels, eating ware, and other vessels of local and foreign make testify to the cult traffic at the Court of Pan. Simple vessels of foreign make, including casserole dishes, comprise Early Roman (late 1st century BC-late 1st century AD) strata assemblages at Baniyas, reflecting

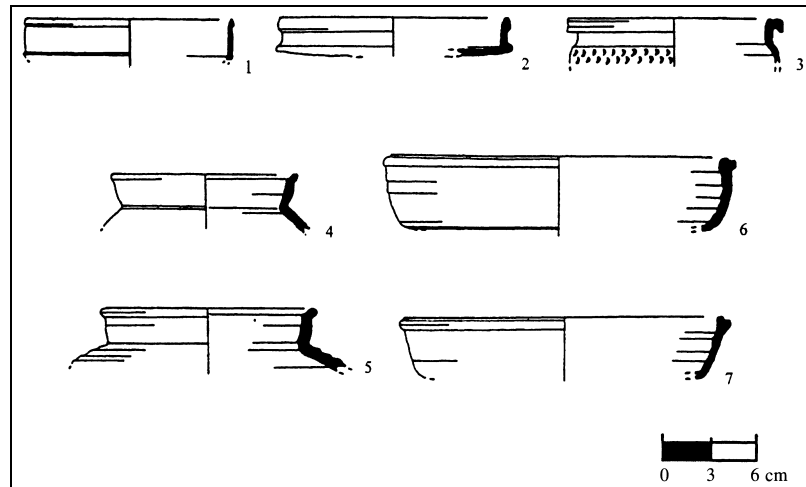
⁴¹ Fowler, *Religious Experience*, 393, 478.

⁴² Agnes Kirsopp Michels, "The Topography and Interpretation of the Lupercalia," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 84(1953): 52-5.

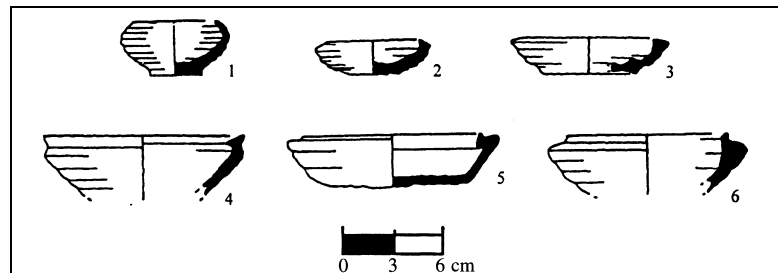
⁴³ T. P. Wiseman, "The God of the Lupercal," *Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995): 1-22.

⁴⁴ Gavin Lucas, *Critical Approaches to Fieldwork: Contemporary and Historical Archaeological Practice* (London: Routledge, 2001), 147-8.

the still growing but simple shrine.⁴⁵ These also may reflect ritual meals and feasting associated with the religious life of the *polis*, both of which were activities that clearly marked the distinction between sacred and profane space and time.⁴⁶ Lamps and various table vessels dominate the Middle Roman (late first century to second century) strata at the sanctuary.⁴⁷ By the end of the Late Roman period (third to fifth century) at Banias, in the fifth century, lamps comprised some 75% of all dedicatory ceramics in that sanctuary



13. Early Roman vessels from the sanctuary: 1) Eastern Sigillata A, 2) Italian Sigillata, 3) Cypriot Sigillata krater, 4) Cooking pot 5) Cooking pot, 6) pan/bowl 7) pan/bowl (Courtesy Andrea Berlin)



14. Late Roman lamps from the sanctuary: 1) saucer lamp, inturned rim, 2) saucer lamp, inturned rim, 3) saucer lamp, delta rim, 4) saucer lamp, delta rim, 5) saucer lamp, flanged lip, 6) saucer lamp, tickened rim (Courtesy Andrea Berlin)

⁴⁵ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 31-4.

⁴⁶ Hansen, *Polis*, 119; Robin Osborne, "Hoards, Votives, Offerings: The Archaeology of the Dedicated Object," *World Archaeology* 36.1 (March 2004): 1-10.

⁴⁷ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 34-6.

stratum's assemblage.⁴⁸ Local coinage also demonstrates the religious importance of Pan in Baniyas. In AD 88 Agrippa II minted a coin at Baniyas with Pan's image, bearing the characteristic pan-pipes, and on his shoulder, the λογοβολον (*logobolon*—rabbit thumper). Pan accompanies Titus and Domitian, whose faces adorn the obverse.⁴⁹ Grills covered the niches dedicated to nymphs at Baniyas,



and also regularly appeared on coins minted there, serving as a sort of indentifying mark for some Baniyas coins.⁵⁰ These currencies were also part of the dislocative effect of culture at Baniyas, due to the carriage of coins beyond the city to other parts of the ancient Mediterranean basin. Coins also confirm that goats were worshipped at Baniyas in the Temple of Pan and the Goats.⁵¹ In fact, “seven of the 61 coin types of Paneas are connected to the cult of Pan and the goats.”⁵² That Pan appears on a significant number of the coins at Baniyas should come as no surprise, and certainly reveals the important

⁴⁸ Berlin, “Archaeology of Ritual,” 33-36.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 59.

⁵⁰ Ma’oz, “Coin and Temple,” 93.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 94, Pls. 13:2, 15:4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 95, Pls. 16:1; 16:3; these were each issued in the year 223. All depict Pan playing his flute, leaning against a tree with his legs crossed.

cultural niche Pan occupied.⁵³ Roman-era statuary recovered from the Court of Pan also confirms religious activity. Archaeologists recovered a diagnostic portion of a statue of Artemis dating from the early third century.⁵⁴ Finds also include a torso of Eros and the forequarters of a bovine from the fourth century,⁵⁵ the colossal head from a statue of Roma,⁵⁶ and the torso and thighs from a statue of Aphrodite.⁵⁷ Quite naturally, certain statue fragments also reflect Pan and his characteristics, such as a tree trunk with a syrinx hanging from it, a hand grasping a syrinx, and the torso of a dancing satyr.⁵⁸ The span of time that these finds represent in the Roman period and Late Antiquity confirms that pagan religious life at the Sanctuary of Pan was active, even past the point when Christians had established themselves in Banias.

Numerous inscriptions also mention Pan and his priests at Banias. In the year 148, one epigraph reads “For Pan and the Nymphs, Victor, son of Lysimachos dedicated her a likeness in stone of Hermes, child of Maia, son of Zeus, having made a vow together with his children.”⁵⁹ “The priest Victor, son of Lysimachos, dedicated this goddess to the god Pan, lover of Echo” reads another from the same priest.⁶⁰ In a dedication in the year 178, a priest of Pan identifies himself as: “... Valerios Hispanos, priest of the god Pan...”⁶¹ The faithful inscribed dedications to Pan and the emperor together. Consider the completion of Valerios’ dedication:

⁵³ Ma’oz, “Coin and Temple,” 95-6.

⁵⁴ Friedland, *Roman Marble Sculptures*, 70.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 90; this piece was found in the vicinity of Banias, at Kibbutz Snir.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Cat. 18-20.

⁵⁹ *CIG* 4538b, 1179.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; see also *CIG* 4538.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; see also *CIG* 4537.

For the preservation of our lords, the Emperors, Valerios Hispanos, priest of the god Pan, (dedicated) the Lady Nemesis and her shrine which was made by cutting away the rock underneath, with an iron fence. Year 180 in the month of Apellainos.⁶²

In the Roman period, there was a pronounced connection between Nemesis and the Roman state and its games. The following example also illustrates allegiance to Rome.

To Heliopolitan Zeus and to the god Pan who brings victory, for the salvation of our lord Trajan Caesar, with his entire house Maronas son of Publius Aristo has dedicated this holy altar⁶³

This marble inscription mentions Trajan by name, and therefore dates to his reign from 98 to 117. A later inscription in Latin seeks the good health of the emperor: “For the good fortune of the Emperor [M(arcus) Aur(elius) An]toninus Aug(ustus), son of the Emperor Ant(oninus) Aug(ustus).” Scholars have concluded that the emperor in the inscription is Elagabalus, and date the inscription to his reign between 218 and 222.⁶⁴

Pan remained an enduring symbol of Baniyas throughout its pagan history. He eventually became assimilated to the universal deity—the “all deity.”⁶⁵ Only during the Roman period did the erroneous etymology of Pan as the “all” emerge, which serves to underscore the Romanization of the cult.⁶⁶ This usage may stem directly from the Orphic Hymn to Pan, which dates from the second or third century AD, whose first line reads “I call strong Pan, the substance of the whole.”⁶⁷ His influence was so great that the region has borne his name long after the Romans left.

⁶² *CIG* 4537.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Pan’s name is most likely a contraction of $\pi\alpha$ and $\sigma\nu$, meaning “shepherd” and not the Greek prefix $\pi\alpha\upsilon$, meaning “all” (see Boardman, 40).

⁶⁶ John Boardman, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 40.

⁶⁷ *The Hymns of Orpheus* 10.

While the cult of Pan was the first enshrinement of Western paganism established at Banias, Roman occupation and, eventually administration, would change that. In 20 BC, Caesar Augustus gave the region of Upper Galilee and portions of Syria to King Herod, Roman-appointed ruler of Palestine, which had formerly belonged to the Iturean Zenodorus (late first century BC). Josephus relates:

Caesar bestowed his [Zenodorus'] country, which was no small one, upon Herod; it lay between Trachon and Galilee, and contained Ulatha, Paneas, and the country round about. He also made him one of the procurators of Syria, and commanded that they should do everything with his approbation...⁶⁸

As a vassal king of the Roman Empire, Herod was loyal to Augustus and his wishes and therefore installed Greco-Roman religious traditions over the existing Canaanite and Greek polytheism present at the site of Banias. In 19 BC, Herod decided to dedicate a temple to Augustus. The promotion of the established religion included first and foremost the imperial cult, and also a number of other Roman practices to which the aforementioned inscriptions attest. Evidence of this fact and further confirmation of the geographical setting is the passage from Josephus noted earlier:

So when he [Herod] conducted Caesar to the sea, and was returned home, he built him a most beautiful temple, of the whitest stone, in Zenodorus's country, near the place called Panlure. This is a very fine cave in a mountain, under which there is a great cavity in the earth, and the cavern is abrupt, and prodigiously deep, and full of still water; over it hangs a vast mountain; and under the caverns arise the springs of the river Jordan. Herod adorned this place, which was already a very remarkable one, still further by the erection of this temple, which he dedicated to Caesar.⁶⁹

Here Josephus associates the building of a temple dedicated to Augustus at Banias with the cave and the headwaters of the Jordan River, which he describes vividly. With the

⁶⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.10.3.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

dedication of the Augusteum, administration and dissemination of the imperial cult would have ensued. Herod's gesture to the Roman state garnered official money, attention, and much-coveted recognition from Rome, and thus began the Early Roman period in Banias (20 BC-late first century AD).⁷⁰

The Augusteum at Banias is an interesting historical problem in its own right. The importance of the shrine of Pan to the Hellenized population is evident enough. Ostensibly, there appears to be no reason for Herod to construct a beautiful temple to Augustus at a location such as Banias. He did build other *Augustea* but they were in grand metropolitan centers such as Caesarea Maritima and Samaria Sebaste, situated in venues where their grandeur could be appreciated, often located at the highest point in the city.⁷¹ Why would Herod even bother with a country shrine frequented by shepherds and goatherds? It is feasible that the origin and location of the Augusteum at Banias was suggested by astrological connections between Augustus and Pan. Such an association is not only supported by Augustus' general affinity for Greek culture and its use in revitalizing Rome,⁷² but by his horoscope as well. Suetonius (c. 71-135) recounts in his *Life of Augustus (Vita Augusti)* that Augustus during his military training—only eighteen at the time—visited an astrologer named Theogenes. Reluctantly Augustus gave the sign of his birth. When Theogenes had produced his horoscope, he fell at Augustus' feet. Augustus thereafter felt utterly confident in his destiny, and made his horoscope public.⁷³

⁷⁰ Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 31.

⁷¹ Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Edinburgh: Fortress, 1999), 178-9.

⁷² Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990), 89-90.

⁷³ Suetonius, *Life of Augustus (Vita Augusti)* 94.12, in J. C. Rolfe, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1913), 270-3.

The sign under which he was born was none other than Capricorn.⁷⁴ Around 27 or 26 BC, he “issued a silver coin stamped with the sign of the constellation Capricornus” to commemorate the event shortly after becoming emperor.⁷⁵ Suetonius’ account is supported by the existence of the coin itself, whose obverse has an image of Augustus and reverse starkly displays the Capricorn holding a globe, with the name “AVGVSTVS” stamped below it.⁷⁶



16. Reissue of coin of Augustus on obverse and Capricorn on reverse, minted c.18-16 BC in Spain

The Greeks had long connected Capricorn with Pan. Echoing archaic sentiments, Pseudo-Eratosthenes (1st/2nd century AD) relates “Capricorn is in form like Aegipan, from whom he derives. His lower members are animal, as are the horns on his head.”⁷⁷ Herod was surely cognizant of the association between Capricorn and Pan, and its legacy in the Mediterranean world. Having spent time in Rome himself, Herod had every

⁷⁴ Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 94.12; there is some debate as to whether Augustus was conceived or born under the sign of the Capricorn. Whichever the case, the connection is auspicious and historically relevant.

⁷⁵ Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, 94.12.

⁷⁶ William T.R. Marvin, “A Coin of Augustus,” *American Journal of Numismatics* 45.1 (January 1911): 192; see also Michael R. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2000), 41, coin number RIC-1 493 in the Molnar collection.

⁷⁷ Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi* 1.27.

opportunity to familiarize himself with Augustus' very public horoscope.⁷⁸ Thus he was in a position to further pander to Augustus, when the time was right, by building a temple in his honor near a shrine whose deity was closely related to his astrological destiny. Herod strongly believed in astrology and the counsel of learned men, especially when they could be used to further his own ambitions. The best-known example illustrating this is to be found in the second chapter of the gospel of Matthew. In this portion of the Christmas story "Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared."⁷⁹ The Magi were most likely Zoroastrian astrologers. One of the decisive factors in Herod's choice of Baniyas for an Augusteum must have been the significance of Augustus' horoscope and his connection to Capricorn and thus Pan. For this reason, Baniyas was even better suited for an Augusteum than either Caesarea Maritima or Samaria Sebaste.

Herod the Great's son Philip eventually assumed control of the region in 4 BC.⁸⁰ According to Josephus, he expanded Baniyas and built additions to the city, renaming it Caesarea: "both Herod and Philip continued their tetrarchies; and the latter of them built the city Caesarea, at the fountains of the Jordan, and in the region of Paneas."⁸¹ Naturally, under his reign the expanded city would have made the religion at Baniyas more urban in nature.

The brilliant white Augusteum was a symbol of regional changes in politics, society, economy, and religion. Herod was one of the first provincial rulers to commit to the cult of the emperor, making Baniyas a model for regional Roman practice. Herod had

⁷⁸ Richardson, *Herod*, 27, 71.

⁷⁹ Matthew 2:7.

⁸⁰ Wilson, "Baniyas Dig Reveals King's Palace," 57.

⁸¹ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 2.9.1.

begun similar renovations and projects in other area cities such as Samaria (renamed Samaria-Sebaste, in honor of Augustus) and Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean Coast, including the structures most pertinent to Baniyas, the *Augustea*.⁸² The Augusteum at Baniyas, pictured on coins minted in the city, was a tetrastyle building.⁸³ It sat on a raised platform with steps leading up to the entrance. Graceful Corinthian style columns adorned the front. Herod's other *Augustea*, such as that at Caesarea Maritima, all stood on high ground, so one may surmise that the structure at Baniyas was much the same, although this is still a matter of some dispute.⁸⁴ Ma'oz contends that the remains of a hall in front of the Grotto of Pan were from the Augusteum. Although noting that the area has not been completely excavated, he argues that the sparse remnants leave "little doubt that this is the temple built by Herod in 19 B.C."⁸⁵ Elise A. Friedland agrees that the Augusteum was in front of the Cave of Pan.⁸⁶ That there was a Roman style structure there is not at issue. The idea that it was the Augusteum does not conform to other examples we have in the region—the structure in question is not on the high ground. Given the lack of survey data from locations above Baniyas, and that Josephus' account regarding the location at Baniyas is not specific, this theory is in need of revision.

Priests and any number of religious officials would have been in charge of maintaining the cult. As Josephus makes abundantly clear, Herod was absolutely loyal to the emperor, so one may conclude that his Augusteum was adequately staffed with the proper officials. The Roman state eventually deified Augustus and made him one of the

⁸² DeVries, *Cities of the Biblical World*, 262, 317.

⁸³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 12-13.

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 14-15; Zvi Ma'oz, "Coin and Temple—The Case of Caesarea Philippi-Paneas," *INJ* 13 (1994-99): 91; Friedland, "Roman Marble Sculpture from the Levant," 26.

⁸⁵ Ma'oz, "Coin and Temple," 91.

⁸⁶ Friedland, *Roman Marble Sculpture from the Levant*, 26.

Roman gods in thanks for his beneficence and for saving Rome. Essentially, Augustus had endorsed the cult of the Divine Will of Augustus, or *Augusti Numen*, and to a lesser degree the cult of his genius.⁸⁷ His liturgical commemorations included all manner of practices including expensive rites, oaths, and bull sacrifices (one of the most potent).⁸⁸ The Hellenistic east was fertile ground for the planting of the Roman imperial cult because ruler worship in the Near East had a history dating back to the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Hellenistic ruler cults of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids connected that bygone era to the Roman era.⁸⁹

Wherever the actual temple stood, the evidence of Roman ceremony exists throughout the sacred precincts of Banias. Worshippers have left traces of cultic activities honoring the host of deities present at Banias, including the emperor, Pan, and the Olympians. As noted, in the Early Roman Period, there was a marked increase in ceramic lamp dedications, the most popular type of offering in the region at the time, which adherents deposited on the terrace near the cave.⁹⁰ Roman-period cooking vessels also appear along with these lamps. Such vessels suggest that dedicatory meals were a feature of offerings at Banias, whether left as offerings or consumed by worshippers in ritual.⁹¹ While offerings of this kind become fewer in number during the Middle Roman Period, there is a sharp increase in bowls, lamps, and other ceramic pieces deposited in

⁸⁷ Ogilvie, *The Romans and their Gods*, 212-13.

⁸⁸ Lily R. Taylor. *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (New York: Arno, 1975), 182, 192.

⁸⁹ Louis Matthews Sweet, *Roman Emperor Worship* (Boston: Gorham, 1919), chapters 1 and 2.

⁹⁰ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 31-33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 33.

this area during the Late Roman Period at Banias which indicates increased cultic traffic and ritual.⁹²

The Romans did indeed present such vessels as offerings. They also presented offerings of wax figures, effigies of wood, graffiti, and placards. On the more grandiose end of the spectrum, great patrons could dedicate structures and temples. Dedicants also gave another type of offering, the *ex-voto*, which they left as a token of thanks to a god or as a reciprocal gift paid in homage for fulfillment of a vow.⁹³ These offerings symbolize the interchange between man and god which takes place during a ceremony.

Earthenware vessels were very common gifts and were less a part of the actual ritual than a sign that a ritual had been completed, most often a sacrifice.⁹⁴ Foodstuffs were also common offerings.⁹⁵ Given the occurrence of typical *ex-voto* offerings and food dishes, it is logical to conclude that Banias was a major venue for Roman religion (including emperor worship) in the Eastern Roman Empire. All vessels in the sanctuary speak to a sacrificial and prayer-driven religious atmosphere.

The cult of the emperor, beginning with Augustus, did not exist separately from the worship of the goddess Roma. In fact, Augustus decreed that should any temple be dedicated to him its rites and worship were to be conducted only in conjunction with reverence to Roma, the sacred personification of the Roman state.⁹⁶ The Augusteum at Banias therefore naturally must have had rites for Roma. Although, in the cult, Augustus and the emperors were paramount, Roma nonetheless occupied a place of honor. She

⁹² Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 36.

⁹³ Scheid, *Roman Religion*, 100.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁶ Suetonius, *Divi Augusti* 52; Taylor, *Divinity*, 146. and W. Warde Fowler, *The Religious Experience of the Roman People: From the Earliest Times to Augustus* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1922), 435-37; see also Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*.

was present in Roman religion at least as early as the second century BC.⁹⁷ Historian Ronald Mellor argues that the mythologizing first began in the Greek world where adherents associated her with local rulers, and that from them the Romans of the later Republic took their cue in the deification of Roma.⁹⁸ If this is so, it was a smooth transition then from her place alongside the Hellenistic rulers to sacred union with the Roman emperors. Worshippers often associated her with Tyche and Nemesis, the Greek deities governing fortune and retributive justice.⁹⁹ Officials and adherents poured libations to the goddess and offered sacrifices. Roma is also found in the Palestinian coinage of the period and statues of Roma and Tyche existed in the region, such as the ones at Antioch.¹⁰⁰ It is not surprising, therefore, that archaeologists have recovered a colossal marble statue of Roma from the sanctuary terrace dating to the Middle Roman Period of Banias.¹⁰¹ This telling find confirms evidence for the presence of Roma worship at Banias and bolsters the care for the imperial cult. There is also evidence of other altars, shrines, and sacrifices, such as the bull which existed to honor Roma, which found a place at Banias.¹⁰²

Games, drama, and gladiatorial events were all integral parts of the festivities associated with Augustus and Roma. Games had existed at Banias since at least the arrival of Titus.¹⁰³ Josephus relates the following account of Titus at Banias:

Now at the same time that Titus Caesar lay at the siege of Jerusalem, did Vespasian go on board a merchantship and sailed from Alexandria to

⁹⁷ Ronald Mellor, *The Worship of the Goddess Roma in the Greek World* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1975), 14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 90, 94-95.

¹⁰¹ Friedland, *Roman Marble Sculpture*, 74; Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 34.

¹⁰² Mellor, *Goddess Roma*, 145-56.

¹⁰³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 63.

Rhodes; whence he sailed away, in ships with three rows of oars; and as he touched at several cities that lay in his road, he was joyfully received by them all, and so passed over from Ionia into Greece; whence he set sail from Corcyra to the promontory of Iapyx, whence he took his journey by land. But as for Titus, he marched from that Caesarea which lay by the sea-side, and came to that which is named Caesarea Philippi, and stayed there a considerable time, and exhibited all sorts of shows there. And here a great number of the captives were destroyed, some being thrown to wild beasts, and others in multitudes forced to kill one another, as if they were their enemies.¹⁰⁴

Such activities were a natural part of the festivals of the imperial cult, which would feature foot races, races in armor, games and cultural competitions, wrestling, boxing, music, drama, and the *pentathlon*. Gladiatorial competitions too were part of the rites, as was the throwing of prisoners to wild beasts.¹⁰⁵ The latter probably included members of the Jewish minority, especially subversives and revolutionaries who refused to conform to Roman standards. The revolutionaries Titus conquered would have been subject to execution via exposure to wild beasts at the amphitheater in Baniyas, as in the aforementioned description.¹⁰⁶ A clearer picture of the gore arises in the record of Titus' exploits:

While Titus was at Caesarea, he solemnized the birthday of his brother Domitian after a splendid manner, and inflicted a great deal of the punishment intended for the Jews in honor of him; for the number of those that were now slain in fighting with the beasts, and were burnt, and fought with one another, exceeded two thousand five hundred. Yet did all this seem to the Romans, when they were thus destroyed ten thousand several ways, to be a punishment beneath their deserts.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Josephus, *Wars*, 7.2.1.

¹⁰⁵ Mellor, *Goddess Roma*, 165-73.

¹⁰⁶ Howard Clark Kee, "Early Christianity in the Galilee: Reassessing the Evidence from the Gospels," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992): 19.

¹⁰⁷ Josephus, *Wars*, 7.3.1.

