

The Decapolis: History and Archaeology

Adam Pažout

AKAV00052

AKA500087

2/0 Zk, 5 kr.

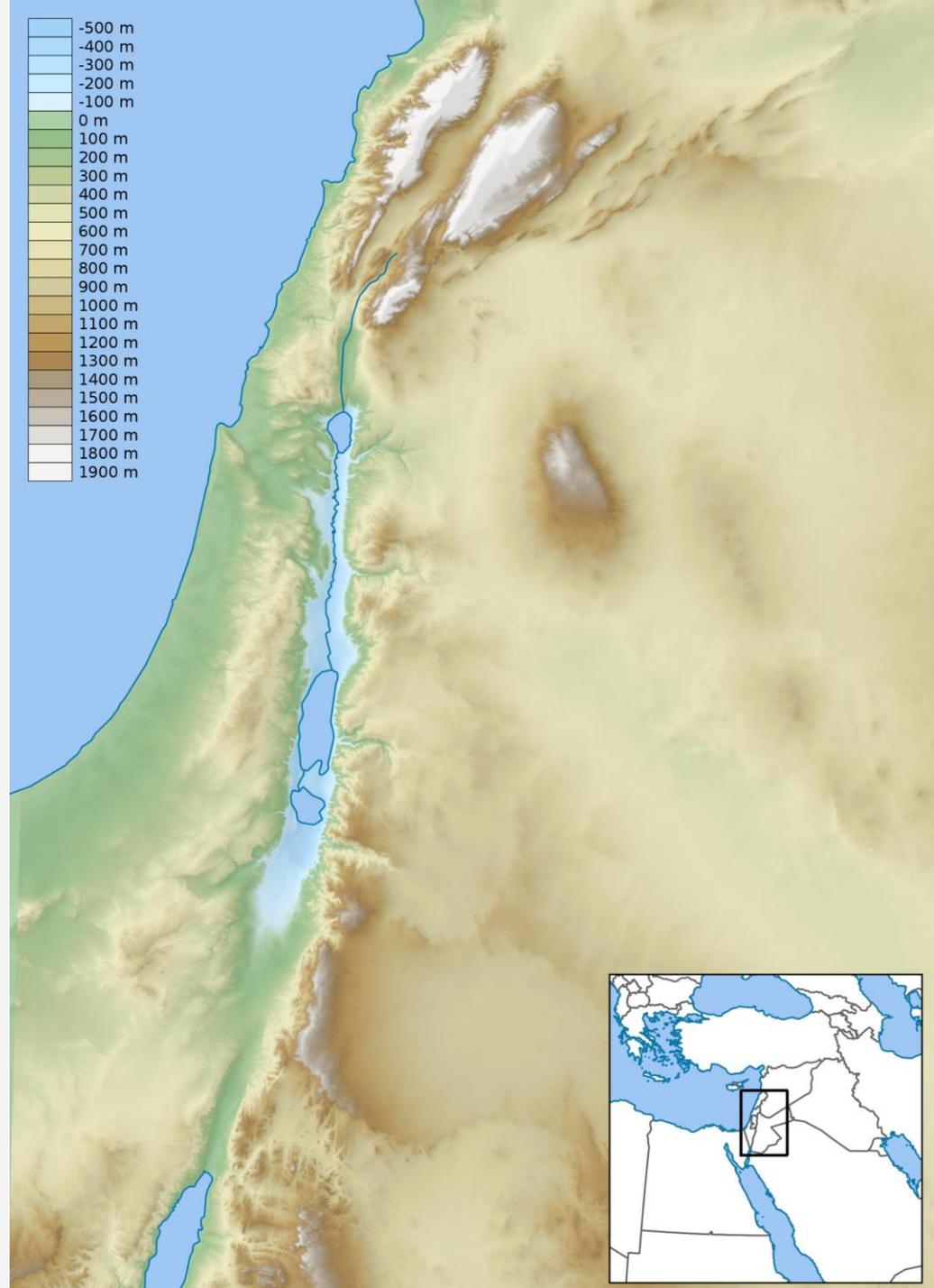
A.Pazout@seznam.cz

Syllabus

1. Introduction. Geography, natural environment. Ancient Sources on the Decapolis. The definition of Decapolis and Historical Geography. History of research.
 2. History of the southern Levant from the Hellenistic to the Late Roman period
 3. The Hellenistic foundations: archaeology of the 3rd/2nd c. BCE
 4. The Early Roman revival
 5. Archaeology of the Roman period I: Urbanism, fortifications, public spaces
 6. Archaeology of the Roman period II: Cults, temples
 7. Archaeology of the Roman period III: Public entertainment (theatres, *odeia*, hippodromes)