As such violent events were sacred to Nemesis, the presence of a Romanized Nemesis at Banias suggests that she may have been associated with the games.¹⁰⁸

Nemesis and Tyche were both present in the iconography, statuary, and rites at Banias. Though they were native Greek deities, Romanized citizens at Banias made them their own. A monumental marble sculpture of Nemesis found in the archaeological record of Middle Roman Banias partially demonstrates the importance of the goddess to the people of Banias.¹⁰⁹ Nemesis, especially, was associated with the worship of the emperor and the protection of the city. This attitude is congruent with the findings of historian Michael Hornum, who observes that “It thus appears that Nemesis was sometimes seen as a special protector, likely with the connotation of avenger or requiter of wrongs done to the city.”¹¹⁰ Citizens of Roman Banias, in keeping with the views of Nemesis empire-wide, also connected the gladiatorial games and drama to her persona.¹¹¹ Hornum notes that “The most distinctive feature of the cult of Nemesis during the Roman Imperial Period is undoubtedly the devotion paid to her at theaters, amphitheaters, and stadia.”¹¹² The relationship between Nemesis and the rulers of Rome dates back to the time of Julius Caesar. After the defeat of Pompey, Julius Caesar had the head of Pompey interred at Alexandria, where he dedicated a shrine to Nemesis, the punisher of extreme hubris.¹¹³

Tyche, on the other hand, while Greek in origin, bears some truly Roman features.

She first appears at Banias on a coin with Pan, currency minted by Agrippa II (AD 53-

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Berlin, “The Archaeology of Ritual,” 34.

¹¹⁰ Michael B. Hornum, *Nemesis, The Roman State, and the Games* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 42.

¹¹¹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 66; Kee, “Early Christianity,” 43.

¹¹² Hornum, *Nemesis*, 43.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 15.

c. 93) at Banias in the first century AD.¹¹⁴ She held a rudder (indicative of the Roman Fortuna), wore a turreted crown, representative of the walls of the city, and also bore a cornucopia and a sheaf of grain, as symbols of might and abundance. She represented the union of civic, martial, and agrarian efforts for which the Romans prided themselves. This image of Tyche is evidenced in Banias by its presence on a number of coins, including one minted by Septimus Severus in 196 and three minted in 220.¹¹⁵ Tyche's military dress also implies a connection with the aforementioned Roma, and according to Wilson her overall persona is similar to that of Maia.¹¹⁶

Maia appeared standing next to a tree on a Banias mint coin of Plautilla, wife of Emperor Caracalla (188-217). Her name in Greek also occurs in an inscription of one Victor, son of Lysimachos.¹¹⁷ In Greek mythology, Maia was the mother of Hermes. Once again, it is difficult to identify the origins of deities, such as Maia, who have both Greek and Roman identities. Romanized citizens of Banias would have had little problem accentuating the attributes of either origin and in all likelihood did. It is therefore helpful for the purposes of this study to explicate some of the traits of the Roman Maia. She was a goddess of blooming and of the earth and of healing. Maia was known best to the priesthood and the learned, and her rites excluded men.¹¹⁸ This feature is congruent with archaeologist Andrea Berlin's contention that from the first century AD to the end of the Roman period, the sanctuary of Pan at Banias, which hosted the shrines and temples to the aforementioned deities, began to increasingly cater to the upper

¹¹⁴ Ya'akov Meshorer, "The Coins of Caesarea Paneas," *INJ* 8 (1984-85) Plate 7:G; Wilson, "King's Palace," 57, and *Caesarea Philippi*, 68.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *Caesarea Philippi*, 67-68.

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 67-68.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹⁸ Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1916), 101.

echelons of society and to discourage visits from the lower classes.¹¹⁹ By the end of the second century AD the sanctuary and its temples were at their most impressive, reflecting patronage from a wealthy local aristocracy, a conclusion which further undergirds the probability of the conflation of the Greek and Roman Maia at Banias. Also, the ceramic lamps and table vessels left behind in this period point to *ex-voto* offerings and ritual meals, and thus Roman ritual.¹²⁰

The rationale for concluding that Maia was present in her Greco-Roman form at Banias rests, once again, in the Roman ability to acknowledge the Greek alter egos of their own *numena*. One of the Roman deities associated with Maia was the Bona Dea (“Good Goddess”), who was none other than a daughter (possibly a wife, Fauna) of Faunus, whom the Romans and Greeks often associated with Pan (the namesake of Banias). Since Maia is present in coinage and iconography at Banias, it seems likely that the Bona Dea was present there too, if only as a shadow of or afterthought to Maia. Bona Dea was a virtuous goddess, moreso than her consort Faunus. Women worshipped her in secret at night and excluded men from her cult. Worshippers offered libations of wine (called milk) from wine jars (called honey-pots), and the pregnant sow was a favorite sacrifice.¹²¹ Myrtle was taboo in the religion, as Faunus allegedly beat Bona Dea to death with a myrtle rod when she refused to submit to his sexual advances to join in his drunken revelry (though he later repented).¹²² It is also very interesting that the Romans

¹¹⁹ Berlin, “The Archaeology of Ritual,” 42.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34, 36.

¹²¹ H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and Description of the Cult* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 232, 239, 349.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 239, 339.

connected the Bona Dea with healing, and that it was in fact her primary function.¹²³

Banias certainly had a venue for healing given the presence of the Greek god of healing Asclepius at the Sanctuary, and possibly an *Asclepion*,¹²⁴ as the following inscription from a physician suggests:

To Heliopolitan Zeus, the father, for the salvation of our lords the emperors, Quadratus, also named Marcellus son of Selamnes, physician, dedicated (this statue of) Asclepius, having made a vow, with his wife and children. Year 65 (AD 63)¹²⁵

As Bona Dea is one of the names of Maia, Banias was an ideal location for her cult, given the presence of Maia and Pan/Faunus. It is difficult to miss the similarities between Faunus' affection and advances toward her, and those of Pan and the Nymphs. Furthermore, with Augustus' restoration of the cult during his reign, Banias' loyalty to Rome would have encouraged rites for Maia, and possibly even the Bona Dea.¹²⁶

There remains a host of theoretical problems and mysteries daunting scholars who study Roman Banias: as stated, very little is known of the local Roman calendar; the location of the Augusteum is still debated; the priesthoods that must have existed to service the cults remain largely undocumented except for a modest corpus of inscriptions and textual material. As local civic figures were often also priests and religious officials, it is not outside the realm of possibility that Herod and his descendants, along with Roman priests, were leaders in the imperial cult and other rites observed at

¹²³ Scheid, *Roman Religion*, 155.

¹²⁴ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 62-67.

¹²⁵ Benjamin Isaac, "Inscriptions from Banias," unpublished report, 5.

¹²⁶ Brower, *Bona Dea*, 360.

Banias.¹²⁷ *Flamines* were the most prominent priests, no doubt, as they attended to the Roman rites of specific deities.¹²⁸ Festivals and their natures are also still debated.

Although scholars know little of pure Roman religion in the traditional sense at Banias, elements of those rites and beliefs did survive. It is impossible to fully detach Roman religion from Greek beliefs and practices after the reign of Augustus, as the Greek rites had already been influencing Roman religion since the Republican Era. Banias is certainly no exception to the rule. Augustus had set out to restore many Roman religious institutions, and his vassals such as Herod were only too happy to accommodate him. Nonetheless the syncretism of Greco-Roman society remained. Ultimately, the pagan religion of Banias was a fusion of Greek and Roman ideas, resulting in a tradition connected to both cultures. Yet religious beliefs and practices which bore distinctly Roman features did exist at Banias, with the most prominent being the imperial cult instituted in the Empire by Augustus, and administered at Banias by Herod the Great, Philip, Agrippa, and their successors. Associated cults such as Roma, Maia, and Nemesis also suggest a Roman influence in the form of the Panian games and imagery.¹²⁹ And lastly, but certainly not least, Pan himself—the Roman Faunus—found a host of local worshippers in the region, adhering to both Greek and Roman rites. Even with the evidence at hand, one thing may safely be said of the religion at Banias during the Roman era: where the Romans were, so was their religion, and the Romans and Romanized citizens made Banias a provincial home beginning in the first century BC and lasting well into the fifth century AD.

¹²⁷ Scheid, 129.

¹²⁸ R.M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and their Gods in the Age of Augustus* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1969), 108-9; see also Scheid, *Roman Religion*, 144.

¹²⁹ Berlin, "Archaeology of Ritual," 34.

CHAPTER 5

In the Footsteps of Enoch: Hebrew Tradition and the Jewish Presence at Baniyas

Jewish historical traditions of the Baniyas region began with Joshua's conquest of Canaan. As soon as the Israelites subjugated Laish—Biblical Dan, and neighbor to Baniyas—the establishment of Jewish rite and priesthood followed.¹ Early on, the Baniyas region also functioned as a political borderland in the north, separating Israel from the Syrians, Amorites, Phoenicians, and other civilizations.² Dan would seem to have conformed to Mosaic law until the separation of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The rivalry between Dan and Jerusalem led to Dan's apostasy. Amongst the Jews themselves, however, older traditions existed.

The antediluvian patriarchs purportedly had lived in the region of Baniyas, in the vicinity of Mount Hermon. One such patriarch, Enoch, is of particular interest. Jewish apocalyptic literature, most notably the Book of Enoch, describes Enoch's role in pre-flood events and highlights the significance of Mount Hermon.³ The accounts relate that 200 *Grigori*, or "Watchers"—the fallen angels of Biblical accounts—descended onto the summit of Mount Hermon after lusting for human females. The Book of Enoch alleges their leader Semyaza persuaded the angels to make a pact, from which the mountain takes its name.⁴ In exchange for science and magic, humanity agreed to allow these angels to mate with females. The unions produced the Nephilim, the gruesome giants of prehistory. This series of events angered Yahweh, who sent the archangels to deliver a

¹ Judges 17-18.

² May, *The Oxford Bible Atlas*, 73.

³ 1 Enoch 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*

message of judgment on the *Grigori*. The messenger to the *Grigori* was none other than Enoch, chosen for his righteousness.⁵

The presence of the antediluvians in the region was significant to the Jews of later eras, but equally important was the mystical and revelatory quality of Mount Hermon. So sacred was the Baniyas region that 1 Enoch even suggests that the earth itself was so disgusted by the *Grigori*, the Nephilim, and their corruption of humanity that she bore witness to God about their sins: “Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones.”⁶ Enoch, while in the process of pronouncing judgment on the *Grigori*, reads a remorseful petition composed by the rebellious angels. The location he selects is at the waters of Dan, where he falls asleep reading the missive.

And they besought me to draw up a petition for them that they might find forgiveness, and to read their petition in the presence of the Lord of heaven. For from thenceforward they could not speak (with Him) nor lift up their eyes to heaven for shame of their sins for which they had been condemned. Then I wrote out their petition, and the prayer in regard to their spirits and their deeds individually and in regard to their requests that they should have forgiveness and length (of days). And I went off and sat down at the waters of Dan, in the land of Dan, to the south of the west of Hermon: I read their petition until I fell asleep. And behold, a dream came to me, and visions fell down upon me, and I saw visions of chastisement, [and a voice bidding (me)] I to tell the sons of heaven and reprimand them.⁷

This location is well within the Baniyas region, Dan being only four miles to the west of what would become the city proper. Other patriarchs Judeo-Christian tradition associates with the region include Jared and Noah, the latter having been chosen to survive the deluge.

⁵ 1 Enoch 12.

⁶ 1 Enoch 7:6.

⁷ 1 Enoch 13: 4-8.

Similar to this account in 1 Enoch is a passage from the Testament of Levi. This latter book is part of a collection of documents known as The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, whose Pharisaic author composed them in the late second century BC, sometime between c. 109 and 106 BC.⁸ Verses 2-7 of the Testament of Levi closely parallel 1 Enoch 12-16. Indeed, Levi falls asleep as Enoch does, near Mount Hermon, called “Aspis” and “Abel Maul” in Levi. “Abel Maul,” or “Abel Mayyin/Abel Mayyim” (Aramaic/Hebrew) is a name for Mount Hermon derived from a midrash on Mount Sirion, its old Ammorite name.⁹

I saw all men corrupting their way, and that unrighteousness had built to itself walls, and iniquity sat upon towers; and I grieved for the race of men, and I prayed to the Lord that I might be saved. Then there fell upon me a sleep, and I beheld a high mountain: this is the mountain of Aspis in Abel-Maul.¹⁰

This following passage recalls the judgment passed on the fallen angels, but here the punishment passes to evil men:

Now, therefore, know that the Lord will execute judgment upon the sons of men; because when the rocks are rent, and the sun quenched, and the waters dried up, and the fire trembling, and all creation troubled, and the invisible spirits melting away, and the grave spoiled in the suffering of the Most High, men unbelieving will abide in their iniquity, therefore with punishment shall they be judged.¹¹

Other similarities exist between the Enoch and Levi accounts, including the invitation extended to both Enoch and Levi by an angel and a period of dwelling near the Holy of

⁸ Robert Henry Charles (trans.), *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1908), xv; James Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, Volume 2* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 560.

⁹ Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 135.

¹⁰ Levi 2:3-4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4:1.

Holies, near God.¹² In fact, the author of Levi directly refers to The Book of Enoch in Levi 10:4 and 16:1. The geographical context here is significant for Banias, as it is at the foot of Mount Hermon. Once again, Enoch is an important part of the regional story, ascribed special value by the author of the account in Levi. It certainly speaks to the importance of the region as a place for revelation in the religious traditions of Jews.

There is a rather curious rabbinical legend about Moses that pertains to Banias. According to the book of Deuteronomy, God denied Moses entrance into Israel.¹³ Moses asked to be allowed to enter at the headwaters of the Jordan into the region of Lebanon, near Banias.

Permit me then, at least, to enter it as a common citizen." "That," said the Lord, "is impossible. The king shall not enter it degraded to the rank of a common citizen." "Well, then," said Moses, "if I may not even go into the land as a common citizen, let me at least enter into the promised land by the Paneas Grotto, that runs from the east bank to the west bank of the Jordan." But this request, too, God denied him.¹⁴

The account of course is another version of the Deuteronomy (3, 34) episode where God denies Moses entrance into the Promised Land, and both passages describe the negotiation process between Moses and God, the latter of whom is recalcitrant. This legend may contain a grain of historicity, as the spies sent into Canaan entered Israel at this point, and several of the first engagements took place in the region of Bashan.

These apocryphal materials and associated legends were certainly part of the Jewish consciousness. During the Second Temple Period (516 BC-AD 70), writers

¹² Compare Levi 2:6 with 1 Enoch 14:8-9, and Levi 3:4 with 1 Enoch 14:20.

¹³ Deuteronomy 3: 21-9; 34: 1-4.

¹⁴ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews, Volume 3* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1911), 421-2; see also W. David Nelson, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 190-1.

produced a myriad of such literature, which became well-known and certainly influenced apocalyptic movements within Judaism and early Christianity.¹⁵ Enoch, Jared, Moses, and other personages even remotely connected to the region of Banias and Mount Hermon were easily recognizable, and the area's significance as a place of revelation seems to have been well-established.

Though the tribe of Dan occupied the region of Banias in the Old Testament Period, there is little known evidence for a Jewish presence at or near the site in later centuries. Aristobulus the philosopher (c.160 BC), one of seventy scribes responsible for the *Septuagint* production, is popularly thought to have come from Paneas, though this cannot be historically verified. If this were so, his comparison of Greek religious texts with Mosaic Law would be a spectacular addition to the religious history of Banias and would provide evidence of a Hellenistic community at the site during the second century BC.¹⁶ To be sure, there were Jews living in Roman era Galilee, as numerous references to synagogues in the New Testament demonstrate. Josephus noted that Aristobulus I (c.140-104 BC), the Hasmonean ruler who, conquered the region, gave the Itrueseans the opportunity to convert or be banished:

He was called a lover of the Grecians; and had conferred many benefits on his own country, and made war against Iturea, and added a great part of it to Judea, and compelled the inhabitants, if they would continue in that country, to be circumcised, and to live according to the Jewish laws.¹⁷

¹⁵ Geroge W.E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 9-15.

¹⁶ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 189, n. 28; see also *The Writings of Methodius, Alexander of Lycopolis, Peter of Alexandria, and Several Fragments*, ed. Alexander Roberts and Sir James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869), 414, n. 3.

¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.11.3; Josephus is quoting Strabo, who quoted one Timagenes.

He also mentions another community of Jews, not far from Baniyas in Batania in Trachonitis, which came into existence as the result of the machinations of Herod the Great:

And now it was that Herod, being desirous of securing himself on the side of the Trachonites, resolved to build a village as large as a city for the Jews, in the middle of that country, which might make his own country difficult to be assaulted, and whence he might be at hand to make sallies upon them, and do them a mischief. Accordingly, when he understood that there was a man that was a Jew come out of Babylon, with five hundred horsemen, all of whom could shoot their arrows as they rode on horse-back, and, with a hundred of his relations, had passed over Euphrates, and now abode at Antioch by Daphne of Syria, where Saturninus, who was then president, had given them a place for habitation, called Valatha, he sent for this man, with the multitude that followed him, and promised to give him land in the toparchy called Batanea, which country is bounded with Trachonitis, as desirous to make that his habitation a guard to himself. He also engaged to let him hold the country free from tribute, and that they should dwell entirely without paying such customs as used to be paid, and gave it him tax-free. The Babylonian was reduced by these offers to come hither; so he took possession of the land, and built in it fortresses and a village, and named it Bathyra. Whereby this man became a safeguard to the inhabitants against the Trachonites, and preserved those Jews who came out of Babylon, to offer their sacrifices at Jerusalem, from being hurt by the Trachonite robbers.¹⁸

These Babylonian Jews, who were recruited to protect against raiders and thieves in the area, were loyal to Herod and thus to the Rome.

The first century AD illustrates the Jewish presence in the district of Baniyas. It is quite evident that the Jews at Baniyas developed close political ties with the Herodians. Philip, son of Jacimus and son of the founder of this community of Jews, was a friend to and general for Herod Agrippa II in the late first century AD.¹⁹ He fought against Varus, Agrippa's viceroy at Baniyas and a member of the Iturean nobility, who had conspired to

¹⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17.2.1-2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.2.2-3.

overthrow Agrippa by aligning himself with the aforementioned bandits of Trachonitis.²⁰ Josephus' works indicate that there were at least three groups of Jews in the Baniyas region: the Iturean converts, the Babylonian immigrants, and the "Jews of Caesarea"



17. From inside the ancient synagogue at Baniyas

(Baniyas proper).²¹ It is also highly probable that this last segment of the local Jewish population also included ethnic Jews from Galilee. Even when considering the effect of Hellenization on Judaism, and the loyalty to the Herodians and Romans, this region ought to have preserved Jewish apocalyptic traditions.

Later Rabbinical schools came to be associated with Baniyas. The Babylonian Talmud, for example, mentions Baniyas, although it reveals a lack of geographical knowledge on the part of the authors, who routinely confuse Dan with Baniyas. As one

²⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities* 17; *Life of Josephus* 11.

²¹ Josephus, *Life* 11.

Rabbi Isaac stated “Leshem is Pamias [Panias],” Leshem being a Canaanite name for Dan.²² Likewise the *Midrash Rabbah*, in an exegesis, contains the telling phrase “And they came to Dan which is Paneas.”²³ This confusion arose from not having been to northern Palestine. Persons living in the vicinity—Jewish or otherwise—certainly knew that Baniyas was separate from Dan: for example, Eusebius of Caesarea is clear on this point.²⁴ Of course, a visit to the area does not guarantee protection from confusion ensconced in long-held traditions. In *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela*, an account of a twelfth-century travelling rabbi, the author relates: “A day's journey brings us to Belinas, the ancient Dan where the traveler may see a cave, from which the Jordan issues, and three miles hence this river unites its waters with those of the Arnon, a rivulet of the ancient land of Moab.”²⁵

It is significant that Kabbalists often revered persons connected with the region of Baniyas and Mount Hermon. Kabbalah, the school of mystical Judaism, is perfectly congruent with the oracular and revelatory nature of the Baniyas region. Enoch, for instance, is a central figure in the Kabbalah, being highly revered for having attained salvation without death and having communed directly with God.²⁶ Kabbalah historian Adolphe Franck, assigning mystical significance to Aristobulus’ melding of Platonic

²² Michael Levi Rodkinson, Isaac Mayer Wise, and Godfrey Taubehaus, *New Edition of the Babylonian Talmud: Tracts Taanith, Megilla, and Ebel Rabbathi or Semahoth, Volume 8* (New York: Talmud Publishing Company, 1899), 12; John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Hebrew and Talmudic Execrations, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford, 1859), 138.

²³ H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah Genesis: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, and Indices* (London: Soncino, 1939), 876.

²⁴ Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 76.

²⁵ Charles F. Horne, *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela in Medieval Hebrew: The Midrash, The Kabbalah* (New York: Parke, Austin, and Lipscomb, 1917), 398.

²⁶ S. L. MacGregor Matthews, *The Book of Concealed Mystery in The Kabbalah Unveiled* (New York: Theosophical Publications, 1912), 105.

philosophy and the Jewish scriptures, was perfectly willing to connect Aristobulus the Philosopher to Banias.²⁷

Judaism remained a fixture in the Banias region during the Byzantine and early medieval periods. Sources testify to a substantial Jewish presence in Banias during the eleventh century. The Fatimids were especially tolerant of the Jews and as a result Jews under their authority in the Middle East prospered.²⁸ For Banias, some of this good fortune was certainly tied to the ruling Fatimids in Damascus and the region.²⁹ Banias is also mentioned with some frequency in the letters contained in the *Cairo Geniza*. The letters not only mention Jews by name, but one even documents the existence of a synagogue, and hence, an active community: one letter dating to c.1100 from Eliazer ha-Levi ben Joseph to Eli ha-Kohen in Banias mentions peripherally the obtaining of a certain object for that synagogue.³⁰ References to both Talmudic and Palestinian groups suggest that the Jewish population was diverse. A host of Jewish names are recorded in correspondence from the tenth through the twelfth centuries, as are a letter for power of attorney and other documents, all of which attest to a religious community.³¹

Early twelfth-century Banias attracted adherents to other forms of heterodox Judaism as well. By this time, Urban II (1088-1099) had answered the Byzantine call for aid and the First Crusade was underway. One example of Jewish heterodoxy in Banias at

²⁷ Adolphe Franck, *The Kabbalah, or The Religious Philosophy of the Jews*, trans. I. Sossnitz (New York: The Kabbalah Publishing Company, 1926), 219.

²⁸ Pinchas Wechter, "The History of the Jews in Egypt and Syria under the Rule of the Mamluks," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (1945): 201-5.

²⁹ William W. Harris, *The Levant: A Fractured Mosaic* (Princeton: Weiner, 2003), 119.

³⁰ Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992), 215.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 208, 214-5.

this time bears note: a Karaite messianic figure. In 1102, Johannes of Oppido, a Roman Catholic priest and scholar converted to Judaism and took the name Obadyah. The reasons for his conversion are obscure, but he was most likely influenced by the conversion of other Christian clerics to Judaism during the crusades. Of interest to our story is his visit to Baniyas in the fall of 1121 while en route to Tyre. Obadyah apparently engaged a would-be messiah, one Solomon Hakkohen, of the infant Karite sect of Judaism. The Karaites believed in a strict interpretation of scripture, and therefore were not rabbinical. Solomon had lived in Baniyas since before the First Crusade amongst a small community of Karaites. Baniyas seemed to attract the fringe movements of Judaism after 1100, when mainline Jews began to leave the city. Whatever the theological standing of either Jew, Obadayah allegedly defeated Solomon in open debate and proved him a fraud to the local Jewish community.³²

It does not appear that the Jewish community at Baniyas survived in a cohesive form much past the First Crusade. Nevertheless, the cultural memory of Baniyas as an important Jewish site remained. In the sixteenth century, after Baniyas was under Ottoman control, Jewish thinkers and laymen alike believed that a number of significant tombs of rabbinical and Biblical personages were at Baniyas. Around 1537, a chronicler by the name of Jacob, son of Naftali ha-Khohen de Gazolo, published a text entitled “Sepulchres of the Just.” In this work he identifies Baniyas as the resting place of Iddo the Prophet and Shubael, son of Gershom, son of Moses. Both of these tombs were believed

³² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 130; for *Geniza* material see also Jacob Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine Under the Fatimid Caliphs, Volumes 1-2* (London: O. U. P., 1920); also see S.D. Goitein, “A Report on Messianic Troubles in Baghdad in 1120-21,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*. new series 43.1 (July 1952): 57-76.

to have been under trees, a practice still visible in the region to this day.³³ The value of these traditions is evident because both of these individuals were associated with the northern tribes of Israel. Iddo saw a vision concerning Jeroboam, the king of Israel, whose capital was at Dan.³⁴ Shubael was a grandson of no less a Biblical figure than Moses.³⁵ The Gershonites, of which Shubael was a member, received the Golan and Bashan.³⁶ Talmudic rabbis associated Shubael with Jonathan the Gershomite, whose family included priests in the polytheistic cults of the tribe of Dan.³⁷ These tombs were part of the traditions connected to northern Israel, and in particular, to Dan. Other tombs including those of two Persian Jews, Rabbi Papa and Rabbi Asche, are recorded in this same work as being in the cave of Banias itself.³⁸ There is no way to know for certain if the Jews of Banias perpetuated these ideas, but Jews in other regions of the Mediterranean basin certainly did so.

The Jews, like other religious groups, came to Banias because of an established sacred geography. They were drawn by it, led to it by their god, and sought revelation where others had before them. Mount Hermon, with its high places, became the northern boundary of the land of Israel, preserving the spiritual significance of the region. Events in Jewish tradition, such as the Watchers, the Nephilim, and patriarchs such as Enoch, became forever connected to Mount Hermon and the Banias region. The Danites settled here. The Israelites were displaced from the region by the Assyrians. Herod situated

³³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 160.

³⁴ 2 Chronicles 9:29.

³⁵ 1 Chronicles 23:15-16; 24:20; 25:4; 26:24.

³⁶ 1 Chronicles 6:71.

³⁷ Judges 18:28-31; Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 160.

³⁸ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 161.

Jews and Jewish converts in the Banias region. Medieval mystics called it home. It would seem that the Jews themselves came and went through Banias, living alongside pagans, Christians, and eventually Muslims in sporadic periods of settlement. While there might have been economic and security reasons for Jewish settlement at Banias, the lure was much the same as it had been for other peoples: the promise of mystical revelation and a niche within a sacred place.

CHAPTER 6

At the Gates of Hell: Early Christian Baniyas, AD 29-300

The first three hundred years of Christian history were crucial for the development of the church. In Baniyas, that progress, took place alongside Greco-Roman paganism, which was active to various degrees into the fifth century AD. Christianity had to compete in the spiritual marketplace, and Baniyas was a regional pagan capital. Though the ascent was not smooth, the history of the rise of Christianity at Baniyas is yet another facet to the spiritual past of the city. Baniyas itself would play an important role in the development of Christianity. A defining moment for the church occurred at Baniyas: its very creation.

Baniyas influenced the creation of Christianity because it was a sacred place located in a major border region on an important trade route. It is clear that east-west traffic through Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi was steady for centuries, as the city was fortuitously located on the road from Damascus to Tyre. North-south traffic was also regular, especially as artisans and merchants brought their wares up from Galilee and other regions of Israel.

One specific journey along the aforementioned thoroughfare has remained a hallmark of Christian history and tradition. Jesus Christ (c. 5 BC-AD 30), in the winter before his death during the closing months of the year AD 29, brought his disciples to Baniyas—then known as Caesarea Philippi—in order to make known to them several startling revelations—revelations foundational to all of Christianity. He declared his messiahship at a holy location known for its apocalyptic significance, with all the

deliberation of a prophet, and with full awareness of the geographical and religious import of the region.

While those revelations are well known to believers and students of the Bible, the location in which Jesus elected to disclose them typically forms little more than a marginal backdrop to the story. However, closer examination of the location of Caesarea Philippi reveals that its geography and apocryphal tradition underlay the revelation there: Jesus chose Caesarea Philippi not simply because of convenience or coincidence but because of its symbolic importance.

Prior to arriving in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus and his disciples had embarked on a mission in the northern reaches of Israel and into Lebanon and Syria. Their travels took them around the Sea of Galilee, into the region of Tyre and Sidon, and back down to Bethsaida before journeying to the mountainous region of Caesarea Philippi.¹ Why did Jesus and his disciples travel north? Although a strictly theological reading of scripture may blur the answers, they are there. Following the beheading of his cousin John at the hands of Herod Antipas (21 BC-AD 39), Jesus was looking for a place to think, pray, and reassess his ministry. It was quite apparent that Antipas feared Jesus as a potential threat. He even thought that Jesus was actually John the Baptist returned from the dead, or perhaps Elijah. In his mind these were the only ways to account for Jesus' miracles.² The logical choice for a retreat, since Jesus was preaching the same message as John and could very well meet a similar fate, would be a location outside of Herod Antipas' realm. Caesarea Philippi, the city of Pan nestled within the borders of the tetrarch Philip II,

¹ Matthew 13-16; Mark 6-8

² Matthew 14:1-2; Mark 6:14-16; Luke 9:7-8.

offered some degree of anonymity with its Greco-Roman culture and freedom from Herod Antipas' immediate jurisdiction.

Jesus' selection of the city would also have been influenced by his familiarity with Roman provincial law. He certainly would also have been aware of Roman penalties for those who upset the peace and went against Rome: lashings, imprisonment, and in the extreme, crucifixion.³ Rome tolerated no behavior from the Jews other than subservience. Jesus' family would have known this all too well, because the burning of a rebellious Sepphoris had taken place just four miles away from Nazareth around 4 BC.⁴ Afterward Herod Antipas had thoroughly Romanized Sepphoris and made it his capital. That same year the Roman governor of Syria, Publius Quintilius Varus, had squelched a rebellion in Palestine and crucified two thousand men who had revolted.⁵ The horrific image of crucified Jews lining thoroughfares in Galilee would not be one Jesus' family would have forgotten. Roman authority was clear to the local Jewish population in Galilee. With these matters weighing heavily on his mind, Jesus took his disciples to Caesarea Philippi in the winter before his death in order to meditate on Hebrew prophecies and consider the future of his mission.⁶

Another significant question is "were there persons from whom Jesus wished repose?" The answer is decidedly "yes." He drew the attention of Herod Antipas, and as such, that of Rome. Jesus' sermons and healings also had already gained him a

³ A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1963), 27-35.

⁴ James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 40-42.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 17. 10.9-10; *War*, 2.5.1.

⁶ Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty*, 176-77.

reputation, one which drew considerable crowds from diverse backgrounds and places. However, teachers know well how distracting a troublesome student or group of troublesome students can be. Constant disruption can also take away from the educational experience of those inclined to learn. Though the Pharisees were—for the most part—not interested in Jesus’ mission or teachings, they present an analogous situation. The scriptures reveal, in the passages before the Caesarea Philippi episode, that Jesus had to regularly respond to their nagging questions. They came up from Jerusalem and followed him into the villages where they attempted to ensnare him with legalistic probing. The Pharisees plagued him with their pedantic questions about impurity and they asked him for a sign from heaven.⁷ Though Jesus cleverly turned their queries into lessons for his followers, they were nonetheless an irritation. So it was probably also to avoid their pestering that he made the decision to go to the region of Tyre and Sidon beyond Galilee. Both Matthew and Mark are very clear on the nature of this departure, Matthew stating that Jesus “withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon,”⁸ and Mark relating in similar tenor that he “got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre.”⁹ Matthew uses a past tense form of *anachoreo* (ἀναχωρεω), which means “to withdraw” or “go away,” though it may also be construed as “return.”¹⁰ Mark uses a different word with the same connotation: the aorist form of *aperchomai* (ἀπερχομαι), meaning “go

⁷ Matthew 15:1-20, Mark 7:1-3; Matthew 16:1-4, Mark 8:11-13.

⁸ Matthew 15:21.

⁹ Mark 7:24.

¹⁰ Barbara Aland et al, *The Greek New Testament* (Munster: United Bible Societies, 1994), 58, glossary 13.

away” or “leave.”¹¹ The word usage is clear: Jesus felt he and his disciples needed a retreat and a place to think.

Did Jesus have reasons beyond utility for choosing Caesarea Philippi as a place in which to think and read the prophets? The answer is absolutely “yes.” Jesus had a definite grasp of the history and traditions of his people, and he would have known the spiritual geography of Palestine. In his prophetic frame of mind he would have recognized the spiritual significance of Caesarea Philippi. It was there that he chose to reveal his divinity. To better explain this event requires a more detailed look at the significance of Banias.

There are two scriptural sources in the New Testament which relate this episode in the ministry of Jesus. Each begins with a peripatetic line of questioning from Jesus, queries which provide both location and foreshadowing for his rationale in choosing it. The gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, contains the first: “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the son of man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’”¹² The second passage is from Mark chapter 8: “Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’”¹³

¹¹ Aland, *Greek New Testament*, 147, glossary 19.

¹² Matthew 16:13.

¹³ Mark 8: 2.

Caesarea Philippi was typical of Greco-Roman cities in the first century AD.

When Jesus and his disciples arrived, it was a bustling metropolitan center with agropastoral villages economically connected to it. Herod Philip (d. AD 34), the son of Herod the Great, ruled as Tetrarch over the regions of Gaulinitis, Trachonitis, Batanea, and Aurinitis. Baniyas was situated within the borders of Batanea.¹⁴ The client kingdom system, of which Philip was a part, would cease to be in AD 105 when the region was absorbed into the Roman province of Syria, and later in the second century, Syro-Pheonicia.¹⁵ Caesarea Philippi was thus one of the last client capitals.

Political organization at Caesarea Philippi in Jesus' day was primarily Hellenistic, which ironically also illustrates its Roman character. Cities in the Roman Near East typically did adopt Hellenic government, especially given pre-imperial traditions of Hellenism. In its existence as Caesarea Philippi—as with subsequent incarnations—Baniyas was Greek in basic city structure, conforming to the *polis* (πολις) model.¹⁶ Josephus, Matthew, and Mark provide clues regarding the municipal arrangement of the city.¹⁷ From both the aforementioned expansion by Philip and literary sources, one may infer the general size of Baniyas. Josephus clearly took Baniyas to be a city of some importance when recounting that “Philip had also built Paneas, a city at the fountains of the Jordan, he named it Caesarea.”¹⁸ The authors of the gospels expand on this subject by illustrating the urban and sub-urban aspects of Baniyas. Each passage addresses the

¹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.4.6.

¹⁵ Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC-AD 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001): 51-61; for absorption by Syria, see Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.23.1.

¹⁶ Sherwin-White. *Roman Law*, 127.

¹⁷ Luke 9 also relates these events but the provenience of Caesarea Philippi is absent from the text

¹⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.1.

mission of Jesus and his disciples in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Matthew is the most general in describing their environs, stating that “Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi.”¹⁹ Here the author uses *mere* (μερη) from the word for “part” or “region” (μερος), to suggest part of a larger district.²⁰ Mark is more specific in conveying that “Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.”²¹ The word for “villages” in this passage is from *kome* (κωμη), meaning “village” or “small town.”²² Mark’s phrasing implies a commercial network of agrarian villages connected to an urban center. While Banias may test the limits of the *polis* model, its municipal model was generally Greek.²³ Acclaimed historian of the Roman Near East Fergus Millar noted that the distinction between *polis* and village is not always a clear one, but the Hellenic model pervaded the region, and it is significant that Banias found its political and cultural expression in the rubric of the Roman Empire. Dense networks of villages in the Roman Near East typified the area, and Banias fit neatly into that scheme.²⁴

Religion was the central feature of Roman Banias, in many ways the entire reason for its existence. Certainly, Herod chose the site with that in mind, building a city around an existing shrine (to Pan). Like so many elements of the site, the religion is Greco-Roman and therefore syncretistic. The shrine to Pan is central to the religious history of the Roman city of Banias and was well-established by the time Augustus ceded the

¹⁹ Matthew 16:13.

²⁰ Aland, *Greek New Testament*, 61; glossary 113-4.

²¹ Mark 8:27.

²² Aland, *Greek New Testament*, 151; glossary 105.

²³ Sherwin-White, *Roman Law*, 133.

²⁴ Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 16-18.

region to Herod the Great in 21 BC.²⁵ As noted, Pan's country shrine—the Paneion—was actually a sizeable cave in the side of the red cliffs of Banias. Numerous aforementioned inscriptions at the site mention Pan and his priests, such as Victor²⁶ and Valerios Hispanos.²⁷ Pan's cult survived and prospered, becoming more urban and cosmopolitan with each century, only to die out by the beginning middle of the fifth century.²⁸

The imperial cult completed Caesarea Philippi's image of allegiance to Rome and her religion. Most Roman of all buildings would have been the Augusteum, which, as noted earlier, Herod the Great built, as Josephus described.

So when he [Herod] conducted Caesar to the sea, and was returned home, he built him a most beautiful temple, of the whitest stone, in Zenodorus's country, near the place called Panlure [Banias]....Herod adorned this place, which was already a very remarkable one, still further by the erection of this temple, which he dedicated to Caesar.²⁹

The Augusteum remained central to Roman religion at the site, although it was most likely converted to accommodate the addition of Heliopolitan Zeus during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.³⁰

A veritable procession of Greek and Roman deities gathered at the Court of Pan during the days of the Roman Empire. Deified emperors, Hermes, Zeus, Apollo, Maia, Nemesis, Echo, Tyche, Asclepius, and various nymphae each had shrines and temples in Banias. A vigorous and active religious life including priests and supplicants is well

²⁵ First mentioned as Paneion in Polybius, *Histories*, 16.18.2 and 28.1.3.

²⁶ *CIG* 4538b, p. 1179-80.

²⁷ *CIG* 4537, p. 1179.

²⁸ Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 41-3.

²⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 15.10.3.

³⁰ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 44.

attested in the archaeological record by a corpus of votive offerings.³¹ On their visit to the city, Jesus and his disciples would have been able to observe residents and travelers attending to the rites of their patron gods.

It is at Caesarea Philippi, in the shadow of this paganism and the symbols of the Roman Near East, where significant events in the mission of Jesus occurred, ones with pivotal importance for the church he established there. According to the gospel texts and subsequent biblical scholarship five critical events transpired at or near Caesarea Philippi: the announcement of messiahship along with Peter's confession³², the founding of the church³³, Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection³⁴, likely, the transfiguration³⁵, and the healing of a boy stricken with epilepsy.³⁶ Jesus' revelation of his messiahship and Peter's confession of that unveiling is known as the Petrine Confession and is thoroughly treated in Biblical scholarship. The passage in Matthew relating the founding of the Christian church is also well known. Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection is near enough in the context of the Petrine Confession that one may infer that the pertinent geography is indeed Caesarea Philippi. The transfiguration and the exorcism of the boy with seizures are two episodes which attract more debate, as the text does not explicitly list them as occurring at Caesarea Philippi. However, if Jesus and his disciples wintered at Caesarea Philippi, it is relatively safe to conclude that these events occurred in the general vicinity. We even have a temporal clue in the texts: six days after his

³¹ Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 27-42.

³² Matthew 16:16-17, 20; Mark 8:27-30.

³³ Matthew 16:18-19.

³⁴ Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22.

³⁵ Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-9.

³⁶ Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29.

revelatory homily, Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to a high mountain, where the transfiguration occurred.³⁷ The transfiguration, according to Christian tradition, occurred either on Mount Hermon or nearby Mount Tabor, seven miles to the south. Theologian and historian George W. E. Nickelsburg notes that Matthew's treatment of the transfiguration is reminiscent of Jewish apocryphal literature such as the Book of I Enoch (12-16) and the Testament of Levi (2-7). Both sources portray Mount Hermon as being a site connected with the heavens where supernatural events transpire, a belief thoroughly embraced by the Canaanites who considered the mountain holy as well.³⁸ So, Mount Hermon would seem to be a good fit. Consequently, Caesarea Philippi is also the most likely context for the exorcism. Caesarea Philippi, as Paneas, already had a history as a site where people sought the healing of the gods. Asclepius, Greek god of healing and medicine, also had a shrine in Pan's Court. In light of the boy's seizure condition, it is worth noting that people in ancient times believed that Pan could possess a person, causing him to convulse. Such a condition was known as *panolepsy*.³⁹ As theologian John F. Wilson observes "Whether the young man's father had brought him to Caesarea Philippi hoping to implore Pan to free him from possession cannot be known, of course. But the possibility is intriguing."⁴⁰ At any rate, the boy and his father apparently were there.

³⁷ Matthew 17:1; 9:2.

³⁸ Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter," 598; see also Nickelsburg, *I Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of I Enoch Chapters 1-36; 81-108* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 246-7.

³⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Caesarea Philippi provided Jesus with an amazing backdrop. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus states that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church.⁴¹ If his vivid imagery had an apocalyptic bent at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' studies of the Psalms and their messianic aspects may have influenced such phraseology. Psalm 16:10 reads "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol." It may have seemed to Jesus and his followers that the demonic host had gathered from the pit of Sheol at Caesarea Philippi, which boasted its myriad of Greco-Roman shrines. Jesus' words in the Matthew passage about "the gates of hell" serve as a lens into the apocalyptic significance of Caesarea Philippi as a place for his revelations.

The announcements and miracles are valuable to Christian tradition, yes, but the dark and ominous reputation of the region in Jewish tradition places Jesus' actions in proper perspective. For the Jews, first century Palestine was a place of demons who caused sickness and oppression. Christians felt similarly, as the exorcisms Matthew and Mark describe indicate.⁴² Jesus' disciples, from the pacifists to the Zealots, would have been familiar with apocryphal tales of the evil attached to Mount Hermon, which towered above Caesarea Philippi. According to the Book of Enoch, the summit of Mount Hermon was the location where the fallen angels first touched the earth upon their expulsion from heaven: "And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon."⁴³ According to that same tradition, that region saw the beginning of the end for antediluvian humanity. The angels, under the leadership of

⁴¹ Matthew 16:18.

⁴² Matthew 17: 14-20; Mark 9:14-29.

⁴³ I Enoch 6:6; see also I Enoch 6-8.

Semyaza and Azazel, instructed men in warcraft, medicine, magic, and other arts, in exchange for sexual access to women. The products of these unions were the Nephilim, the giants mentioned in Genesis, and elsewhere in the Old Testament.⁴⁴ The corruption of humanity began at Mount Hermon and spread first in the region of Caesarea Philippi. In fact, in Hebrew “Hermon,” can mean “cursed,” “anathema,” “secluded,” “utterly slay,” and perhaps most interestingly, “devoted to religion (for purposes of destruction),” a testimony to the original pact to misguide humans made amongst the fallen angels.⁴⁵

When Jesus spoke of the church, saying “and the gates of hell will not prevail against it,” his disciples understood the gravity of his statement. Some scholars have speculated that Jesus utilized the actual cave of Pan as a backdrop when he referred to the “gates of hell, and that the “rock” he indicated was not Peter but a large rock in front of the cave.”⁴⁶ While this scenario is possible, given the prophetic meditations of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi and his perception that his death was immanent, the circumstances probably necessitated a dramatic oration rather than simply spitting in the face of Greco-Roman paganism. Mount Hermon, with its reputation as ground zero for the tumult of fallen angels, would have been, to Jesus’ Jewish disciples a far starker image. Jesus was, in effect, shaking his fist in the face of forces more sinister, more powerful, and more dangerous than those of Rome: the devils who defied Yahweh and who set themselves

⁴⁴ Genesis 6; Numbers 13:33; I Enoch 7-8.

⁴⁵ James Strong, *Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon*, 2763-64; Matthew Black, James C. Vanderkam, and Otto Neugebauer, *The Book of Enoch, or, 1 Enoch: A New English Edition With Commentary and Textual Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 122.

⁴⁶ Kelley Coblenz Bautch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17-19: “No One Has Seen What I Have Seen”* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 63; Watson, “The Religious History of Baniyas and its Contribution to an Understanding of the Petrine Confession,” 87; George W. E. Nicklesburg, “Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 (December 1981): 598; Frank S. De Hass, *Recent Travel and Exploration in Bible Land* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1890), 273.

against humanity. Jesus established the church and confirmed his messiahship in the very maw of “the gates of hell.”

There are interesting undertones to this righteous indignation. For instance, it is also reasonable to conclude that the shrine of Pan had significance in light of the events on Mount Hermon. As aforementioned, Azazel, who is sometimes conflated with Semyaza, led the rebellious angels, taught men to make weapons, women to use cosmetics, and humanity to learn the art of witchcraft—essentially “all sin” as the Book of Enoch phrases it.⁴⁷ Azazel is most often associated with goats, especially the scapegoat in the Jewish atonement sacrifice.⁴⁸ One goat was given to Yahweh and another to Azazel, the scapegoat for all sins. Azazel, with his goat characteristics is connected to the *seirim*, a species of goat demons which the Israelites also worshipped.⁴⁹ Indeed, Azazel is likely another Near Eastern incarnation of a goat deity, whose identity is now lost to us. Clues remain in the Semitic such as the Akkadian *uz* or *az*, meaning “goat.”⁵⁰ It is also worth noting that goat sacrifices on the part of the Israelites (hurled over a cliff as atonement and as pagan offering to *seirim*) and as conducted by later occupants of Banias (presented in the cave as offerings) bear eerie resemblance to the very fate of Azazel. In The Book of Enoch, the angel Raphael carries out God’s judgment on Azazel:

⁴⁷ 1 Enoch 8:1, 9:6, 10:4-6.

⁴⁸ Leviticus 16:8-10.

⁴⁹ Leviticus 17:1-7, this passage follows the description of the goat for Azazel; see also 2 Chronicles 11:15, 2 Kings 23:8, and Isaiah 13:21; 34:14.

⁵⁰ A. H. Sayce, *The Hibbert Lectures 1887: Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger, 2004), 285; John M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger, 2004): 320-21.; Uz was of course an ancient Babylonian deity

And again the Lord said to Raphael: “Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light.”⁵¹

The mythical Dudael and its location are in dispute; however there is an undeniable similarity between these goat sacrifices and Yahweh’s dispatching of Azazel into “an opening in the desert” to be covered in darkness. This suggests a point of origin for the Baniyas cult far older than the Hellenistic period. The cave itself shows signs of recycling by the adherents of successive religions, beginning with that of the Canaanites.⁵² At any rate, it is more plausible that Baal and Azazel were simply the earlier incarnations of the fertility god Pan, as discussed above. Such reasoning fits in the schema of first century AD Jewish apocalyptic thought, especially given the traditions associated with Mount Hermon and the proximity of the towering mountains to Caesarea Philippi and its Cave of Pan.

Jesus’ visit to Baniyas may also relate to the ancient kingdom of Bashan. Batanea, the very portion of Philip’s tetrarchy in which Baniyas is situated, is in fact the Hellenized form of “Bashan.”⁵³ Batanea was a post-exilic division of the old kingdom, one part of ancient Bashan.⁵⁴ Bashan spanned the fertile lands between Mount Hermon in the north and Gilead in the south, primarily on the east side of the Jordan River. Important to the region’s past is a mighty king, whom the Old Testament writers depicted as one of the

⁵¹ 1 Enoch 10: 4-5.

⁵² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 2; 187 fn 6-7.