 8. Archaeology of the Roman period IV: Water management (aqueducts and baths)
 9. Hinterlands, rural settlement and economy
 10. On the way to the Christian Late Antiquity - the 3rd/4th c. CE transformation
- +1 additional lecture

Geography, environment

- “Levant” in the narrower sense (from the Taurus Mts. in the north to the Red Sea in the south, between the Mediterranean to the Syrian and Arabian Desert)
- “Southern Levant” (Lebanon, S. Syria, Israel, Jordan, Palestinian territories)



Geography, environment

- Dead Sea Transform fault system

- Major earthquakes:

140 BCE

31 BCE

363 CE

551 CE

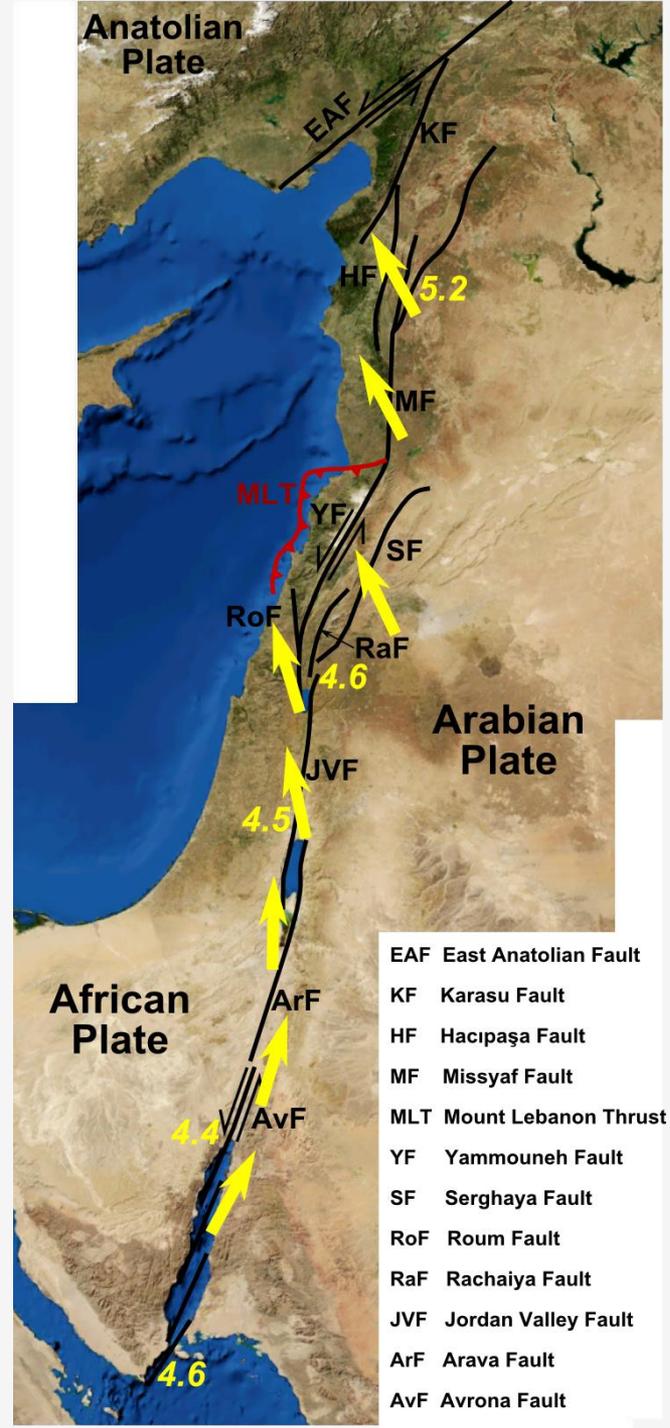
658 CE

749 CE

1033/4 CE

...