⁵³ Emil Shurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ* (New York: Scribner, 1891), 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

remnant giants of the antediluvian world. The great king's name was Og of Bashan. Upon entering Canaan, the Israelites engaged Og and his army at the Battle of Edrei, and defeated them.⁵⁵ The author of Deuteronomy makes an interesting closing statement about Og in the last verse of chapter three: "Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaites. His bed was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide. It is still in Rabbah of the Amorites."⁵⁶ Og is here described as one of the last of the Rephaim, who occupied the east bank of the Jordan. The Rephaim were a species of giants descended from the pre-flood stock, who were renowned for their evil and great size, reaching heights of up to fifteen feet according to Jewish lore and tradition.⁵⁷ *The Zohar*, though a much later document, actually relates that "After the deluge the souls of the antediluvians incarnated in five different races or nations, viz., the Nephilim (fallen or degraded), Giborim (mighty ones), Anakim (tall ones), Rephaim (the giants), and Amalekim (Amalekites)."⁵⁸ The Talmud is based on older oral traditions of the Jews and preserves the notion that Og survived the flood and may have done so by clinging to the ark.⁵⁹ Therefore, he—and by proxy his territory—was a part of the antediluvian world and the corruptive force behind humanity's downfall. Jesus, offering a doctrine of redemption to humanity, chose Og's old kingdom, thereby alluding to the tradition of Og's defeat at the hands of the Hebrews as they entered Canaan. The Messiah had to

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 3:1-10; see also Numbers 21:33 and 32:33.

⁵⁶ Deuteronomy 3:11.

⁵⁷ The Book of Jubilees 29: 9-11; Charles Filmore, *Mysteries of Genesis* (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1936), 131; Nurho de Manhar, *The Zohar: Bereshith to Lekh Lekha* (New York: Theosophical Publishing, 1914), 129.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Joseph Barclay, *The Talmud* (London: John Murray, 1878): 23; Heinrich Ewald and Georg Heinrich August von Ewald, *The History of Israel* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1883): 228.

return to this location in order to justify his ministry, just as Moses had led the Hebrews out of Egypt into Canaan.⁶⁰ Jesus would have led his disciples back to the region of Sihon and Og in order to find spiritual freedom because this land had apocalyptic significance for them.

Of course, there was another tradition associated with the region which made Jesus' words especially potent. It has already been noted that Caesarea Philippi, only a few miles east of Dan, was in the region once allotted to that tribe. The geographical significance in this case lies with the apostasy of Dan as recorded in the Old Testament. The book of Judges relates the activities of the tribe and its abandonment of the covenant with Yahweh. Judges 19 recounts the establishment of their capital at the expense of the defenseless citizens of Laish:

Then they took what Micah had made, and his priest, and went on to Laish, against a peaceful and unsuspecting people. They attacked them with the sword and burned down their city. There was no one to rescue them because they lived a long way from Sidon and had no relationship with anyone else. The city was in a valley near Beth Rehob. The Danites rebuilt the city and settled there. They named it Dan after their forefather Dan, who was born to Israel—though the city used to be called Laish. There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. They continued to use the idols Micah had made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh.⁶¹

It is relatively easy to see how the apostasy tied to this very land could have a very emotional impact on the disciples. Jesus masterfully utilized the knowledge of Dan's rebellion against Yahweh and Dan's reputation for adopting Canaanite religion as another

⁶⁰ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Doctrine of Last Things: Jewish and Christian* (London: John Murray, 1908), 133; see also Joshua 2; Hosea 2.

⁶¹ Judges 18:27-31.

stark backdrop for his message against the devil. It is also plausible that the memory of the Assyrian conquest of Israel and the removal of Dan functioned as subtext in Jesus' assertions, a reminder that those who rebelled or stood against Yahweh would face his justice.⁶² Even Micah's idol, which led directly to the Dan's embrace of Canaanite religion, could be construed as a footnote to the homilies of Jesus at Caesarea Philippi.⁶³ Such ideas had implications for all humanity, but also could be aptly applied to Rome and her occupation of Judea.

If Jesus' teachings became increasingly prophetic and apocalyptic, as scholars such as James Tabor have posited, then it is likely that his interpretation of Jewish scriptures would have followed suit—not simply those authored by the prophets, but all books.⁶⁴ Hence, passages pertaining to the ancient frontier province of Dan, where Caesarea Philippi lay, could only add to the fiery lessons Jesus imparted there to his disciples. “Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that its rider tumbles backwards,” says Genesis 49:1. Jesus was fond of calling the Pharisees a “brood of vipers,” an appellation he no doubt learned from his cousin and mentor John, who also used it.⁶⁵ Jesus employs this imagery and phrasing after entering Jerusalem, as well as in the prelude to his sermon on the end of the age, where he once again called the Pharisees “snakes” and a “brood of vipers.”⁶⁶ It is

⁶² Beginning in 722 BC; 2 Kings 15.

⁶³ Judges 17-18.

⁶⁴ James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 171-86.

⁶⁵ Matthew 3:7; 12:34; 23:33.

⁶⁶ Matthew 23:33.

reasonable to conclude that these words had more powerful and symbolic meaning in the environs of Caesarea Philippi than they had carried before Jesus and his disciples visited.

As Jesus asserted his messiahship and established his church in the shadow of Mount Hermon, it is apparent that he was using a degree of theatricality (albeit with dire import). The prediction of his own suffering and death only added to the sense of historical gravity. Its impact on the disciples is made clear in Peter's disbelief: "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'"⁶⁷ Shock and confusion at this turn of events would have made for a long journey back to Judea. Jesus' revelations at Caesarea Philippi, therefore, were meant to undergird the apocalyptic significance of his mission, not just for Israel, but—as Jesus saw it—for all peoples of the world.

After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus may have felt that his message of the redemption of Israel and the end of its oppression needed invigoration. The psychological and emotional strain of John's loss clearly affected the physical course of Jesus' travels and the execution of his mission. However, Jesus did not show signs of faltering commitment to the prophetic enterprise. He chose Caesarea Philippi, in the region of the tribe of Dan, a symbol of Greco-Roman paganism, but more importantly, of rebellion against Yahweh and the corruption of humanity. Caesarea Philippi was not only a safe haven or retreat, but also a carefully selected venue in which Jesus could deliver his most important teachings and revelations. There, at the northern border of ancient Israel, four miles east of Dan, Jesus clarified the instruction of the previous two

⁶⁷ Matthew 16:22; see also Mark 8: 32.

years and set an ominous tone for the remainder of his life. He made clear his war against the enemies of Yahweh, while defying Roman oppression and largesse, and conveyed the dire and eternal significance of the future assemblies of his followers.

As evident as the Caesarea Philippi episode's significance may be theologically and historically, it is still easy and tempting to regard it just one more stop during Jesus' ministry. In a number of respects this is simply not the case. Its socio-political characteristics prove that Caesarea Philippi was a Greco-Roman *polis*, not a small merchant town or Jewish fishing village. Jesus must have deliberately selected Caesarea Philippi because its location, history, and contemporary condition all could serve as a dramatic setting for his messianic revelations. The city was much more than a convenient refuge, as some scholars have argued. I contend that Jesus' decision and his use of the site are much more spiritually and historically significant than previously surmised.

The relatively quiet circumstances of Jesus' revelation should not detract from the import of its message and setting. Although he admitted his status as messiah to his disciples, the responsibility to disseminate that message fell upon their shoulders and those of their students. Jesus spoke words at Caesarea Philippi that would reach beyond first-century AD Palestine. They were powerful because he made bold statements in opposition to forces seen and unseen that he and other contemporary Jews considered Satanic. On the one hand, Rome sought to subjugate the region and its people. The other opponents, though more abstract, were no less real to Jesus and his disciples: the demonic powers in direct conflict with Yahweh, who sought to control and oppress

humanity. Caesarea Philippi was the point of no return for Jesus and the geographical and religious fulcrum for his ministry.

Jesus planted the seeds for the Christian community at Banias, assuming that his preaching there produced its first converts to the faith. However, the known identities of the earliest Christians in the city are few, one being a martyr named Levi who died at Banias sometime during the first century AD.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Banias must have had a growing Christian element. The lens through which one must view this world is orthodoxy. All extant sources describing later Christian life at Banias are of orthodox production. Yet, despite the bias of these authors, there emerges a far from monolithic picture of diverse forms of Christianity at Banias. It is probably better to think of the Christian community in terms of “Christianities.” As such, Banias was a microcosm of the rest of the eastern Mediterranean world where myriad Christian sects abounded.

Quite naturally, the early Christian elements in Banias were connected to Jewish society. One was the Ebionites, some of whose members were located in Banias by Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis (c.315-403). They were originally followers of Jesus from Jerusalem. They continued to observe Jewish law and tradition, accepting Jesus as messiah, adopting his apocalyptic message, and practicing asceticism.⁶⁹ The Ebionites also believed that Jesus was absolutely human, “born of the seed of a man, Joseph.”⁷⁰ Epiphanius determined that the Ebionites were connected with a group of Christians who

⁶⁸ *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1927), 261.

⁶⁹ James Hastings, *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1915), 319.

⁷⁰ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.3, 1.

left Jerusalem during the Jewish-Roman war. This group moved to Pella, perhaps somewhere in the Decapolis, and then to Bashanitis, and eventually diffused into other groups.⁷¹ He distinctly identifies the leader of one of these branches, for whom he has no love, stating that “Ebion too preached in Asia and Rome, but the roots of these thorny weeds come mostly from Nabataea and Baniyas, Moabitis, and Cocabe in Bashanitis beyond Adrai—in Cyprus as well.”⁷² Whatever orthodoxy may have to say about the Ebionites, it is clear that they had a presence in Baniyas proper and its region during the first century AD.

Epiphanius mentions yet another group of Christians, who had no doubt been active in the Baniyas region by the time he was writing in the fourth century, stating that “I have been told that they originally came from Nabataea, Itureaea, Moab, and Arielis,”⁷³ and also firmly ensconced in the Baniyas region (Iturea).⁷⁴ The Sampsaeans, or Elkesaites, or Ossenes also had traditional connections with Jewish theology. In Eusebius’ *History of the Church*, he describes the Elkesaites as a heresy that arose in the Transjordan and Arabia, with their own canon of scriptures and with revelation that “fell from heaven” to them. They claimed that by reading this revelation they could attain true salvation.⁷⁵ Epiphanius describes the Elkesaites as a splinter group of the Ebionites, so named for the alleged founder and prophet, Elxai (Elkesai).⁷⁶

⁷¹ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 29. 7, 7-8; see also Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3.5, Eusebius mentions this larger group of Jerusalem Christians and their flight from Jerusalem, but does not necessarily equate them with the Ebionites themselves.

⁷² Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30.18, 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19. 1, 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 53. 1,1.

⁷⁵ Eusebius, *History of the Church* 6.37-8.

⁷⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30. 3, 1.

The Nazoraeans were another Christian sect prominent in the Baniyas region. As with the Ebionites and Elkesaites, Epiphanius locates them generally in Coele-Syria and mentions a specific group of Nazoreans at Cocabe in Bashanitis, east of Baniyas.⁷⁷ He says that they did not “term themselves Christians—but ‘Nazoraeans,’ from the place name ‘Nazareth.’”⁷⁸ The account states they are educated in Hebrew law and religion, utilize parts of the Old and New Testaments, practice Jewish rites, and accept Jesus as the messiah.⁷⁹ The term “Nazoraean” has the linguistic connotation of an individual from Galilee, the northern reaches of which contain Baniyas and its region.⁸⁰ In consequence, this notion supports the historicity of Epiphanius’ account of the Nazoraeans and their presence in the Baniyas region.

It is evident that this region of the Levant had numerous varieties of Christianity during Late Antiquity. The diverse groups associated with the Baniyas region are part of the larger history of Syrian and northern Palestinian Christianity. Indeed, sects such as the Ebionites and Elkesaites were present in Syria during Late Antiquity.⁸¹ They were deeply rooted in Jewish tradition and the Hebrew language. Along with the Nazoraeans these sects lend credence to the existence of a version of the gospel of Matthew written in Hebrew. Jerome knew of the presence of just such a book in Caesarea Maritima, and he

⁷⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 29.7, 7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.7, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.7,2, and 4.

⁸⁰ Nathaniel Schmidt, “The New Jesus Myth and Its Ethical Value,” *International Journal of Ethics* 22 (October 1911), 26; Edmund Montgomery, “Revelation of Present Experience,” *The Monist* 21 (July 1911): 419.

⁸¹ James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Part 9* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger, 2003), 139-45, 261-9.

knew that the Nazoraeans of Boeria in northern Syria used it, because he had occasion to copy it.

Matthew, also called Levi, apostle and aforesaid publican, composed a gospel of Christ at first published in Judea in Hebrew for the sake of those of the circumcision who believed, but this was afterwards translated into Greek, though by what author is uncertain. The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it. In this it is to be noted that wherever the Evangelist, whether on his own account or in the person of our Lord the Saviour quotes the testimony of the Old Testament he does not follow the authority of the translators of the Septuagint but the Hebrew.⁸²

The ties with Jewish tradition and the predilection for utilizing the Hebrew text instead of the *Septuagint*, not to mention these groups' location in the Baniyas region, suggest a possible proclivity for mysticism and Jewish apocalypticism. As such, their practices and beliefs may be much closer to those of Jesus and his disciples, who themselves probably came from a similar apocalyptic tradition. It is evident that the Ebionites, Elkesaites, and Nazoraeans preserved the link between Jewish tradition and Christianity.

However, the earliest Baniyas and Syrian Christians did not live in a vacuum. It is quite probable that their ideas affected another major religion of Late Antiquity: Manichaeism. This relationship begins with an apostle from Baniyas, one Addai, or Addaeus. We learn from The Book of the Bee that "Addai, from Paneas, preached in Edessa and Mesopotamia in the days of Abhgar the king; he built a church in Edessa. Herod, son of Abhgar, slew him in the fortress of Aggel, or Engîl, north of Amid. He was

⁸² Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 3.

buried either in Edessa or Rome.”⁸³ Addai would have been living in the first century AD, carrying out his mission during the middle and end of that period. Though the text ascribed to him is from the fifth century, it certainly has earlier roots, as he is among the first generation of apostles.⁸⁴ The Teaching of Addaeus the Apostle is persuasive in connecting Addai with the earliest of these Jewish-Christian groups, and the subsequent spread of that message to Syria.

And those who were Hebrews, and knew only the Hebrew tongue in which they were born, behold today speak in all languages, that those who are far off, as those who are nigh, might hear and believe that He is the same, who confounded the tongues of the impious in this district, which lies before us; He it is who to day teaches through us the faith of truth and verity, by humble and wretched men, who were from Galilee of Palestine. For I also, whom ye see, am from Paneas, from where the river Jordan goes forth. And I was chosen, with my companions, to be a preacher of this Gospel, by which, behold, the regions everywhere resound with the glorious name of the adorable Christ.⁸⁵

Addai’s connection with Baniyas suggests he grasped the imagery and apocalyptic import of Christ’s message presented there. Would the historical Addai have been a convert from Jesus’ Galilean mission? At any rate, Addai is said to have travelled on a mission to Edessa on orders from Jesus, bringing that apocalyptic tradition and linking farther flung regions of Syria and Mesopotamia with the Baniyas district and local Christians.

The connection between Baniyas’ Ebionites, Elkesaites, and Nazoraeans, and the Manichaeism of the East is the Book of the Giants, a piece of Jewish apocalyptic literature. It has already been seen that Jesus and his disciples, as well as first century

⁸³ *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, trans. Wallis Budge, 257-8.

⁸⁴ Eusebius records a version of this story, *History of the Church* 1.13.

⁸⁵ *The Doctrine of Addai the Apostle*, trans. George Phillips (London: Trubner and Company, 1876), 21.

AD Jews, were probably familiar with such works. Both the New Testament and the writings of early church fathers and apologists relate that the ideas contained in such pseudepigraphal works were considered doctrinal and near-canonical by early Christians, as evinced by the not infrequent references to the antediluvian world, the fallen angels, and their progeny the giant Nephilim.⁸⁶ Addai's mission and the growing lines of religious communication between southern Syria and Mesopotamia laid the foundation for the exchange of ideas and literature. The Book of the Giants became important to the earliest Manichaeans. This should come as little surprise, especially since the first Christians with which the founder of Manichaeism—Mani—had any dealings were in fact Elkesaites. Born in Babylon in 216, Mani actually lived with a group of Elkesaites, his own father being a devotee of their rites and beliefs.⁸⁷ Though he eventually left the group, their influence on Manichaeism is certainly seen in the adoption of The Book of the Giants. This text circulated widely amongst the Manichaeans who produced their own copies and versions.⁸⁸ The setting for The Book of the Giants is, of course, the vicinity of Mount Hermon, which includes Banias. Therefore, the traditions of Jews and Christians at Banias directly affected the formation of portions of Manichaean doctrine.

While infant Christianity underwent theological transformations in the region, Banias, like other cities in the Empire, became a setting for competing religious ideas.

⁸⁶ Matthew 24:36-39; Jude; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 140-1; Justin Martyr, *2 Apology* 5; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.16, 27, 36; Athenagoras, *The Plea for the Christians* 24; Tertullian, *Apology* 22, 39; Tertullian, *On Women and Fallen Angels* 1-2; Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.92; Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 2.14-15, 7.24.

⁸⁷ A. F. J. Klijn and G. J. Reinink, "Elchasai and Mani," *Vigiliae Christianae* 28.4 (December 1974): 1; Dale T. Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Volume I* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 126.

⁸⁸ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Book of Giants from Qumran: Texts, Translation, and Commentary* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), vii, xvi, 11-12, 20.

Although paganism maintained supremacy in the early period, Christianity was gaining social and political clout. A heated public debate ensued between pagan and Christian apologists. Baniyas was not exempt from the conflict. A resurgence of the cult of Pan in the early third century is evinced by the coins minted in 220 and thereafter, whose themes increasingly include Pan.⁸⁹ As previously noted, the third century is also a time of increased activity at the Court of Pan. Add to this revival a host of peripatetic Neo-Platonists and pagan thinkers, and the fledgling Christian religion had much with which to contend. Endeavors to universalize Pan into the great “all” attempt to unify pagans against the emerging Christianity. Likewise, Christian thinkers—many of them trained in the same schools as pagan apologists—quickly presented their counter-arguments. As a result, traditions of colorful personalities persisted that illustrate the tensions between pagans and Christians in the district.

The written traditions most applicable to Baniyas concerning this ongoing battle come from the Christian Eusebius (c. 263-339) and from the Neoplatonists Porphyry (c. 234-305) and Iamblichus (245-325). Porphyry was a Phoenician, having been born in the region of Tyre around AD 233.⁹⁰ Jerome (c. 347-420) and John Chrysostom (347-407) specify that he was born in Batanea, the very region in which Baniyas is situated.⁹¹ It is significant that in John Chrysostom’s sermon on 1 Corinthians, he cites the Baniyas pericope in Matthew 16 just before referring to Porphyry as “he of Batanea,” intoning

⁸⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 87.

⁹⁰ Porphyry, *Introduction*, trans. Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), ix-x; *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects, and Doctrine during the First Eight Centuries, Volume 4* (London: John Murray, 1887), 440.

⁹¹ Jerome, *Preface to Commentary on Galatians*; John Chrysostom, *Homily on 1 Corinthians* 6.6.

How did “the gates of hell” not “prevail” against “the Church?” How is Christ always “with us?” For had He not been “with us,” the Church would not have been victorious. How was the Gospel spread abroad in every part of the world?⁹²

In either case—Tyre or Batanea especially—Porphyry was well acquainted with the Shrine of Pan and the temples at Baniyas. His writings had ramifications for all pagans and, because of his writings about Pan, for Baniyas as well. Porphyry echoed the popular sentiment of the day contending that the Greeks “made Pan the symbol of the universe, and gave him his horns as symbols of sun and moon, and the fawn skin as emblem of the stars in heaven, or of the variety of the universe.”⁹³ It is difficult to imagine that Baniyas would not have come to his mind in writing this line.

Eusebius is quick to rebut Porphyry’s statements, and even to refute his conclusions regarding Pan. While Porphyry is content call Pan a good spirit, albeit with frightful tendencies, Eusebius has the following to say about Porphyry and Pan:

Now some were shown to be servants of certain gods, as Pan of Dionysos: and this has been made clear by Apollo of Branchidae in the following verses. For nine persons were found dead; and when the inhabitants of the country district inquired the cause, the god made answer:⁹⁴

"Lo! where the golden-horned Pan
In sturdy Dionysos' train
Leaps o'er the mountains' wooded slopes!
His right hand holds a shepherd's staff,
His left a smooth shrill-breathing pipe,
That charms the gentle wood-nymph's soul.
But at the sound of that strange song
Each startled woodsman dropped his axe,
And all in frozen terror gazed
Upon the Daemon's frantic course.

⁹² John Chrysostom, *Homily on 1 Corinthians* 6.6.

⁹³ Porphyry *On Images*, trans. Edward Hamilton Gifford, Fragment 9.

⁹⁴ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 5.6.

Death's icy hand had seized them all,
Had not the huntress Artemis
In anger stayed his furious might.
To her address thy prayer for aid."⁹⁵

Have you now heard how Apollo of Branchidae described both the figure and the deeds of the daemon whom Porphyry calls good? See then also the noble achievements of the rest, for the sake of which forsaken they abandoned their life in heaven, and chose the company of men instead.⁹⁶

Eusebius offers a counter argument against Pan here. He states that Pan could not be good if he was responsible for people's deaths. Eusebius views Porphyry's Pan as an evil demon.

Porphyry's protégé Iamblichus was silent, not surprisingly, concerning Eusebius' incrimination of Pan. He was born of a noble family in Chalcis in Coele-Syria, north of Banias in the Bekaa Valley, near Baalbek.⁹⁷ Though the date of his birth is a matter of some debate, most scholars now situate it no later than around AD 240.⁹⁸ He advocated theurgy over theology and extolled the virtue of pagan ritual.⁹⁹ Iamblichus considered himself a priest in the fashion of the Egyptians who influenced Greek religion. With regard to Banias, he referred to such things as oracles, dream interpretation, and Pan and the Nymphs.¹⁰⁰ In one passage he refers to the frenzied states and ecstasy for which Pan is often responsible:

⁹⁵ Porphyry, *Of the Philosophy to be derived from Oracles*, cited in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 5.6.

⁹⁶ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 5.6.

⁹⁷ William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology, Volume 2* (London: John Murray, 1880), 549.

⁹⁸ Iamblichus, *Iamblichus on the Mysteries* (trans. Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell) (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), xviii-xix.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, xx-xxi.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

This form of possession has a life-engendering and fulfilling power, in which respect it differs completely from every other form of frenzy. Continuing thus in the order of what comes next in the present discourse, and turning to isolate suitably the inspirations of Pan and the nymphs and their other differences in regard to the powers of the gods involved, we shall...explain why they frisk about and spend time in the mountains, why some of them appear bound, and some are honoured with sacrifices.¹⁰¹

He continues:

Spirits from the gods, arousing humans and causing them to burst into Bacchic frenzy, drive out all other human and natural activity.¹⁰²

It is clear that Iamblichus was familiar with the rites of Pan and the associated beliefs. From his home situated just to the north of Baniyas, Iamblichus would have had ample opportunity to visit Baniyas, and perhaps even take part in those rites. As a pagan apologist, he too might have been a source of tension for Christians in the area.

Eusebius is once again a valuable source in the study of religions at Baniyas. He recorded a number of interesting occurrences exemplifying the clash between paganism and Christianity. A Christian named Astyrius is but the first of several. Astyrius was a highly respected Roman senator from Caesarea Maritima, known for his boldness in the faith. He states the following:

At Caesarea Philippi, which the Phoenicians call Paneas, springs are shown at the foot of the Mountain Panias, out of which the Jordan flows. They say that on a certain feast day, a victim was thrown in, and that through the power of the demon it marvelously disappeared and that which happened was a famous wonder to those who were present. Astyrius was once there when these things were done, and seeing the multitude astonished at the affair, he pitied their delusion; and looking up to heaven he supplicated the God over all through Christ, that he would rebuke the demon who deceived the people, and bring the men's delusion to an end. And they say that when he had prayed thus, immediately the

¹⁰¹ Iamblichus, *Iamblichus on the Mysteries*, 143.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 145.

sacrifice floated on the surface of the fountain. And thus the miracle departed; and no wonder was ever afterward performed at the place.¹⁰³

The passage describes a sacrifice in the stream, quite probably to Pan. This account illustrates the survival of paganism and its continued place in popular culture. The hero, Astyrius, however takes pity on the devotees and exorcises the shrine. The miracle apparently stopped the demon from accepting the sacrifice. Clearly, Eusebius' account, while biased, depicts the triumph of Christianity over paganism in the late third and early fourth centuries

The passage following the Astyrius encounter is equally intriguing, and within it we find yet two more Christian traditions at Baniyas: the woman with an issue of blood and the statue of Christ. Eusebius writes:

1. Since I have mentioned this city I do not think it proper to omit an account which is worthy of record for posterity. For they say that the woman with an issue of blood, who, as we learn from the sacred Gospel, received from our Saviour deliverance from her affliction, came from this place, and that her house is shown in the city, and that remarkable memorials of the kindness of the Saviour to her remain there.
2. For there stands upon an elevated stone, by the gates of her house, a brazen image of a woman kneeling, with her hands stretched out, as if she were praying. Opposite this is another upright image of a man, made of the same material, clothed decently in a double cloak, and extending his hand toward the woman. At his feet, beside the statue itself, is a certain strange plant, which climbs up to the hem of the brazen cloak, and is a remedy for all kinds of diseases.
3. They say that this statue is an image of Jesus. It has remained to our day, so that we ourselves also saw it when we were staying in the city.
4. Nor is it strange that those of the Gentiles who, of old, were benefited by our Saviour, should have done such things, since we have learned also that the likenesses of his apostles Paul and Peter, and of Christ himself, are preserved in paintings, the ancients being accustomed, as it is likely,

¹⁰³ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 7.17.

according to a habit of the Gentiles, to pay this kind of honor indiscriminately to those regarded by them as deliverers.¹⁰⁴

Eusebius is obviously connecting this set of statues with the woman whom Jesus healed in Matthew 9:20-22 and Mark 5:24-9. Though the bronze statue cannot be substantiated archaeologically, the tradition was perpetuated in other works, as the chapter on Byzantine Baniyas will illustrate. More curious still is the strange medicinal herb allegedly growing at the foot of the statue of Jesus. Again, the identity of such a plant is not known, however, herbal remedies and folk medicine were part of life in the ancient Golan, and since Baniyas was a place where people came for healing by such deities as Pan and Aesclepios, these traditions should come as no surprise.

The existence of a Christian community at Baniyas implies that church buildings stood at the site at one time. Evidence of such a structure may reside on the Lateran Sarcophagus, a decorative coffin dating to the fourth century. The sarcophagus was discovered in 1591 under the floor of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Scenes from the Bible, cut in bas-relief, adorn the panels of the sarcophagus, the right side of which depicts a woman kneeling at Christ's feet and reaching out to him with her hand. His arm is extended touching the head of the woman. Behind the two are a series of structures, which may be churches or houses. Excavations at Baniyas have uncovered a structure that was a very early church, the link between the images of the Lateran Sarcophagus are reminiscent of the woman with the issue of blood, and the statues which commemorated her healing. The architecture depicted on the panel may provide some clue as to the

¹⁰⁴ Eusebius, *History of the Church* 7.18.

appearance of the Banias church(es). However, scholars admit that the connection is an exercise in historical speculation.¹⁰⁵



18. Ruins of fourth century basilica

Once again, Banias is a microcosm of issues which concern the entire empire. The region starkly illustrates the polemical and apologetic war between paganism and Christianity which was taking place in Late Antiquity. As it had been for pagans, Banias was a place of revelation and mysticism for early Christians. The sects that called the Banias region home seem to have been, for the most part, on the fringes of what would become orthodoxy. Like Jesus and his followers, the earliest Christians at Banias occupied the religious margins. Banias' proclivity for attracting religious groups that embraced prophecy, healing, and mysticism is evident for early Christians. It remained sacred space because of Jesus' legacy in Banias and because of an older pre-Christian reputation as a place in which one communed with the divine.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 93-7.



19. Excavated water basin from basilica ruins

CHAPTER 7

Byzantine Baniyas: Religion and Change in the City of Pan, 300-632

The Roman Empire underwent significant changes during the third and fourth centuries. With the advent of Diocletian (c.244-311), the emperors spent an increasing amount of their time in the east, particularly in Asia Minor. With the empire spread across three continents around the Mediterranean basin, he established four co-ruling emperors to manage its affairs. By the time Constantine (c. 272-337) became emperor in 306, the east had begun its transformation into the Byzantine Empire. Christianity gained recognition and finally authority and influence under Constantine, who forever changed Roman culture by moving the imperial seat to Constantinople in 330. Paganism—especially that species associated with high culture—had long been hostile toward the new faith. While still in the majority, pagans and their ideas began to lose dominance in the public sphere of religion in many regions during the fourth century.

By the beginning of the fifth century, the city and region of Baniyas had begun to change in rather significant ways, particularly with regard to religion. The third and fourth centuries had been a time of religious pluralism when Christians, Jews, and pagans resided and worshipped in Baniyas. Constantinople increasingly asserted her authority over Baniyas under the auspices of the Byzantine Empire. Paganism, however, continued to linger, and those embers would smolder well into the sixth century. Baniyas in the middle of the sixth century was part of this venue of shifting religious traditions.

Reconstructing the religious history of Baniyas—let alone its social and political history—during the period from AD 300 to 632 is nothing short of daunting. The period from 540 to 632 is especially problematic as few sources exist. The documents at the

historian's disposal become increasingly scarce. Epigraphy disappears: the latest local inscription dates from 363 during Julian's reign (361-363).¹ The most helpful sources are archaeological and folkloric. Text by itself produces an incomplete narrative of Banias at this time, but the synthetic approach renders a different and in places more vibrant account. As such, the aim of this chapter is to create an ancient ethnography, or even religious ethnohistory. The latter term may be more accurate as my aim is to reconstitute a specific sacred space and its residents, of which little is now known. At any rate, part of the methodology is of necessity an ancient anthropology, a study of a population—a society—nominally known to scholars, where only a few people are willing to speak as informants. Microhistorical approaches also serve well here, as what few sources are available deal with a specific region, that of Banias.

The Church father Eusebius adequately captures the early fourth-century religious pluralism of Banias. As noted above in the account of a Roman senator and Christian named Astyrius, Eusebius states:

Among these is also the following wonder. At Caesarea Philippi, which the Phoenicians call Paneas, springs are shown at the foot of the Mountain Panias, out of which the Jordan flows. They say that on a certain feast day, a victim was thrown in, and that through the power of the demon it marvelously disappeared and that which happened was a famous wonder to those who were present. Astyrius was once there when these things were done, and seeing the multitude astonished at the affair, he pitied their delusion; and looking up to heaven he supplicated the God over all through Christ, that he would rebuke the demon who deceived the people, and bring the men's delusion to an end. And they say that when he had prayed thus, immediately the sacrifice floated on the surface of the fountain. And thus the miracle departed; and no wonder was ever afterward performed at the place.²

¹ G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1978), 123-24, notes a rededication of the temple of Zeus; see also Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 102.

² Eusebius, *History of the Church*, 17.

Although Eusebius is writing with a clear bias, this brief episode illustrates the religious variety present at Banias and the competition between religions.

Christianity had been present at Banias since the mid-first century AD. Jesus and his disciples stopped there in the winter before his death, and it was at Banias that he admitted messiahship.³ An orthodox church and bishopric existed there in the early fourth century, for a bishop of Banias, one Philokalos of Paneados, is noted as being present at the Council of Nicea in 325.⁴ Christians at Banias must have long since associated themselves with the patriarchate of Antioch and the archbishop of Tyre. Bishop Barachus of Paneas attended the Council of Constantinople in 381;⁵ and Bishop Olympios of Paneas attended the Council of Chalcedon in 451.⁶ By the fifth century, the Christians were well-established in Banias. They would have relished the demise of paganism as a public form of religion. The legislation of Theodosius I, particularly the Edict of 391 which ordered the closing of temples, was the beginning of the end for classical paganism. The entire pagan priesthood became prohibited under the new laws.⁷ These codes certainly had repercussions for the pagans of Banias.

Christianity had found itself in harsh competition with other forms of monotheism, namely pagan variations. Pagan monotheism had begun to appear in the

³ Matthew 16, Mark 8.

⁴ *Patrum Nicaenorum Latine, Graece, Coptice, Syriace, Arabice, Armeniace, Volume 2* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubneri, 1898), 14.

⁵ B.H. Cooper (trans.), *Syriac Miscellanies: or Extracts Relating to the First and Second General Councils, and Various Other Quotations, Theological, Historical, and Classical* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 35.

⁶ Richard Price and Michael Gaddis (trans.), *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University, 2005), 134, also 7, 78, 122, 125, 210, 222, 235, 270, and 303; Edward Robinson and Eli Smith, *Later Biblical Researches in Palestine, and in the Adjacent Lands* (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1852), 410.

⁷ *Codex Theodosianus XVI*, 10, 14, of 7.

Greco-Roman Near East during the mid-second century AD. Neoplatonism certainly formed a transitional mechanism between paganism and Christianity, though its early exponents disliked Christianity (as seen in the previous chapter).⁸ The Chaldean oracles of Syria, which were a synthesis of Neoplatonism and Persian thought, exemplify this sort of pagan monotheism. Christian monotheism did not greatly differ from forms of pagan monotheism popular in the Late Antique Near East, except for the Christian notion that Jesus was divine.⁹ However, by the late third and early fourth centuries, pagans were searching for a stable image of what Peter Brown called the “divine man,” a moral model for the pagan philosophers.¹⁰ The various schools of Gnosticism which emphasized dualism, the spiritual, and the knowledge of the divine, also prepared Late Antique society for Christianity. Syria, Egypt, and Asia Minor appear to have been the centers of ancient Gnosticism.¹¹

The pagan presence at Baniyas was certainly of great import to the Byzantines. However, equally important was the fact that the Byzantine Christians found and made a sacred space of their own at Baniyas. The Christianization of the site reveals that they found something of the beatific *locus amoenus*—reflective of heaven—in Baniyas. After all, Christ himself had been there, the patriarchs had walked there, and the Jordan River, so important to the Holy Land’s sacred geography, seemed to spring from the site. Like their pagan neighbors, Christians too saw the sacred touch on mountains, waterways,

⁸ Johannes Geffcken *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*, trans. Sabine MacCormack (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1978), 281.

⁹ Stephen Mitchell, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, 233-4.

¹⁰ Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1993), 62.

¹¹ Henry Longueville Mansell and Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries* (London: John Murray, 1875), 45-6.

trees, and grottos. Even if there were demons who continued to haunt the region, giving impressions of a lingering *locus horribilis*, there was much they found still connected to the kingdom of God at Banias.¹²

Of course, whatever beauty the Christians at Banias found and made their own did not make its shrines any less the haunts of demons. Across the Byzantine world Christians had recategorized old deities and their sacred spaces as demonic. While finding a *locus horribilis*, the Byzantines recognized that they could and rightly should be changed. Such change paved the way for the conversion of temples and the building of new ecclesiastical structures.¹³ Pan's Court was subject to conversion, the "logical consequence of the theological tendency to recategorize pagan deities into destructive *daimones*."¹⁴

In an analysis of Christianity at Banias during the Byzantine period, several issues require discussion. These are the Church and its writings, the statue of Christ, and Banias' place on the pilgrim trail. These elements reveal a Christian community at Banias and its rise to prominence.

Numerous Christian authors wrote about one statue of Christ erected at Banias. Philostorgius (368-439), an Anomoean Christian, offers the following account about the statue and its nature:

Concerning an image of our Saviour erected by the faith of a pious woman in grateful remembrance of her cure from a bloody flux, [Philostorgius

¹² John Howe, "Creating Symbolic Landscapes: Medieval Development of Sacred Space" in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*, ed. John Howe and Michael Wolfe (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 210-12.

¹³ Frank Richard Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370-529, Volume 1* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 101-7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

writes, that] it was placed near the fountain in the city among other statues, and presented a pleasant and agreeable sight to the passers-by. And when a certain herb, which grew up at the foot of this statue, was found to be a most effectual remedy against all diseases, and especially against consumption, men naturally began to inquire into the cause of this matter ; for by lapse of time all memory of the fact had been lost, and it was even forgotten whose statue it was, and on what account it had been erected. Inasmuch as the figure of our Saviour had long stood exposed in the open air, and a great part of it was covered over by the earth which was perpetually carried down against the pediment, especially during seasons of heavy rain, the notice contained in the inscription upon it was well nigh obliterated. A diligent inquiry was consequently made, and the part of the statue which had been covered up being brought to light, the inscription was discovered which explained the entire circumstances of the fact; and the plant thenceforth was never again seen either there or in any other place. The statue itself they placed in the part of the church which was allotted to the deacons, paying to it due honour and respect, yet by no means adoring or worshipping it; and they showed their love for its great archetype by erecting it in that place with circumstances of honour, and by flocking thither in eager crowds to behold it.¹⁵

Sozomen's (c. 400-450) account of the statue suggests that it is older than the fourth century, but that Julian tore it down to replace with one of his own likeness, for he continues:

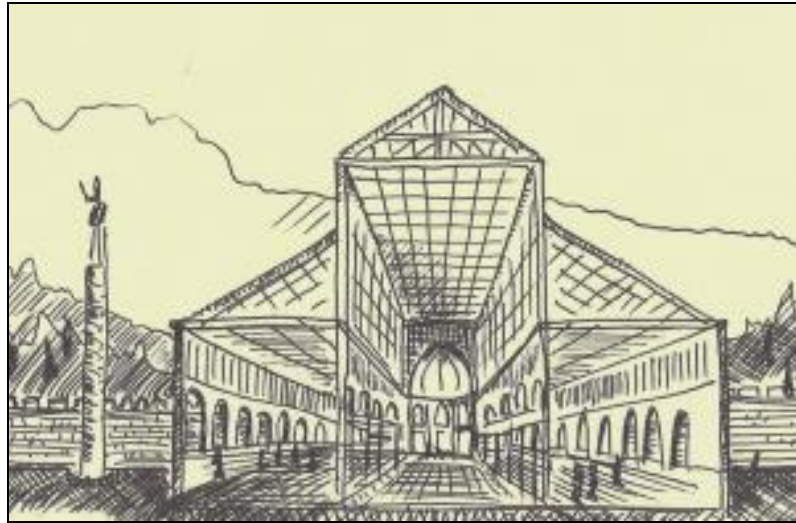
Among so many remarkable events which occurred during the reign of Julian, I must not omit to mention one which affords a sign of the power of Christ, and proof of the Divine wrath against the emperor.

Having heard that at Caesarea Philippi, otherwise called Paneas, a city of Phoenicia, there was a celebrated statue of Christ which had been erected by a woman whom the Lord had cured of a flow of blood, Julian commanded it to be taken down and a statue of himself erected in its place; but a violent fire from heaven fell upon it and broke off the parts contiguous to the breast; the head and neck were thrown prostrate, and it was transfixed to the ground with the face downwards at the point where the fracture of the bust was; and it has stood in that fashion from that day until now, full of the rust of the lightning. The statue of Christ was dragged around the city and mutilated by the pagans; but the Christians recovered the fragments, and deposited the statue in the church in which it

¹⁵ Photius, Bishop of Constantinople, *Epitome of the Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius 7.3*, trans. Edward Walford (New York: Covent Garden, 1855), 475-6.

is still preserved. Eusebius relates, that at the base of this statue grew an herb which was unknown to the physicians and empirics, but was efficacious in the cure of all disorders. It does not appear a matter of astonishment to me, that, after God had vouchsafed to dwell with men, he should condescend to bestow benefits upon them.¹⁶

If one is to then believe Sozomen, the dismantled fragments of the statue of Christ had been recovered in part and were stored in the church of Baniyas. An earthquake in May of 363 may have caused the statue's actual destruction, but what is important here is the tradition that survived and the acknowledgement of the statue's existence.¹⁷ In the sixth century John Malalas (c. 491-578), a Byzantine chronicler from Antioch, also mentions the statue. Malalas was working with second- and third-hand materials. He can provide details about the appearance, make, and location of the statue, but he may have been repeating earlier sources rather than offering an independent witness.¹⁸



20. Artist's rendering of the Baniyas cathedral (courtesy Biblewalks)

¹⁶ Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.21.

¹⁷ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 102.

¹⁸ *Chronicle of John Malalas*, Books 8-18, trans. Matthew Spinka and Glanville Downey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1940).

Another interesting detail in Sozomen's account is the motif of healing. Certainly, the story and accompanying image of the woman with a blood disease is intriguing. Even more so, the herb which grows onto the statue of Christ is of note, said to have cured all ailments. Not only does this characteristic of the statue connect it to earlier pagan tradition—since Banias also had a shrine to Aesclepius and was known as a place where people sought healing—but it may contain a grain of truth. Myrtle grows in the Golan, and has long been known as a useful herbal medicine employed as an astringent, as a stimulant, and as treatment for fever, infection, and diarrhea. This plant is a plausible candidate for the original "miracle" herb of the statue of Christ. The statue and the herb confer defined motifs of healing to the Christian tradition at Banias.

The statue of Christ reveals three major elements of Christianity at Banias. First, the statue illustrates the existence of an active church community in Banias during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods. Second, it represents the resolve of the Christian community, which saved its fragments from destruction. Perhaps most important, the statue was of such importance that Christian writers from nearby regions wrote about it. This last aspect—in conjunction with the Petrine Confession and Christ's transfiguration—contributed to the site's significance on the pilgrim trail. The story indicates a consistent attempt to locate the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, who was allegedly responsible for the statue.

That Banias was part of the pilgrim trail cannot be doubted. As pilgrims from the west began to visit the Holy Land in droves, itineraries developed to accommodate travel

to sacred sites in Palestine.¹⁹ The geographer Theodosius, writing in the sixth century notes that Baniyas was the last stop on the pilgrim trail.²⁰ The Piacenza Pilgrim's route also terminated at Baniyas, as he recounts that he and his party "came to two streams called Jor and Dan, which join together to form the single stream Jordan..."²¹ This should come as little surprise, given that the Baniyas region, including nearby Dan, had long been the traditional northern boundary of Israel proper.

However Christian Baniyas had become, it still remained pagan in many ways. The city was a multicultural venue in which Christianity—both orthodox and heretical—and paganism continued to exist side by side. In this respect, Baniyas mirrored the condition of many Late Antique towns in the Mediterranean, whose inhabitants embraced a wide array of religions.²² Paganism associated with learned culture began to deteriorate with the legislation of Theodosius.²³ Prohibitions of temple visits and public sacrifices destroyed paganism as a public religion.²⁴ Persons sacrificing to demonized gods could be punished by exile, a penalty eventually replaced by execution in 423.²⁵ Of course, the greatest persecutions would come under the Emperor Justinian (483-565). Under his codes, persons not coming forward for baptism or continuing to sacrifice to the old gods could lose their civil rights.²⁶ Authorities enforced similar penalties if they found

¹⁹ Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, *The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims Text Society* [hereafter *PPTS*], *Volumes 1-13* (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1897).

²⁰ Yoram Tsafrir, "The Maps Used by Theodosius: On The Pilgrim Maps of the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the Sixth Century C. E." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 40 (1986): 130.

²¹ John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris and Philips, 1977), 81.

²² Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 7.

²³ Geffcken, *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*, 223-4.

²⁴ *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 10, 14, of 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10, 23, of 8.

²⁶ *Codex Justinianus* I, 11,10

persons to be less than genuine in their conversion, that is, to be εθνοφρονες (pagan-minded).²⁷ Concerns about superficial conversion point to the practice of a veiled paganism. Many communities that identified themselves with Christianity nevertheless preserved and perpetuated pre-Christian ideas and practices.²⁸ In this period of orthodox law, paganism found itself in a liminal phase, and adjusted in order to adapt to its new surroundings. Baniyas was no exception.

Pagan tradition survived better in Greek-speaking lands than elsewhere in the Mediterranean. The residents of those regions tended to adhere to such beliefs and practices longer. There were occasional revivals of old and defunct forms of paganism, not only during the reign of Julian but even later.²⁹

Various texts imply that paganism was still practiced at Baniyas. The excerpt cited above from Eusebius' *History of the Church* is an excellent example of sacrifice still taking place in the fourth century. Philostorgius also gives an example of the survival of paganism at Baniyas in his story of the statue of Christ:

During the reign of Julian, however, the heathen who inhabited Paneas were excited by an impious frenzy to pull down this statue from its pediment, and to drag it through the midst of the streets with ropes fastened round its feet; afterwards they broke in pieces the rest of the body, while some persons, indignant at the whole proceeding, secretly obtained possession of the head, which had become, detached from the neck as it was dragged along, and they preserved it as far as was possible.³⁰

²⁷ Richard Trombley, *The Survival of Paganism in the Byzantine Empire during the Pre-Iconoclastic Period (540-727)* (Los Angeles: PhD Dissertation, UCLA, 1981), 70.

²⁸ Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, 226.

²⁹ Johannes Geffcken, *The Last Days of Greco-Roman Paganism*, 232.

³⁰ Photius, *Epitome of the Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius* 7.3, 475-6; Photius notes that Philostorgius claims to have seen this with his own eyes.

Sozomen mentions pagans continuing to practice their rites in nearby cities such as Apamea in Syria.³¹ Harran displayed similar tendencies.³² Heliopolis (Baalbek) in Lebanon, to the north of Banias, was known to be openly pagan well into the sixth century, the mission there being unsuccessful as late as 579.³³ Church historian Theodoret writing in the fifth century describes:

Heliopolis, where every man is given over to superstition, where flourish the devil's ways of pleasure, and where the situation of the city, surrounded on all sides by mountains that approach the sky, is fitted for the terrifying lairs of wild beasts.³⁴

Syrian paganism did survive, despite the fact that by the sixth century most of that country was Monophysite Christian.³⁵ Syrian and Phoenician paganism had ancient, pre-Hellenic roots strengthened by Greco-Roman cults. Christians of the countryside still took part in Hellenic prayers, observed festivals, and regularly used magical cures.³⁶

Traditional calendrical festivals associated with the seasons were regularly observed during the Byzantine era. Celebrants naturally associated these festivals with specific pagan gods. Christian records find fault with the Brumalia, the Saturnalia, and the Kalends. A very popular celebration in the region of Banias was the Maiuma, a festival dedicated to Bacchus and Aphrodite, possibly because of the similarity between Bacchus and Pan. The Maiuma, given its presence in Syria, would have found a friendly home in pagan Banias. Since the celebration had both Syrian and Greco-Roman roots, the local Hellenized Semitic population at Banias would have found the Maiuma very

³¹ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.15.

³² Trombley, *The Survival of Paganism*, 77.

³³ Geffcken, *Greco-Roman Paganism*, 237; see also Trombley, *The Survival of Paganism*, 77.

³⁴ Theodoret, *History of the Church*, IV.19.

³⁵ Richard Trombley, *The Survival of Paganism*, 76-7; Stephen Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284-641* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 295.

³⁶ Geffcken, *Greco-Roman Paganism*, 235.

familiar.³⁷ John Chrysostom related that the Maiuma was a night-time rite that included the pantomime, raucous parties, and even naked female bathing.³⁸ The chronicler Joshua the Stylite described the 494/5 festival at Eddessa in the following account:

On the seventeenth of May this year, when good gifts were liberally bestowed by heaven upon all...the bulk of the citizens cut off hope of salvation to go sinning in public. Reveling in their delights they gave no thanks to God for his gifts, but were negligent in [thanksgiving] and succumbed to the pestilence of sin. As even the hidden and open sins in which they were engrossed did not satisfy them, they got ready on this specified date, which was a Friday night, when a dancer was dancing, and [this] <lasted> *a period of three days*. They lit countless candles in celebration of this festival, a procedure without precedent in the city, and arranged them on the ground along the bank of the river...³⁹

The placing of candles along the riverbank was an aquatic facet of the rites.⁴⁰ With the stream from the cave and proximate pagan shrines, Baniyas was an ideal environment for such a Maiuma celebration. However, it is likely that the feast would not have taken place openly as local bishops and clergy took great pains to abolish the Maiuma by the early decades of the sixth century.⁴¹

Archaeology reveals a demographic transformation in worship activity near the shrine of Pan. The type and make of votive ceramics left at the shrine illustrate the change in worship. The Late Roman period at Baniyas is a time of transition from a public religion of largesse practiced by the wealthy to a more austere and individual faith exercised by persons of lesser means. The archaeological assemblages of the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods are markedly different than preceding ones. 75% of

³⁷ *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, trans. Frank R. Trombley and R. W. Watt (Liverpool University: Liverpool University, 2000), 29, fn 142.

³⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaem* 7.6-7.

³⁹ *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua*, trans. Trombley and Watt, 24-5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 fn 120-1.

⁴¹ Trombley and Watt, "Introduction," *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua*, xvi.

the period's ceramics are simple fragmentary and complete lamps, some 2930 pieces in all.⁴² Dedicants most likely visited the shrine in large numbers. However, during the fourth and early fifth centuries, it is evident that the shrine of Pan gradually returned to a state akin to that of its Hellenistic origins—a simple shrine patronized by the local peasantry. Fewer ceramics were made in the city and fewer worshippers visited the shrine. The ceramic industry at Baniyas had been linked directly to the Sanctuary of Pan. After it shut down, we find fewer votives at the shrine itself and no diagnostic pieces connected with the shrine by the sixth and seventh centuries.⁴³ The pattern of increased Christian authority is reflected in the archaeological record. It is logical that the shrine and pottery industry would have come to an end with the gradual enforcement of orthodox laws. A gap in the numismatics from the early fifth to the late sixth century reveals Christian influence, as the large portion of coins minted at Baniyas in previous centuries bore images of Pan and the gods.⁴⁴ By the middle of the fifth century, the Paneion itself had been abandoned.⁴⁵ A Byzantine chapel replaced it above the cave, known today as the Tomb of St. George or the Tomb of Khadir. Archaeology at Baniyas confirms the decline of *polis*-based pagan religion, which parallels a trend in cities throughout the Byzantine Levant.⁴⁶ Parts of the city and the aqueduct had also been abandoned by this time.⁴⁷ The Greco-Roman polis of Paneas was evolving into the agro-

⁴² Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Mitchel, *History of Later Roman Empire*, 230.

⁴⁷ Berlin, "The Archaeology of Ritual," 41.

pastoral village of Banias, the shape it retained in later centuries, and a form most likely true to its early roots.⁴⁸ Public paganism was dead in Banias by the sixth century.

The increase in simple votives present in the late Roman period is telling. It reveals the dramatic increase in the practice of local pagan rites by members of the lower echelons of Banias society. At a time when traditional public pagan and high-culture was declining, the farmers, herdsman, and artisans of Banias took an active role in their religion. They kept alive the area's pagan ideas and practices. Nor did polytheism die out altogether during the era leading up to the Arab invasion (540-632), rather, as aforementioned, paganism was sufficiently preserved in the folk culture of the residents as to preserve some ritual and different incarnations of the fertility god. Which incarnations? They are the ones found before and after the Byzantine Period of Banias: deities of nature and prophecy. They are Pan, St. George, and El Khadir. It is thus safe to conclude that paganism was alive and well at Banias, if only in the domestic sphere.

There is certainly evidence for the survival of paganism in Christian venues in world history. It persevered to some extent as hearth religions and folk magic in medieval Europe. In Africa, even before a forcible departure to the Americas, future slaves practiced multiple rites and beliefs despite the best efforts of Christian catechists. After the diaspora, these systems evolved into Vodun, Santaria, and Candamble. In both cases, pagan traditions were grafted on to Christianity to varying degrees and thus survived along with the dominant religion.

⁴⁸ Hugh Kennedy, "From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria," *Past and Present* 106 (1985): 3-27.

In Baniyas, it is within the Georgic cults of the Levant that we find the preservation of old pagan ideas. The name refers to St. George, a saint who according to legend was a Roman knight born in Lydda, Palestine, serving in Asia Minor. For over a thousand years, Christians in the Levant have revered George, who is known to Muslims as Khadir, the “Green One.” Indeed, Christians and Muslims often pay respects at the same shrines.⁴⁹ In medieval Syria, Khadir’s shrines abounded and local peoples often attributed to such structures pre-Islamic origins, hinting at his connection with the older George.⁵⁰ While St. George of hagiography may not have been a historical personage, the symbol of George did preserve the mythology. He seems to be a continuation of the fertility god motif engendered in the avatars of Baal and perpetuated in the form of Pan. The very name “George”/“georgos” (Γεοργεος) is telling, for it means “farmer, gardner, or husbandman.” The title “georgous” was used in concert with the adoration of a peasant fertility deity.⁵¹ Farmers and pastoralists in Palestine—especially Druze—pray to Khadir to this day for good crops.⁵² George, like Pan, Khadir, and the ancient Baals, is a deity of the fields who embodies all nature.⁵³

⁴⁹ H.S. Haddad, “The Georgic Cults and Saints of the Levant,” *Numen* 16.1 (April 1969): 21-2; Jonathan Good, *The Cult of Saint George in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), 21-34.

⁵⁰ Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints Among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 177-8.

⁵¹ Meri, *The Cult of the Saints*, 24.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 36.



21. Icon of St. George, Novgorod c. 1130

At Baniyas, the tomb of St. George/Khadir rests above the old cave of Pan. This structure has been studied considerably, and research indicates that it retains the major features of a Byzantine chapel.⁵⁴ In the east, the Byzantines often built churches on or near pagan temples and shrines to keep close watch over them and manage the conversion of populous and precinct to Christianity.⁵⁵ The Druze later recycled it for

⁵⁴ M. Victor Guérin, *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine*. Part 3: *Galilée* 1-2 (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1980), 314-5.

⁵⁵ Richard Alston, *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2002), 291; see also Trombley, *The Survival of Paganism*, 119, 182. There is certainly precedent for clergy using this tactic of building churches near shrines on Pan directly, as Trombley relates the exorcism of a shrine of Pan in Arcadia, and its subsequent “ecclesiastical surveillance.”

their use when they came to Baniyas in the tenth century. Subsequently, it became known as the tomb of Khadir. The fact that George has Byzantine roots and similarities with Pan, and that Khadir is a Muslim designation for George, illustrates the survival of paganism, or at least pagan ideas during this period when records fall increasingly silent. It may very well be, as Peter Brown has observed about similar scenarios, that “We are dealing with a tenacious sub-classical paganism of Greek idiom with deep local roots.”⁵⁶



22. The shrine of St. George/Khadir, above the Cave of Pan

While the dusky afterglow of Byzantine Baniyas obscures events and details, archetypes are yet known. The bounty of evidence concerning religion on either side of the period between 400 and 632 is more than persuasive concerning the survival of certain ideas. Prior to 400, the zenith of classical paganism occurred in the region, as well as the ascendancy of Christianity. Following the Arab invasion, a host of mystics and seekers of the esoteric came to Baniyas. George, Khadir, and the embers of paganism, lay on either side of this apparent gap, therefore it is not as difficult to reconstruct the religious history as previous scholars have concluded. Limited approaches yield limited results. Only a synthesis of methods can provide the best possible way to study Baniyas' past during the period in question.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 92.

The picture that materializes of Banias during the Byzantine phase of its history is one of transition and pluralism. The city itself gradually shed the model of the classical *polis*, its economy became insular and returned to agriculture, and its religious life was forever changed. Christianity asserted its authority, while paganism receded from the public into the private and domestic arenas. With all the textual obscurity, how can one know about the pagan religious practices at Banias during this time? The return to an agro-pastoral economy, the transition of Banias from city to village, and the privatization of religion all suggest that the sacred space of Banias changed. The region returned to its Semitic and pre-Hellenic rustic roots when the only shrine that the local deity needed was the magnificence of the natural setting. Silences of text and other sources reveal an oral tradition. Practitioners of pagan religions would have been uneducated at this time, and therefore had no need to record anything about rite or belief.

What is certain is that Banias could never return to the grandiose spectacle of Greco-Roman paganism. With her temples abandoned and replaced, the city turned village would remain a place of religious importance but of minor economic consequence. Yet the native Christians and pagan Semitic population endured. Banias as a *polis* may have disappeared, but its people and traditions had not.

CHAPTER 8

The Season of Khadir: Early Arab Baniyas, 632-1100

The study of religion in early Arab Baniyas is an exercise in the analysis of Islamic heterodoxy. That journey into the religious margins of Baniyas begins in a time when Judaism and Christianity were struggling to survive in the region, and Islam was struggling internally against competing ideologies and ever-growing sects. Communities of Jews and Christians had existed at Baniyas at least as early as the mid-first century AD. Orthodox strains of both religions continued to practice in and around Baniyas throughout the Byzantine period.¹ Likewise, beginning in the seventh century, Muslims also found a haven in the green quiet of Baniyas. Ahmad al-Nabulusi operated a noted Hadith school at Baniyas in the tenth century. It grew to be one of the most important Sunni educational centers of its time, drawing students from Iraq and from all over the Muslim world. As such, al-Nabulusi helped to revitalize Baniyas, which had been in disrepair through much of the Early Muslim era and created such Sunni fervor that he opposed the Shi'ite Fatimids of the day more than he did the Byzantine Christians or the Jews.² Archaeologists and historians such as Vassilios Tzaferis and John Wilson have indeed contributed valuable commentary and elaborated on heterodox figures and traditions at Baniyas. However, what remains is the further enumeration, examination, and explication of the historical and mythological natures and continuities of these traditions and some of the subtler motifs present.

Both paganism and Christianity left indelible marks on Baniyas. One of the most resilient of religious motifs to remain at Baniyas is that of the fertility deity. Beginning

¹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 125.

² *Ibid.*, 123.

with the aforementioned Baal (though not originally a fertility god, he was nonetheless connected to nature through the storms he rode), or perhaps a local goat deity, that symbol continued through Pan, and eventually was incarnated in a group of figures at the center of what religious scholars have dubbed Georgic cults. Those figures are St. George, Khadir, and Elijah, who locals have historically identified as the same personality.³ The Levantine Georgic cults found a home in Byzantine Baniyas and, of course, in Islamic Baniyas.

Atop the old Cave of Pan rests a shrine which the Druze population of modern Baniyas identifies variously as the Shrine of Khadir and the Tomb of St. George. The origins of the structure are obscure, although M. Victor Guérin noted after a visit to the site in 1854 that it showed signs of having been a Byzantine chapel at one time. Guérin's contention is certainly plausible, as the Byzantines did erect small, single-aisled churches in close proximity to existing pagan shrines and cult sites in order to monitor those activities. Such a position would afford clergy and officials an ideal vantage from which to monitor the Court of Pan on the platform directly to the east. Since the Byzantines abandoned such practices in lieu of exorcising a temple or cult site during the sixth century, it is reasonable to conclude that the shrine was built some time before the sixth century.⁴

St. George gained popularity among crusaders after he supposedly appeared at the crusader siege of Antioch in 1098, at which time he became a symbol of knightly virtue

³ H. S. Haddad, "'Georgic' Cults and Saints in the Levant," *Numen* 16.1 (April 1969): 21-2.

⁴ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 106; also Trombley, *The Survival of Paganism*, 182.

to Westerners.⁵ He had been commemorated since Late Antiquity, though the details of his origins and life do not seem historical. His early cult has all the marks of martyrdom. According to tradition he was from Lydda in Palestine, and he rescued the daughter of the king of that region from a dragon. Other traditions claim he was a Christianized Roman soldier of Late Antiquity. At any rate, it is evident that church authorities—from Nicephorus to Calvin—have never liked him much and he has always been a saint of common people. As stated earlier, his name Γεοργος means “farmer” or “husbandman,” and therefore has agrarian connotations that would have been associated with lower classes.⁶ Both professions were historically practiced at Baniyas, as evinced by the shrine of Pan, archaeology, text, and the fertile plains below the city. George, therefore, may have had links in the cults of Pan, and presumably Baal, as well as in Christian legend.

Khadir is a similar figure who like George predates Christianity and predates Islam. Khadir was the “ever-living” and “the green one”—a *wali* or “saint” of popular Islamic folklore often associated with the mysterious servant who accompanies Moses in a passage of the Qur’an:

And when Musa said to his servant: I will not cease until I reach the junction of the two rivers [*some translations say “oceans”*] or I will go on for years. So when they had reached the junction of the two rivers they forgot their fish, and it took its way into the sea, going away. But when they had gone farther, he said to his servant: Bring to us our morning meal, certainly we have met with fatigue from this our journey.⁷

⁵ Fulcher of Chartres, *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and other Source Materials*, ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1998), 223; William of Malmesbury, *William of Malmesbury’s Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), 382-3.

⁶ Haddad, “Georgic Cults,” 23-4.

⁷ *The Qur’an*, Sura 18: 60-62.

Here, Khadir may symbolize the meeting of opposites—east and west, heaven and earth, immortality and death, intuition and law, etc.—and therefore is suited to Baniyas as it has historically been a place of the meeting of such opposites, namely the Latin and Greek West with the Semitic East. He also had a myriad of supernatural traits such as the ability to appear any time, at any place, and in any form. Khadir could perform miracles and the person experiencing a vision of Khadir was said to be very blessed.⁸ The ability to perform such miracles is not out of place at Baniyas, as its shrine of Asclepius was reputed to heal persons with various afflictions. The greatest healer of all the saints was Khadir who had a talent for curing epilepsy and all forms of convulsions.⁹ Khadir was to live as long as the Qur'an was on the earth and was the very embodiment of livelihood and vegetation. The Nusairis (Nusariyeh) of Syria, the uninitiated of the Druzes, revered Khadir more than any other saint. They used his name as much as the Muslims chanted that of Allah. The Sufis also admired Khadir and cited him as a source of mystical inspiration and instruction. In some ways, he also seems to be an embodiment of Jesus, Muhammed, and all the prophets and therefore had a broad appeal across cultural and religious lines¹⁰

⁸ Keith Crim (ed.), *The Perennial Dictionary of World Religions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1981), 406.

⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 207.

¹⁰ Haddad, "Georgic Cults," 25-6.



23. Elias (left) and Khadir (right), Timurid dynasty, 15th century

As the mystics of Islam admired Khadir, so the Kabbalists and other Jews revered Elijah, another aspect of the Georgic cult at Baniyas. Elijah, however, is the least prevalent of the three motifs. He is akin to Khadir in that he never tasted death.¹¹ Given the presence of Jews in the Baniyas region at the time, it is probable that they identified the shrine with Elijah, as other Levantine Jews did with Georgic shrines.¹²

Beginning in 963, Baniyas became a refuge for a number of Muslim groups fleeing southward as the Byzantine Empire sought to push back the Islamic frontier.¹³ The Arab geographer al-Muqaddasi recorded that Muslims from the north fled south to Palestine in

¹¹ Crim, *Dictionary*, 406.

¹² Haddad, "Georgic Cults," 27.

¹³ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London: Pearson, 2004), 279-80.

order to escape the campaigns of Nicephorus Phocas and his successor John Zimisces.¹⁴ Eventually, the newcomers outnumbered the original Jewish, Christian, and Muslim inhabitants of the city. The refugees sought peace—what they found was disarray. Syria was in civil turmoil and elsewhere the Shi'ite Fatimids had caused the displacement of many Sunnis, including a large number of Sufis who made their way to Baniyas.¹⁵

Sufism is the name generally applied to Islamic mysticism. It is primarily inward-looking, such as primitive Islam was, and contains disciplines for meditation, recitation, repetition of the name of Allah, and tendencies toward a pantheistic theology. The Sufi mystics prayed not only to Allah, but to Muhammed and deceased saints.¹⁶ Sufis despised outward piety and dead ritualism and emphasized an inward attention to spirituality. They promoted unity and brotherhood and in most cases eschewed violence. The Muslim ascetics arose about one hundred years after the death of Muhammed in an atmosphere of civil and moral decadence. They continually leveled polemics against Islamic institutions and clerics for their hypocrisy. Because of their beliefs and lack of respect for religious authorities, Muslim leaders considered Sufis scandalous.¹⁷

The Sufis brought their theology and ideas with them to Baniyas. There they found fertile ground on which to plant their philosophies. The forests and mountain regions afforded a quiet and lush venue in which to practice their contemplations. The Sufis came to Baniyas at a time when the movement as a whole sought to define itself, as there

¹⁴ Al-Muqqadasi, *The Best Division for Knowledge of the Regions (Ahsan al-Taqa sim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim)*, trans. Basil Collins (Reading: Garnet, 2001), 136.

¹⁵ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 121.

¹⁶ Crim, *Dictionary*, 719-21.

¹⁷ Nasrollah S. Fatemi, Faramarz S. Fatemi, and Fariborz S. Fatemi, *Sufism: Message of Brotherhood, Harmony, and Hope* (London: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1976), 27-33.

were only Sufi communities and no orders to speak of until the eleventh century.¹⁸ Here this fusion would occur in the context of local legends and popular religion. There are two characteristics of Sufism that make the study of religions at Banias all the more fascinating. One is the fact that Sufis had a reputation for commanding miraculous powers of healing and the ability to walk on water. Once again, the Sufis' alleged powers and their community at Banias were very much in keeping with the aforementioned tradition of healing.¹⁹ The other particularly interesting trait is the devotion which Sufis had for Khadir. Sufis claimed Khadir was a teacher and guide, and one Sufi—Ibn Arabi—claimed direct initiation into Sufism by none other than Khadir.²⁰ This period of refugee resettlement in Banias coincides with the arrival of Sufis, and it is probably around 970 after their arrival that the shrine to St. George becomes known as the Tomb of Khadir.²¹

The Druze religion made its way to Banias in the early eleventh century. The sect traces its origins to Al-Hakim, the so-called “Mad Caliph” (996-1021). Due to his autocracy and his ruthlessness, revolts broke out in various parts of the Fatimid Empire, including one in 1012 in Palestine. Muhammed Ibn-Isma'il al-Darazi, a Persian, claimed that Al-Hakim was an incarnation of the deity. To the Druzes, he was a *mahdi*—a “messiah.” Al-Darazi took his new revelation to Syria and other locales, including Wadi al-Taym (the literal birthplace of Druze religion) at the foot of Mount Hermon near

¹⁸ Crim, *Dictionary*, 721.

¹⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 122.

²⁰ Crim, *Dictionary*, 406.

²¹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 123.

Banias, and spread the new religion.²² It is worthwhile to ask why Al-Darazi chose the people of Wadi al-Taym as a mission field. Writing in 1469, the Egyptian historian ibn Taghri-Birdi noted that "And al-Hakīm said to Darazi, 'Proceed into Syria and spread the cause in the mountains because their people are quick to follow.'"²³ It is possible that they were already primed for the message given their proximity to the Arab mystics of Banias, and potential accessibility by Persian missionaries. The mountain people embraced al-Darazi and Druze religion became entrenched. Today the Druzes are the only remaining indigenous population in the Banias region.²⁴

The Druzes flourished in Syria and Lebanon, particularly at the foot of Mount Hermon. They were self-contained and insular; industry held little appeal to them.²⁵ This self-imposed cultural seclusion helped preserve their religion. Technically, little is known about Druze theology as they continue to be a secretive sect.

With Al-Darazi's death, a man named Hamzah succeeded him and proclaimed that Al-Darazi had not died. Hamzah proclaimed that he was a mahdi and would one day return. Under Hamzah, Druze theology would develop using Islam as a base and incorporating elements of Judaic and Christian ideas, Gnosticism, Neo-Platonism, and an elaborate eschatology.²⁶ Al-Muqtana Baha' al-Din, the link between Hamzah and his followers, also helped to develop theology and close the community.²⁷ Baha' al-Din,

²² Philip K. Hitti, *Origins of the Druze People and Religion* (New York: Columbia University, 1928), 10.

²³ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

²⁴ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 124-5.

²⁵ Hitti, *Druze People and Religion*, 5.

²⁶ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 124-5.

²⁷ Crim, *Dictionary*, 231.

Hamzah's successor, closed the community to new converts.²⁸ Since his codification, the Druzes divide themselves into the "initiated" and "uninitiated." The more clerically inclined individuals conduct religious services on Thursday evening, the least secret of which the uninitiated may attend.²⁹ Most scholars agree that the name is derived from al-Darazi, though the Druzes went by other names in the earliest periods of its growth, such as the "Hakimiya," who followed al-Hakim, and the "Tayamina," the Druzes of Wadi al-Taym.³⁰

The historical study of Druze theology presents a number of difficulties. One of the most pressing issues is the paucity of outside sources treating Druze religion. The majority of the texts that exist are compiled centuries after the founding of the religion and typically are polemical in nature.³¹ However, even such biased documents allow the historian a glimpse into the faith, and therefore into religious life at Banias. A second problem is the ethnoreligious nature of Druzism as an independent entity. Taken as such, its origins and rites are even more difficult to discern. It may be more helpful to consider the religion at Wadi al-Taym as an outgrowth of Ismaili beliefs, rooted in Persian heterodoxy.³² In this chapter I have already examined the Sufi presence at Banias. Though the overwhelming majority of these mystics must have been Sunni, it is possible that some were Shi'ite. At any rate, the tradition of mysticism embraced by the Sufis would have acquainted local peoples with some elements of esotericism. The deification

²⁸ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 125.

²⁹ Ibid.; Robert Brenton Betts, *The Druze* (New Haven: Yale, 1988), 13.

³⁰ Betts, *The Druze*, 25.

³¹ Hitti, *Druze People and Religion*, 25.

³² Ibid.

of Al-Hakim is a central tenet, one to which the Druzes of Baniyas subscribe.³³ In addition, they considered al-Hakim a messiah figure who would return again, no doubt influenced by the incarnational theology of Christianity, which early Arab thinkers were not altogether able to escape.³⁴ Polytheistic and pagan influence may be observed in Druze theology. In terms of Neo-Platonic and Gnostic influence, the Druzes also personified the different wills of Allah, turning each one into elements reminiscent of Gnostic emanations. In like manner, the Druzes also believe in a demiurge in the person of Ali.³⁵ Other surviving pagan elements amongst the uninitiated Druzes include a belief in the transmigration of the soul and reincarnation as animals.³⁶ Interestingly, several prophets are integral to Druze theology, some important to the religious history of the Baniyas region. Those pertinent to the area include Noah, Moses, Jesus, and Enoch.³⁷

In addition to the tradition of Khadir and its location near the Cave of Pan, there may be supplemental evidence connecting the Druze religion to older pagan tradition. Amongst the local non-Druze population there exists a folk belief concerning calf worship. While this is certainly part of the Druze beliefs and practices themselves, a gold figure of a calf or bull is thought to rest in a box in one of the *khalwah*, or “place of seclusion.”³⁸ Furthermore, Paul Casanova recounts the finding of a baked clay figurine in the shape of a ram or sheep with al-Hakim’s name inscribed on it.³⁹ These horned animals—in particular, the ram and sheep—represented fertility and virility in regional

³³ Hitti, *Druze People and Religion*, 28, footnote 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34-6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44-5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-9.

³⁸ W. B. Seabrook, “The Golden Calf of the Druzes,” *Asia* 26.3 (March 1926), 220-53.

³⁹ Paul Casanova, “Figurine en terre cuite avec inscription arabe,” *Revue archéologique* 17 (1891): 298-303.

paganism, and hearken back to such themes embodied in the cults of the baals and Pan. To be called a “calf-worshipper” or “calf” was derogatory in Druze culture, but even so, we find evidence in at least one document—“al-Asrar” (“Secrets/Mysteries”)—that suggests that these animals were symbols of deity. In it, there is a direct reference to the above reliquary, the author mentioning “the box in which is the figure of the incarnation of our Lord.”⁴⁰ This phrasing reveals a reverence for the image, and perhaps a continuation of its antique virtues.

At Wadi-al-Taym, the leadership of one Sukayn was popular but at odds with the newly codified religious teachings. Al-Din first tried to resolve the issue diplomatically. He sent his niece Sitt Sarah, whom the Druze still venerate, on an errand of peace to attempt to dissuade Sukayn from his ideas. When that proved unsuccessful, he destroyed Sukayn and his circle of supporters, thus enforcing his Druzism on the inhabitants of Wadi al-Taym.⁴¹

Wadi al-Taym became the major Druze center in the medieval period.⁴² No doubt, during the eleventh century, the Druzes became familiar with the Tomb of Khadir if its significance was not already part of their oral culture. Khadir was especially important to the Nusariyeh (the aforementioned “uninitiated”).⁴³ Khadir’s significance to these Druzes was in his influence over vegetation and the fertility of crops and livestock of the mountain folk, much as the ancient fertility deities of Baniyas. Khadir’s legacy is evident today, as the Druzes still hold Thursday evening services and festivals at the

⁴⁰ Adler, “al-Asrar,” in “A Catechism of the Druzes,” *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1886): 136; cited in Hitti, *Druze People and Religion*, 49-50.

⁴¹ Betts, *The Druze*, 13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴³ Haddad, “Georgic Cults,” 26; also see Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 105.

Tomb of Khadir. At any rate, by the time of the First Crusade, the Druzes were well established in Syria and northern Palestine.⁴⁴

The nature of Islam during the early Arab period at Banias was overwhelmingly mystical. Those ideas which broke apart Islamic theology into sects found a home in a region long-reputed for its traditions of mysticism, prophecy, and revelation. It should therefore come as little surprise that the variations of Islam that became part of Banias' religious history were often mystical and heterodox. Sunnis, Sufis, Druzes, and perhaps even some Persian elements created niches for themselves at the site, and in doing so, connected themselves to older traditions of religious mysticism.

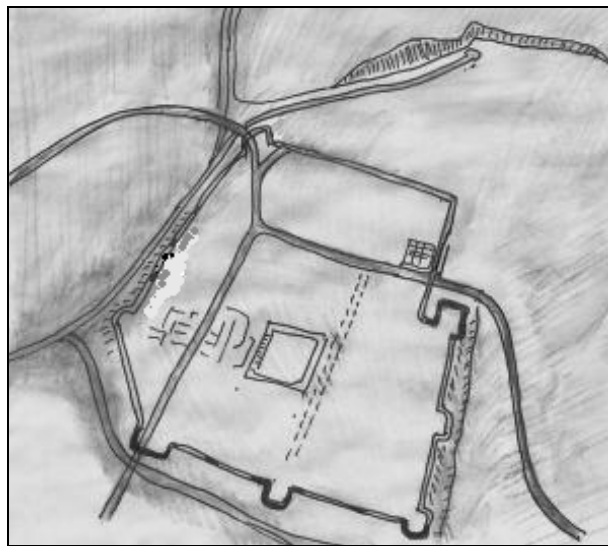
⁴⁴ Betts, *The Druze*, 70.

CHAPTER 9

Crescent and Cross in Medieval and Early Modern Banias, 1100-1635

As Pope Urban II (1035-1099) called for an armed pilgrimage, the Arabs and Druzes of Banias continued to meditate upon the mysteries of Allah and al-Hakim, knowing little of what stirred in the west. Banias experienced its first crusader contact in 1100. Duke Bohemond of Antioch (c. 1058-1111) and Count Baldwin of Edessa (c.1058-1118), completing the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, travelled through Tiberias and Banias on the way back to their principalities.¹ This relatively peaceful passage was to be the first of many encounters over the next two centuries.

The city remained a haven for mystics and heterodox Muslims as well as Jews and eastern Christians up to and beyond the dawn of the Crusades. While the conflict would displace certain groups at the site, those sects with a mystical inclination remained drawn to the region. Amidst the clash between Christian Franks and Muslim Arabs,



24. Crusade-era Banias (no scale, courtesy Biblewalks)

¹ Fulcher of Chartres, *The First Crusade*, 99; William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea, Volume I*, trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and August Krey (New York: Columbia University, 1943), 403.

those that flirted with the flexible theology of religious adventurers—Assassins, Templars, Hospitallers, and more—come very much to the fore of the religious history surrounding Banias during the Crusades.

By the close of the eleventh century, the Banias region had become a borderland. No single political entity had a firm control over Banias and her surrounding territories. The Fatimids had sought to consolidate the region earlier in the century, but to no avail. In the end, it was the regional leaders who managed Banias, though only tenuously.

It is clear that Banias remained one of the northernmost fixtures in the sacred geography of Palestine. While its Greco-Roman grandeur had given way to the more austere *madina* model (the Arab city arrangement common at the time), the city and region retained its reputation as a place for mystical revelation and as a significant Christian site. The Caesarea Philippi of Jesus was still very much a part of the religious consciousness. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Muslims had revered the region and connected its importance to Khadir. The Jews cherished traditions of Mount Hermon, Moses, and Banias as a tomb site. On the eve of the Crusades, however, medieval Banias was probably primarily Muslim, and of necessity, discussion must begin in this context and more precisely, within the context of its religious fringe.

The successive presence of the Umayyads, Abassids, Ayyubids, and Mamluks that governed and lived in Banias during this period influenced Islamic religious life. Interestingly, there is more evidence about the heterodox forms of Islam at Banias during the Crusades. Perhaps the most notorious heterodoxy one is likely to find in medieval Banias is that of the Nizari Isma'ilis—more popularly known as the Assassins. Though

their dominance of the city was very brief, the Nizaris earned a chapter the history of Banias as well as that of the Crusades. The Nizari Isma'ilis were extreme Shi'ite Muslims who originated in Persia, their history beginning with a man named Hasan-I Sabbah, who seized a fortress south of the Caspian Sea in 1090. From there, the Nizari maintained a revolutionary presence with a succession of eight of their own imams until 1256, when the Mongols murdered the last of them.²

It is challenging to determine the details of Nizari history. Much of what was known about this secretive sect came from rumor and folklore. Because of this, their notoriety as hired killers, and after a fashion occultists, spread throughout the West. Amongst Europeans and even Arab Muslims of the Crusader Era, it was widely believed that the Nizari leaders used hashish to give their *fidawis*³—their agents—a foretaste of paradise to be attained after their missions. “Hashish” was the word for Indian hemp, and along with opium, was one of the common vices of the age. In the early 1120s, during the time the Nizaris were at Banias, the Fatimid Caliph al-Amir issued an anti-Nizari letter in which he referred derogatorily to the Nizari as *Hashishiyya*, the first recorded use of the term as applied to the Nizari Isma'ilis. Not surprisingly, two Nizari *fidawis* dispatched al-Amir in 1130.⁴ Muslim leaders throughout the Islamic world most likely applied this word to the despised Isma'ili minority, thus associating the sect with the deplored leisure activities of the time. It then passed into European languages as

² Crim, *Dictionary*, 71.

³ Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 65; see also Bernard Lewis, “The Sources for the History of the Syrian Assassins,” *Speculum* 27.4 (October 1952): 34.

⁴ Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 66.

“assassin.”⁵ Certainly, the Nizari were known for their intense loyalty and their tendency to murder leaders who placed themselves between members of the sect and Nizari objectives. Such activities generated no small amount of terror. Amongst the legends of the Nizari was a belief that under the influence of hashish they killed for a price at the behest of their master. By the time the Franks arrived in the region during the early twelfth century, they too had heard of the notorious Nizari.⁶

The Europeans also came to know about the sect through rumors of their leaders, the *dai*. These *dai* were often referred to as “The Old Man of the Mountain.” At the popular level it was in the context of this Old Man that the legends of indulgence and hashish abounded, especially in later centuries in the works of Europeans such as Marco Polo.⁷ This appellation is a reference to the original leader of the Nizari Isma’ilis and his mountain fort in northern Persia. The fact that the title remained in use as a reference to Nizari leaders is born out in crusader chronicles, such as *The Life of Saint Louis* by Jean de Joinville.⁸ Archbishop William of Tyre (1174-1186) referred to the Assassins and their engagements with the Franks.⁹ The thirteenth century *Rothelin* continuation of William of Tyre’s *History* also mentioned their reputation for fanatical devotion to the *dai* and equally zealous execution of his assassination orders.¹⁰ The memorable title coupled

⁵ Crim, *Dictionary*, 71.

⁶ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 131.

⁷ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo, The Venetian*, trans. William Marsden (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1948), 48-51.

⁸ Jean de Joinville, *The Life of St. Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M.R.B. Shaw (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 277-80.

⁹ William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea, Volume 2*, trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and August Krey (New York: Columbia University, 1943), 77.

¹⁰ *Crusader Syria in the Thirteenth Century: The ‘Rothelin’ Continuation of the History of William of Tyre with part of the ‘Eracles’ or ‘Acre’ Text*, trans. Janet Shirley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 35-6.

with the stories of the Assassins no doubt contributed to their longevity and to the mystique of the order.

Early Isma'ili theology is equally difficult to decipher. It is complex and extremely esoteric. It seems to synthesize Islamic, Jewish, and Christian influences, as well as ancient Gnosticism.¹¹ Neoplatonism and/or Gnosticism appear to be central to Isma'ili theology, as evinced by a belief in a cosmic intelligence which has, since Adam, continuously revealed itself in divine incarnations.¹² As such, there had been six prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed. The final revelation would come through the seventh of these incarnations: the *Mahdi* (messiah). They developed a faith that sought hidden meaning in the scriptures, whose initial stages of initiation were not unlike Sunni Islam. The farther the initiate progressed, the more mathematics and science became blended with spirituality in an attempt to use these mechanisms as a means of achieving transcendence. Naturally, the Isma'ilis attracted intellectuals whose interests tended to the contemplative side of spirituality. Like all Muslims, they believed that Mohammed was the most important prophet and that the future of all Muslims was a significant concern, but it was their openness to a new revelation after Mohammed that garnered them the notoriety of heterodoxy.¹³

The Nizari, however, did not confine their efforts to Persia. Shortly after their establishment, they sent a mission to Syria in 1105 which began at Aleppo and spread into the mountainous regions southward. The Nizari did find some willing recruits as

¹¹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 131.

¹² Gerald Benedict, *The Watkins Dictionary of Religious and Secular Faiths* (New York: Sterling, 2008), 267.

¹³ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 69-70.

Seljuk rule in Syria had not set well with the inhabitants nor the Nizari themselves for that matter, as their troubles with Seljuks had begun in Persia. Though it took over fifty years of missionizing and maneuvering, the Nizari did manage to acquire a network of mountain strongholds in the highlands.¹⁴ Despite initially finding a peaceful home in Aleppo, the Nizari eventually clashed with both the Seljuks and the Sunni majority, resulting in their massacre. They reorganized under the Persian *dai* Bahram and moved their base of operations to Damascus, where they acquired a substantial following.¹⁵ There Bahram gained the confidence of al-Mazdaghani, the vizier of the regional Seljuk ruler Toghtekin.¹⁶ By 1125, the Franks were threatening Damascus, and Toghtekin made a desperate decision by entering into a pact with the Nizari. Bahram all but demanded that Toghtekin give him Fort Dan at Banias, just 40 miles to the southwest, and with the help of al-Mazdaghani, convinced Toghtekin to do just that.¹⁷ After all, who would dare attack Damascus with the dreaded Assassins strategically positioned at Banias on the road to the great city? Surely not the Franks.

Bahram left some followers at Damascus in order to maintain a presence and influence in the city, but set off with the bulk of the Damascus Nizari to Banias. The nearby valley had come to be known as Wadi al-Jinn, “valley of the demons,” a moniker which seemed to harbor both ancient pagan embers and an air of allure for the Assassins.¹⁸ There Bahram refortified the city and the old Fatimid Fort of Dan in

¹⁴ Farhad Daftary, “Hassani Sabbah and the Origins of the Nizari Movement,” in *Mediaeval Isma’ili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 198.

¹⁵ Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 484.

¹⁶ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 131.

¹⁷ Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 65.

¹⁸ Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, *The History of the Assassins*, trans. O.C. Wood (London: Smith and Elder, 1835), 78.

November of 1125.¹⁹ Archaeology reveals fortified walls that demonstrate the Assassins' resolve to hold the city.²⁰ The Muslim historian and chronicler al-Qalanisi gives a less than favorable assessment of the order, but nonetheless records the Nizari takeover of Banias. He describes the expedition as a rabble of valets, peasants, low-fellows, and miscreants.²¹ In describing Bahram and his Nizari, al-Qalanisi voices the widespread contempt for the Assassins in the Muslim world. He goes on to account for the refortification saying that Bahram took to "fortifying it and rebuilding what of it was in ruins or out of repair."²² From al-Qalanisi we have a picture of the disrepair of the city and also that the Nizari made use of what remained, certainly the Fatimid Fort of Dan and quite probably what Byzantine and Roman ruins were exposed at the time.

Bahram wasted no time in spreading the Nizari message in the Banias region, terrorizing whoever did not conform.²³ Any Christian or Jew, and likely any Muslim for that matter, who opposed him would not have been allowed to stay. Thus, due to the near complete demographic shift, Banias truly did become the City of Assassins as John Wilson asserts. The Nizari totally repopulated Banias, reactivated the mint—as evinced by a coin from 1126—revised its civil and religious institutions, and swept away the last remnants of the renaissance of the tenth century.²⁴ As a result of his activities, Bahram gained control of a number of the area villages and towns. However, Bahram and the Nizari had difficulties in consolidating their power over several recalcitrant groups of

¹⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 131.

²⁰ Moshe Hartal, "Banias, the Southwestern Tower" *Hadashat Arkheologyot* 119 (2007).

²¹ Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades. Extracted and Translated from the Chronicle of Ibn al-Qalanisi, Volume 5*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: University of London, 1932), 187.

²² Al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle*, 187.

²³ Stephen Runciman, *A History of the Crusades, Volume 2: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East, 1100-1187* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1952), 179.

²⁴ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 131.

mountain peoples, especially the Druzes. Bahram and the Nizari were no match for a coalition of Druzes, Nusariyeh, and the area's Bedouin Arabs, whose sheikh he had murdered. In 1128, he died in a battle near Baalbek against the coalition.²⁵

The Nizari maintained their hold on Baniyas despite this setback. In fact, Baniyas had become the center of the order's influence and power in Syria, if only for a brief time.²⁶ Another Persian, Ismail al-'Ajami, succeeded Bahram in leadership, and continued to enforce Nizari policies in the region.²⁷ However, the Nazari were not yet free of obstacles. Toghtekin, the sometime benefactor of the Nizari, died on 12 February 1128, shortly after the death of Bahram. The new ruler of Damascus was Toghtekin's son, Taj al-Muhk Buri, who made plans to distance himself from the unsavory pact his father had made.²⁸ In 1129, Buri ordered the slaughter of some 6000 Nizari at the hands of the primarily Sunni Damascus militia. In September he openly murdered the vizier al-Mazdaghani—the Nizari's one true friend and ally in Damascus—at the Rose Pavilion while his council was present. Buri displayed his head as a message of deterrence to all who would align themselves with the Nizari.²⁹

When word reached al-'Ajami in Baniyas, he soon realized the precarious position that he and his order were now in. He quickly wrote a letter to Baldwin II (1118-1130) and dispatched couriers to Frankish territory. He offered to surrender Baniyas in exchange

²⁵ Al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle*, 190-91; Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 65; see also Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 133, and Runciman, *The Crusades*, 179.

²⁶ Hammer-Purgstall, *History of the Assassins*, 78.

²⁷ Al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle*, 191.

²⁸ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 133.

²⁹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 133; see also Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 65.; see also Runciman, *The Crusades*, 179.

for asylum for the Nizari in Frankish territory.³⁰ Baldwin had planned to advance on Damascus and this was exactly the sort of opportunity for which he was waiting.³¹ As soon as Toghtekin died, Baldwin had sent Hugh de Payens (c. 1070-1136), the Grandmaster of the Knights Templar, to Europe in order to recruit more soldiers. But, when al-‘Ajami’s emissaries arrived in November of 1129, Baldwin and the Franks set out to take Banias with his newly swelled Army of Jerusalem. Al-‘Ajami and his followers resettled in Frankish territory and dispersed. He contracted dysentery and died within a few months in 1130, thus ending Nizari rule in Banias.³² Back in Damascus, Buri suffered the fate that both history and legend have apportioned for enemies of the Assassins: two Syrian *fidawis* killed him to avenge their master, a task which cost them their lives as well.³³ At any rate, for four years, Banias was indeed the City of Assassins before it was claimed by the Franks in 1129, and then again by the Muslims in 1164.³⁴

By the end of 1129, Banias was in the hands of European crusaders and under the Latin bishopric of Tyre.³⁵ Isma’il, the Muslim ruler of Banias, had made a contract with the Franks to surrender Banias in exchange for allowing the city’s residents to move into Frankish territory.³⁶ Baldwin II designated Banias a regional capital, and it became the seat of a northern fiefdom. Renier de Brus, an English nobleman, became the first lord of

³⁰ Al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle*, 194; Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (trans. John Rothschild) (London: Al Saqi Books, 1984), 10.

³¹ William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 13, Chapter 26, 620-22, Book 14, Chapter 19, 656-7.

³² Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 66.; see also Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 179-80.

³³ Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 66.

³⁴ R.C. Smail, “Crusader Castles of the Twelfth Century,” *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10.2 (1951), 138.

³⁵ William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 14, chapter 14, 68.

³⁶ ‘Izz al-Din Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fil-tarik, Part 2, The Years 541-598/1146-1193: The Age of Nur al-Din and Saladin*, trans. D.S. Richards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 278.

Banias under the new partitioning. Banias was an outlying frontier fort. Occasional treaties with Damascus offered temporary security, but enemies and potential enemies abounded.³⁷ A glaring absence of pilgrim accounts of the city during this period illustrates the severity of Banias' insularism.³⁸



25. Inside the southern gate tower of the Crusader city (courtesy Biblewalks)

That Banias' remained in the minds of European crusaders is demonstrated by the attention they gave to its strategic position in their military campaigns. Its significance in the sacred geography of Palestine influenced the crusading armies. Not only was it the traditional end of the pilgrim trail, as has been demonstrated, but its spiritual resonance

³⁷ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 132-4.

³⁸ R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus 1193-1260* (Albany: State University of New York, 1977), 137.



26. Outside view of the south gate tower (courtesy Biblewalks)

continued to draw the eccentrics of the Western Christian enterprise. Despite the politically tenuous nature of Galilee, there were hermits and monks seeking spiritual illumination who ventured into the region as far as Mount Tabor, and conceivably into the Banias region.³⁹ The confusion of Banias with Dan persisted in the Latin conceptualization of Palestinian sacred geography, although this seemed not to deter the attention of crusaders from its religious significance.⁴⁰ Interestingly, a fixture in the crusade history of Banias is the presence of the martial monastic orders, namely the Knights Hospitallers and the Knights Templar.

³⁹ Andrew Jotischky, *The Perfection of Solitude: Hermits and Monks in the Crusader States* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1995), 27, 179.

⁴⁰ William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 14, chapter 14, 81.

The crusaders lost Banias to a Muslim siege in 1132.⁴¹ However, a campaign retook the city by siege in 1140.⁴² In June of 1140, Banias was once again in crusader control. The conquerors allowed the citizens of the city the option of leaving with their families or of remaining pledging fealty to the crusaders.⁴³ Wilson posits that this accommodation may suggest the presence of Eastern Christians living in Banias.⁴⁴ With the onset of the Second Crusade, lords and churchmen met in Acre in 1148 to organize campaigns to retake more of the Holy Land. Adam, Bishop of Banias, was present at this meeting.⁴⁵ The crusade would march through Banias on its way to the ill-fated siege of Damascus.⁴⁶ In 1156, a series of earthquakes ravaged Palestine, producing destruction in towns such as Banias and an opportunity for Muslim attacks on Frankish holdings.⁴⁷ In 1157, Humphrey of Toron became lord of Banias, and in an effort to strengthen the city and supply it with much-needed capital he made a deal with the Knights Hospitaller. In honor of their contribution toward financing the city's repairs and maintenance, as well as the charge of its defense, Humphrey gave them control of half of the city, which would have made Banias a Hospitaller stronghold.⁴⁸

The Knights Hospitaller originally operated a hospital for the care of the sick and the poor; their additional duties eventually included the fortification and defense of

⁴¹ Al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle*, 216-18; Maalouf, *Crusades*, 117.

⁴² Al-Qalanisi, *Damascus Chronicle*, 261; William of Tyre, *History*, Volume 2, Book 15, chapter 10, 106-10.

⁴³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 138-9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ William of Tyre, *History*, Volume 2, Book 17, chapter 1, 185; Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 141.

⁴⁶ William of Tyre, *History*, Volume 2, Book 17, chapter 2, 186.

⁴⁷ Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, Volume 2, 343.

⁴⁸ William of Tyre, *History*, Volume 2, Book 18, chapter 12, 256-7; Jean Richard, *The Crusades, c.1071-c.1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 175-6.

castles and participation in campaigns.⁴⁹ Pope Paschal II (d. 1118) organized them into the Order of St. John of Jerusalem with a papal bull in 1113, bestowing upon them lands in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and jurisdiction therein.⁵⁰ With their association with the care of the infirmed, the Hospitallers found familiar environs in Banias, ones which resonated with the city's traditional relationship with healing. It is evident that the order had every intention to make good on its agreement. However, the Hospitallers' tenure at Banias was to be a short one. Once the rudimentary logistics were in place, members of the order sent for supplies and personnel. A convoy of camels and pack animals carrying the necessary goods under the protection of knights fell victim to a raid. Nur ed-Din led the Muslims and captured the entire convoy just outside the southern reaches of Banias, he and his company killing many Hospitallers in the engagement. This setback seems to have changed the minds of the Hospitallers and they withdrew from the city and their contract with Humphrey.⁵¹ Banias was to remain in Crusader control until November 18, 1164, when Nur ed-Din and his forces retook the city.⁵²

Despite popular conjecture about the Knights Templar in recent decades—ranging from unfounded speculations to historical guesswork—the order stands out among its peers in the crusades. Certainly, they were one of the most capable fighting forces in the Middle Ages, but even so, there are attributes of the Templars that provide insight into their presence at Banias, ones that extend beyond the strictly military.

⁴⁹ Helen J. Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller* (Boydell: Woodbridge, 2001), 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-5

⁵¹ William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 18, chapter 12, 257; Humphreys, *Saladin to the Mongols*, 348.

⁵² William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 19, chapter 10, 308-9; Peter M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260-1290), Treaties of Baybars and Qalawun with Christian Rulers. Islamic History and Civilisation. Studies and Texts 12* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 107.

The Templars' very origins are ensconced in sacred geography. Upon their founding in Jerusalem, they were given a section of the the Al-Aqsa Mosque as a headquarters, believed to have been the location of the Temple of Solomon—hence the order's name.⁵³ Their original mission was to protect pilgrims as they marched from Jaffa or Acre to Jerusalem. It should come as no surprise that the Templars would be employed in taking Banias, a role that becomes more logical when considering their charge for protecting the pilgrims on the various trails.⁵⁴ This charge to protect pilgrims and the sacred places they frequented also meant that Templars were defenders of Christian sacred space in the Holy Land.⁵⁵ Their first priority at Banias was to protect the northern borderland. The Templars do seem to have collected relics, though their rules do not specify such activities as part of their mission. Again, such activity needs no fantastical stories for support.⁵⁶ Banias had been home to its share of relics, though whether they existed at the time the Franks invaded is not known with a great degree of certainty. Be that as it may, such sacred objects would have been of interest to the Templars (as other orders) and a mechanism for change in the execution of military campaigns. The statue of Christ, its remnants, the statue of the woman with the issue of blood, any object associated with St. George, any confirmation of saintly presence, and most importantly, their sanctifying effect on Banias: all were plausible enticements for Templar involvement at Banias. Muslim stewardship of the city and its relics was simply incongruent with the Templar initiative.

⁵³ G.A. Campbell, *Knights Templar: Their Rise and Fall* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2003), 20.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-2.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Barber, *The New Knighthood: A History of the Order of the Temple* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 6, 39.

⁵⁶ Campbell, *Knights Templar*, 8, 124, 326, 342.

The Templars proved to be valuable to Banias in 1156, when Baldwin III (1130-1162), King of Jerusalem, led a substantial troop of Templars to relieve Banias from Muslim pressure. The city was saved, but as many as three hundred Templar knights died and many others were captured in an ambush on the return journey.⁵⁷ On 18 November 1164, the city fell to Nur ed-Din (1118-1174).⁵⁸ Nur ed-Din's victory was such a blow to crusaders that a council sent a group including John, Bishop of Banias, to the Europe in order to raise support for the Crusades.⁵⁹ In May of 1174, King Amaury of Jerusalem (1136-1174) led a force to Banias with the purposes of wresting it from the Muslims. Amaury withdrew in exchange for monies, and died two months later. There must have been Templars in the Banias region in 1174 because Amaury had hanged a number of their order for some vague concession to the Muslims.⁶⁰ He appears not to have gotten along with the Templars very well, and they eventually exacted revenge upon him by killing a group of messengers bearing gifts to the Assassins.⁶¹ It was not until his successor, Amaury's son Baldwin IV (1161-1185), "The Leper," came to power that Banias was once again the scene of a crusader siege, which included Templars. Baldwin also withdrew at the payment of a tribute from Muslims.⁶²

Odo of St. Amand (d. 1180) was another Templar connected to the Banias story. Odo was, in fact, Grand Master of the Templars from 1171 to 1179. He engaged Saladin

⁵⁷ Campbell, *The Knights Templar*, 70.

⁵⁸ William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 19, chapter 10, 308-9; Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 145.

⁵⁹ William of Tyre, *History, Volume 2*, Book 20, chapter 12, 360.

⁶⁰ Estelle Blyth, *Jerusalem and the Crusades* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2007), 121

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶² Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 146.

(1138-1193) and his army near Banias and was subsequently taken prisoner.⁶³ Odo was a hot-tempered man, and made diplomacy a more tenuous exercise for the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Though Saladin had attempted to trade him for a Muslim prisoner in the interests of a truce, Odo refused and he met his end in the prisons of Saladin, dying the following year.⁶⁴

In 1187 another encounter between Templars and Muslim troops occurred near Banias. Saladin ordered his son al-Afdal to dispatch an envoy to Count Raymond III (1140-1187) in Tiberias to request safe passage through Galilee. Constrained by treaty terms, Raymond was obliged to grant the request, and al-Afdal set out from Banias with a host of 7,000 troops. Acting of their own accord, 150 Templar knights commanded by Grand Master Girard de Ridefort, attacked al-Afdal's troop, which destroyed the lot of them and thereby weakened the Templars.

The Templar presence in and near Banias during the First and Second Crusades is telling. It implies that Banias was important enough on a spiritual level to devote Templar resources to retaking and defending it. What is more intriguing is that the Templars deemed it of such importance that even the Grand Masters went out to the city and region in order to attend personally to its security. The city's military value on the Damascus road during the Crusades is well-attested, but there must have been a great lure beyond the pragmatic to entice the Templars undertake several expeditions to Banias.

⁶³ Sir Walter Besant and E. H. Palmer, *Jerusalem, The City of Herod and Saladin* (London: Chanto and Windus, 1908), 377.

⁶⁴ Stanley Lane-Poole, *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1906), 158-9.

Templars and other crusading armies never quite lost sight of the possibility of retaking Banias. However, the thirteenth century spelled change for crusader aims. An unfortunate precipitate of the ongoing conflict of the preceding decades was that Christians were not allowed into the city during the early part of the century.⁶⁵ In 1217, the crusaders made another attempt to take Banias from the Muslims in what amounted to a three-day plunder of the city and region, without success in their original aim.⁶⁶

Aware of the resolve of crusaders, the Ayyubids began construction of a fortress east of Banias in 1228 to strengthen the defense of the region. They constructed the castle known as Qalat al-Subayba in a strategic location, perched on a southern spur of Mount Hermon, overlooking the region of Banias. From here, the castle also acted as a buffer against potential crusade attacks on Damascus. No doubt, the castle Qalat al-



27. Qalat Subayba, looking to the north east

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 150.

⁶⁶ Jean de Joinville, *The Life of Saint Louis in Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M.R.B. Shaw (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 307.

Subayba would have been of both strategic and sacred geographical significance to the Templars and crusaders if they could take it. Though the fort has recently been proven to be fundamentally of Arab construction, the touch of the crusaders was upon it, as crusader structures in the town of Banias proper attest.⁶⁷

King Louis IX (1214-1270) of France was instrumental in organizing yet another expedition against the Muslims of Banias. In 1253, he placed the operation under the direction of the Comte d'Eu, Philippe de Montfort and Gilles le Brun, the king's Chamberlain Pierre, Grand Masters of the Temple and of the Hospital, and Jean of Joinville.⁶⁸ Once again, the Templars and the Hospitallers found themselves in the midst of a scheme to reacquire the sacred landscape of the Banias region. Joinville gives the following account of the plan to be launched from Tyre:

It was decided that the king's division...should take up their stand between the castle and the city, supported by the troops under the worthy knight Geoffroy de Sargines. The barons of the land, for their part, were to enter the city by the left, the Hospitallers by the right, while the Templars would ride straight on along the road by which we had come, to effect an entry that way.⁶⁹

There seems to have been an occasion during the course of the battle when the Franks actually took possession of the city. However, this was short-lived and the city returned to Muslim control.⁷⁰ Though the crusaders failed to take Banias, this campaign illustrates the continuing presence of Banias in the minds of commanders and churchmen.

⁶⁷ Denys Pringle, *Fortification and Settlement in Crusader Palestine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), I, 93; Ronnie Ellenblum, "Who Built Qalat al-Subayba?" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 103-12; Reuven Amitai, "Notes on the Ayyubid Inscriptions of al-Subayba (Qal'at Nimrud)" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 43 (1989): 113-19.

⁶⁸ Jean de Joinville, *Saint Louis*, 307.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 308-9.

Opportunities for taking Banias were becoming less frequent as the crusader hold on a small strip of the Levantine coast grew more tenuous. The second half of the thirteenth century continued to be a time of uneasy diplomatic relations between the crusaders and the Muslims. The crusaders remained a factor in the region's military balance, as evinced by a raid on Banias in 1264.⁷¹ The Franks conducted this expedition most likely because they suspected that the Muslims were using Banias as a base for striking into crusader territory, a scenario that is supported by the nature of Banias in the period.⁷² It continued to hold special significance in the minds of the clergy. Pope Gregory X (1210-1276) maintained the practice of naming Latin bishops of Banias, though such appointments were merely symbolic.⁷³ Though Banias was a fixture in the crusading mind, she slipped absolutely beyond reach with the loss of the last crusader outpost in the Levant, Acre, in 1291.⁷⁴ The last decade of the thirteenth century marked the loss of the Holy Land for the crusaders, and the overwhelming majority of lands and kingdoms in the Near East. In the Latin West, Banias was now only a fading dream.

With the loss of Acre in 1291, crusading forces from Europe retreated to island outposts and posed no further threat to the non-coastal regions of the Near East. The Holy Land was now strictly under Muslim control. Thanks to the Mamluks, long the backbone of the Ayyubid military and now rulers of Egypt and Syria in their own right,

⁷¹ U. and M.C. Lyons (trans.), *Ayyubids, Mamlukes, and Crusaders: Selections from the Tarikh al-Duwal wa'l-Muluk of Ibn al-Furat, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1971), 90.

⁷² Lyons, *Ayyubids, Mamlukes, and Crusaders*, 116; see also Peter M. Holt (trans.), *The Memoirs of a Syrian Prince: Abu al-Fida, Sultan of Hamah (672-721/1273-1331)* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1983), 197.

⁷³ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 157.

⁷⁴ Claude Reignier Conder, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1099-1291* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1897), 406.

the crusaders had lost their citadel of Acre⁷⁵ and ceased to be a major threat to the Near Eastern mainland.⁷⁶ While Cyprus, Rhodes, and Crete still represented a major crusader presence, crusader kingdoms and territories diminished even as the Muslims forced them back to Europe, until at the very end of all crusading efforts they were back where they started, without the the coveted boons of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As the Crusades were losing momentum, the Levant became a region of dispute yet again. The Mongols threatened Muslim lands with a series of invasions to which the Banias region was not immune. The Mongols took the city of Damascus in a campaign. However, after several encounters, the Mamluks won a decisive victory over the Mongol intruders at the Battle of Saqhab on 20-22 April 1303, a scant fifteen miles north of Banias on the Damascus road.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, for people who were not Muslim this meant something other than freedom. The Mamluks' local administrators apparently did not treat the Eastern Christians and non-Muslims who lived in the Banias region very well.⁷⁸ They also denied Europeans entry into the Banias region. As a result, in the minds of European Christians, Banias' location became increasingly imprecise.

The close of the Middle Ages and the early Ottoman period, beginning in 1299, was a time of displacement in the minds of European Christians: Banias remained spiritually important to the Christian tradition, but its location was unsure. Authors producing religious literature routinely misplaced Banias on maps and in their narratives.

⁷⁵ P. M. Holt, "The Treaties of the Early Mamluk Sultans with the Frankish States," in *Muslims, Mongols, and Crusaders: An Anthology of Articles Published in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, ed. G. R. Hawting (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 71-2.

⁷⁶ Holt, "The Position of Power of the Mamluk Sultan," in *Muslims, Mongols, and Crusaders: An Anthology of Articles Published in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, ed. G. R. Hawting (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 237.

⁷⁷ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 158.

⁷⁸ Wechter, *History of the Jews*, 201 fn.

Pilgrims must have been extremely scarce during this time. Marino Sanuto, a Venetian, produced a gazette in 1321 in which Baniyas is situated not at the foot of Mount Hermon or the headwaters of the Jordan, but farther to the west.⁷⁹ Another gazette from 1350 similarly locates Baniyas to the north of Dan, and renders the name “Balynas.”⁸⁰

The fourteenth century was a period of consolidation for the Mamluks. Toward the end of that century, one ethnicity of the Mamluks became dominant: that of the Circassians or, collectively, the Burghi Mamluks. During this time, the name of Baniyas becomes synonymous with the major fort that had defined the city’s defences in the medieval period, Subayba. The Burghi Mamluks would remain dominant in the region until 1517, during which time we may infer the presence of an active Muslim community.⁸¹

Beginning in 1512, the Ottomans acquired and integrated the Mamluk world into their empire. As the Ottomans made Syria a province, Baniyas, became a *baj*, a sort of merchant and customs station on the road to Damascus. In terms of religious life, Baniyas remained important to the Muslims and especially the Druzes, for its continued association with Khadir and his monument near the old Cave of Pan. However, Baniyas was as misrepresented in western literature and on maps in the Ottoman period as it had been under the Mamluks. Its confusion (indeed, conflation) with Dan was still ever-

⁷⁹ *PPTS, Volume 12*, 19; *PPTS, Volume 13*, 12-13.

⁸⁰ *PPTS, Volume 13*, 128.

⁸¹ Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 159.

present in such works. Travellers mistook Banias for sites such as Baalbek, Dan, and even cities located near the Sea of Galilee.⁸²

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Banias became an interesting crossroads of Eastern economic and military need and the Western ability to accommodate. The Arab population in the Banias region grew increasingly disgruntled with the Ottoman tendency toward despotism. As such, Arabs of that region and many others in the Levant began to look for assistance in the West. This phenomenon created an environment that made for an intriguing exchange of cultural and religious ideas.

In a time when Arabs of the Levant were beginning to look for alternatives to Ottoman rule, Fakhr al-Din, a Druze, turned those yearnings into action. Fakhr al-Din was born in 1572, a member of the Arab tribe of Beni Ma'n, all of whom practiced the Druze religion. By the turn of the century, al-Din controlled much of the Syrian coast, and also territory in northern Palestine, which included such cities as Banias, Safed, and Tiberias. Al-Din restored a number of old fortresses (crusader and Muslim) for the defense of his territory, including Subaybah at Banias. He allegedly captured Subaybah without any bloodshed by having his men surround the town in hiding, and tricking the local sheikh into give him a tour of Banias. When the tour was over, Al-Din had his men come out of hiding and surround the sheikh, and then announced the he was no longer in control of the city.⁸³

⁸² J.A. van Egmont and John Heyman, *Travels Through Parts of Europe, Asia Minor, the Islands of the Archipelago, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Mt. Sinai, etc, Volume 2* (London: Davis and Reymers, 1769), 266; *PPTS, Volume 13*, 15; Harry Charles Luke, *A Spanish Franciscan's Narrative of a Journey to the Holy Land* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1927), 19.

⁸³ George Sandys, *Sandys Travells: Containing and History of the Original and Present State of the Turkish Empire...* (London: J. Williams Junior, 1673), 212.

Fakhr al-Din was ostensibly an Ottoman vassal, though he seems to have been more concerned with the fortunes of his own people and territories than with the Empire. He did operate as though he were autonomous, a trait perhaps best illustrated by his developing



28. Fakhr al-Din II

European contacts, and in some cases, friends. Al-Din grew especially close to the Medici family of Florence, Italy. In 1612, the Ottomans banished Al-Din, whereupon he went directly to Florence. It was rumored that while there he converted to Catholicism. It is evident that he had curried favor with the Medicis and developed a friendship with Cosimo II Medici. Al-Din requested Cosimo II to send envoys to his former territories, now under the control of his brother and son, who were both loyal to him. The fascinating situation created here was the crossing of Catholic and Druze spheres of spirituality. Perhaps the latent Christian tenets surviving in the Druze religion were



29. Cosimo II Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany

enough to persuade Al-Din to convert. Unfortunately, the lack of accounts and records makes this an unanswerable although intriguing question. Whatever the nature of his faith, he was able to convince the Ottomans of his loyalty and regain control of his former emirate. However, his flirtation with European culture and an accusation that he had opened Sidon to European ships were enough to convince the Turks otherwise. In 1632, the Turks took him to Damascus where he remained as a prisoner until his execution on 14 March 1635.

The analysis of Baniyas' religious history during this era is a study in the history of memory, particularly for Christian Europe. Baniyas would remain an important religious fixture in the theology of Europe because of its association with Jesus and the early church. However, the displacement of its location on maps and in literature reflects the fact that for the most part, Europeans had lost touch with the physical city of Baniyas. The result was a totally detached cultural memory. The Muslim residents of Baniyas and its region were the only people still in contact with Baniyas, and those cultural memories of a

Greco-Roman Baniyas were often vague for the Arab citizens living in the city. Records for Baniyas are so sparse at this point that here it seems proper to bring this present analysis of the religious history of Baniyas to a close.

CHAPTER 10

Conclusions: Mythos and Topos

Throughout its vibrant history, Baniyas has been a nexus of religious ideas and practices. Nexus implies locus, locus implies space, and that is exactly the type of relationship that this dissertation has illustrated. The region of Baniyas exhibits the interaction of religious ideas, culture, and sacred space. Thus, Baniyas is an ideal venue in which to study these historical forces at work. It is along the lines of *mythos*—“myth”—and *topos*—“place”—that the clues concerning these forces lie. Religious themes, mythological continuity, and sacred space in the history of Baniyas become clearer upon the examination of *mythos* and *topos*.

I have endeavored in this dissertation to illustrate a cultural process, specifically regarding religion. Each of the elements in this study—religion, society, and sacred space—are all the result of acts of creation, over centuries and millennia. The religions of Baniyas may be viewed as separate creations and segments of history, yes, but the transitions were as important as the perceived periods of history as identified by coherent terms such as “Roman,” “Christian,” “Arab,” and so on. The culture of these periods helps to give identity to the societies involved, but the aforementioned terms can obscure ideological and ethnic subtleties. There is a danger in utilizing inflexible terminology, but equally dangerous is the eschewing of certain terms altogether, such as “Roman.” Such terms do not hinder the writing of culture history or silence the voices of ancient peoples, but rather aid the scholar in identifying the softer voices in history by providing examples of what obscured societies are not. The limits of terms can clarify rather than obfuscate the minute variations in past cultures. As I have sought to recount in synthetic

form a religious history associated with specific dominant cultures, I have also demonstrated that there are nuances of culture that are syncretistic, and which cannot be rigidly defined. Baniyas has proven a subject in which variation and nuance over space and time have resulted in definable religious periods with multiple cultural expressions.

Pan, so prominent a figure in the Greco-Roman era, was the very reason for the site's existence. It is arguable that the city and cultural institutions that grew with it would never have become realities were it not for the Hellenistic establishment of the simple country shrine. But Pan left more than his name to the city of Baniyas. He continued an earlier religious pattern and in his wake left a legacy of divine fertility. This mythological motif survived the changes in religious tradition, thanks to its foundations within the cultural memories and in the sacred geography of Baniyas.

Evidence suggests that people have worshipped at the site since at least as early as Canaanite times in the Bronze Age. The traditions of high places in the Hermon Mountain range and their association with the baals, have led several researchers to conclude that the precursor to Pan was a baal worshipped at the cave. Though this is possible, it is more likely that a goat god such as the *Az* or *Uz* is a better fit. The reason is that when the Ptolemies took control of the region, they were the first keepers of the shrine, and their conflative practices in Egypt suggest that they would simply overlay a local goat deity with Pan. When the Seleucids took the region from them, they continued to maintain the shrine at the Cave of Pan.

The Roman era, which began with Pompey's campaign in 63 BC, was the zenith of paganism at Baniyas. The cult of Pan grew as Roman influence in the region became

clearer. Augustus ceded the land to Herod the Great, where Herod built a grand Augusteum on a hill at Banias. With this structure came the subsequent expansion of the city, its shrines and temples, and its notoriety. Herod's son Philip developed Banias into a *polis*, the identity it kept well into the Byzantine era. Temples to Zeus, the nymphs, and a host of other gods appeared as the city grew.

When Banias grew into a symbol of Greco-Roman paganism and Roman authority, Jews and Christians lived in the shadow of paganism. The Jews had arguably been in the region since the late Bronze Age, especially if Banias had indeed been Beth Rehob. The Jews of Banias felt Roman harshness in the Jewish-Roman Wars, when Vespasian and Titus took many prisoners only to execute in their games. Despite this misfortune, Jews maintained a presence well into the medieval period. Christians, likewise, had a strong presence in the region. Jesus and his disciples had visited the city when it was Caesarea Philippi, in order for him to reveal his messiahship and established his church. From this point, Banias became an important Eastern city for Christianity, and early church historians such as Eusebius and Epiphanius paid attention to the important city.

The Byzantine period marked the demise of public paganism and the triumph of Christianity. By the fifth century, devotees became less frequent at the Sanctuary of Pan and its shrines. A chapel—soon to be connected to St. George—and its priests kept close watch over the old Cave of Pan and its neighboring temples in order to oversee this conversion and to exploit its sacrality in theologically acceptable ways. Banias sent bishops to the great ecumenical councils, including the Councils of Nicea and the Council

of Chalcedon. An active Eastern Christian community thrived at Baniyas, but not to the exclusion of other “Christianities.”

The Muslim invasion in the seventh century caused yet another change of power in the Baniyas region. In 632, Baniyas came under Muslim control, which meant both political and religious changes. Though Jews and Christians remained in the city, the *polis* transformed into a *madina*, mosques arose, and orthodox Muslims, Sufis, and Druzes came to Baniyas, where they believed Khadir dwelt near the Cave of Pan.

On the eve of the Crusades, the area was a borderland where only local authority ultimately mattered. The Muslim faith continued to be the dominant spiritual force in the land even when European crusaders began their armed pilgrimage to retake Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Baniyas became an important target because of its location on a crossroads. For decades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, control of Baniyas vacillated between Franks, Templars, Hospitallers, and European knights on the one side, and Damascenes and Assassins on the other. Ultimately, the Muslims were able to take control over Baniyas and to hold it until the crusaders were no longer a threat to the Palestinian, Lebanese, and Syrian interior.

With the retaking of Acre, the Mamluks were responsible for ruling the Baniyas region. The Mamluks would serve as vassals of the Turks until the Ottoman Turks acquired the Levant in the sixteenth century. At this time, little more than religious vignettes can be made of Baniyas’ religious past, as the records are but a whisper. This history closes with the crossing of Druze and Muslim spheres of influence with those of

Catholic Italy, as seen in the case of the Druze ruler of Banias, Fakhr Al-Din II, and Cosimo II Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, respectively.

During its history, Banias has drawn people seeking revelation. With Mount Hermon looming above it, the city has been a haven for mystics, priests, rabbis, prophets, and their followers. Its association with such figures as Enoch, Azazel, Pan, Moses, Jesus, St. George, and El Khadir helped to secure its reputation as a venue for revelation and oracle alike. In that capacity, the orthodox and heretical both—in person and idea—gravitated to Banias and its surroundings.

The fertility god motif, upon which the site's religious past is founded, gave to Banias its most enduring figure: Pan. That fertility god theme permeated to varying degrees the religious ideologies that followed. The city's name itself speaks to the importance of Pan. Though he changed his garb, the patron of the city seemed always just below the surface, waiting to integrate himself into new religious paradigms.

While outside influences were a tremendous cultural force in Banias' development, the local population has proven resilient. Semitic peoples lived at Banias at its Canaanite beginnings and continue to do so today. Although the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Arabs controlled Banias in turn, the local Semitic peoples—primarily Iturean—managed to accommodate themselves to each new regime. But always they remained, just as the mythical idea had done. It is likely that the two are therefore inextricably linked, given their long history at the site of Banias.

Of course, Banias existed as part of a larger world. In her case, Banias was a city influenced by the Greco-Roman models for cities so prevalent in the Mediterranean. As

such, there were precedents for the longevity of pagan sites in the Roman Near East, such as Palmyra, Dura Europas, Caesarea Maritima, and Baalbek. As a shrine site, other cities provide analogues, such as Jerusalem, Gaza, and especially Panopolis, in Egypt. These places all exhibited long pagan traditions, some times existing in public form into the sixth century despite the triumph of Christianity. All of these sites also related to the religious forces of the day, altering their ideas to conform, each in turn to Judaism, Christianity, and finally Islam, until they became pluralistic. Baniyas is a part of a broader sacred geography in the ancient Near East, one that encompasses a variety of religious traditions.

The societies that left their cultural imprint at Baniyas also helped define its sacred space. Baniyas was an economic crossroads, but it had a sense of place and spiritual permanence with its inspiring cave, lush surroundings, temples, shrines, churches, and mosques. Some of these structures remain and attest to that seeking of religious space. Scholars can identify a substantial portion of them and their respective religious meaning. Others, such as the Augusteum, continue to be points of contention in terms of situation and space. Baniyas accommodated both its own inhabitants as well as visitors in that pilgrims of several faiths regularly stopped. It was a place to seek religious meaning, and then take the boon back home or elsewhere. The important overarching conclusion is that Baniyas had a definite sacred geography, based on religious ideologies, its society, and its physical topography.

The key to understanding the religious history of Baniyas is a better comprehension of the three elements that constitute the spiritual past: religion, society, and sacred space.

The numerous specific studies of Baniyas have been valuable in revealing the details of belief and rite. Inscriptions and text yield abundant cultural data on the various ethnicities and social groups living at Baniyas, and what function they had in terms of religion. By examining sacred space—the very religious geography—at Baniyas, scholars are able to situate the religious history into a sacred venue. These three elements exist in concert at Baniyas. They suggest that a nature deity persisted for centuries as an archetype, that the region lured mystics and prophets, that religious travelers and adventurers sought out Baniyas, and that the religious history of Baniyas is unique. Every phase of its past reveals the connective strands that link them all together. We are still learning the history of Baniyas, and work remains to be done, but synthetic methods such as the ones outlined in this dissertation can yield results where a strict classical approach may miss valuable data. Religion at Baniyas between 21 BC and AD 1635 had a near constant presence, transformed to conform to transitional cultural norms, and remained integrally connected to the regional natural environment.

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