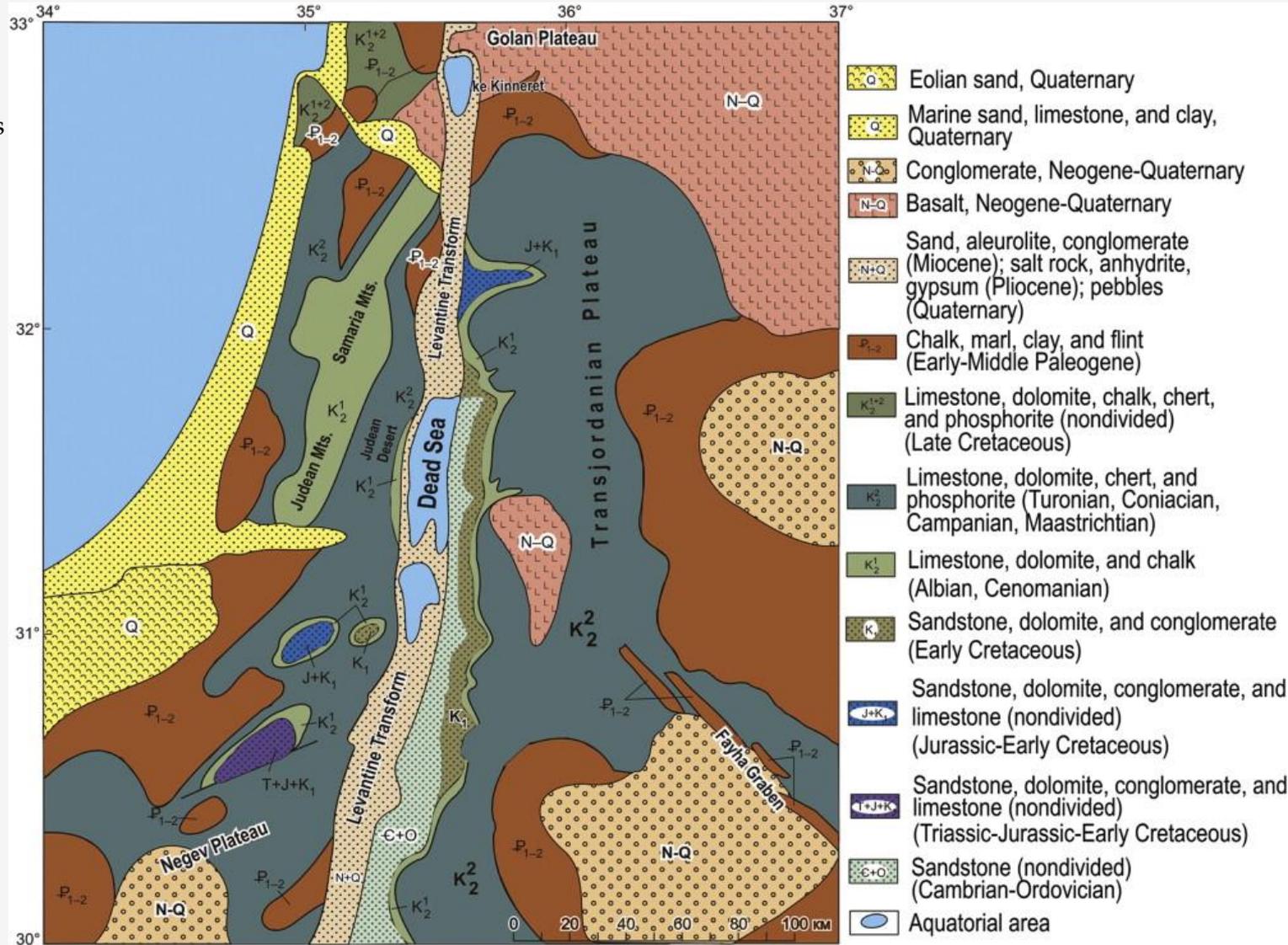
Some of them are archaeologically recognizable



Geography, environment

Geology

- Building materials
- *Kurkar*
- Limestone
- Basalt
- Sandstone limited (Petra)



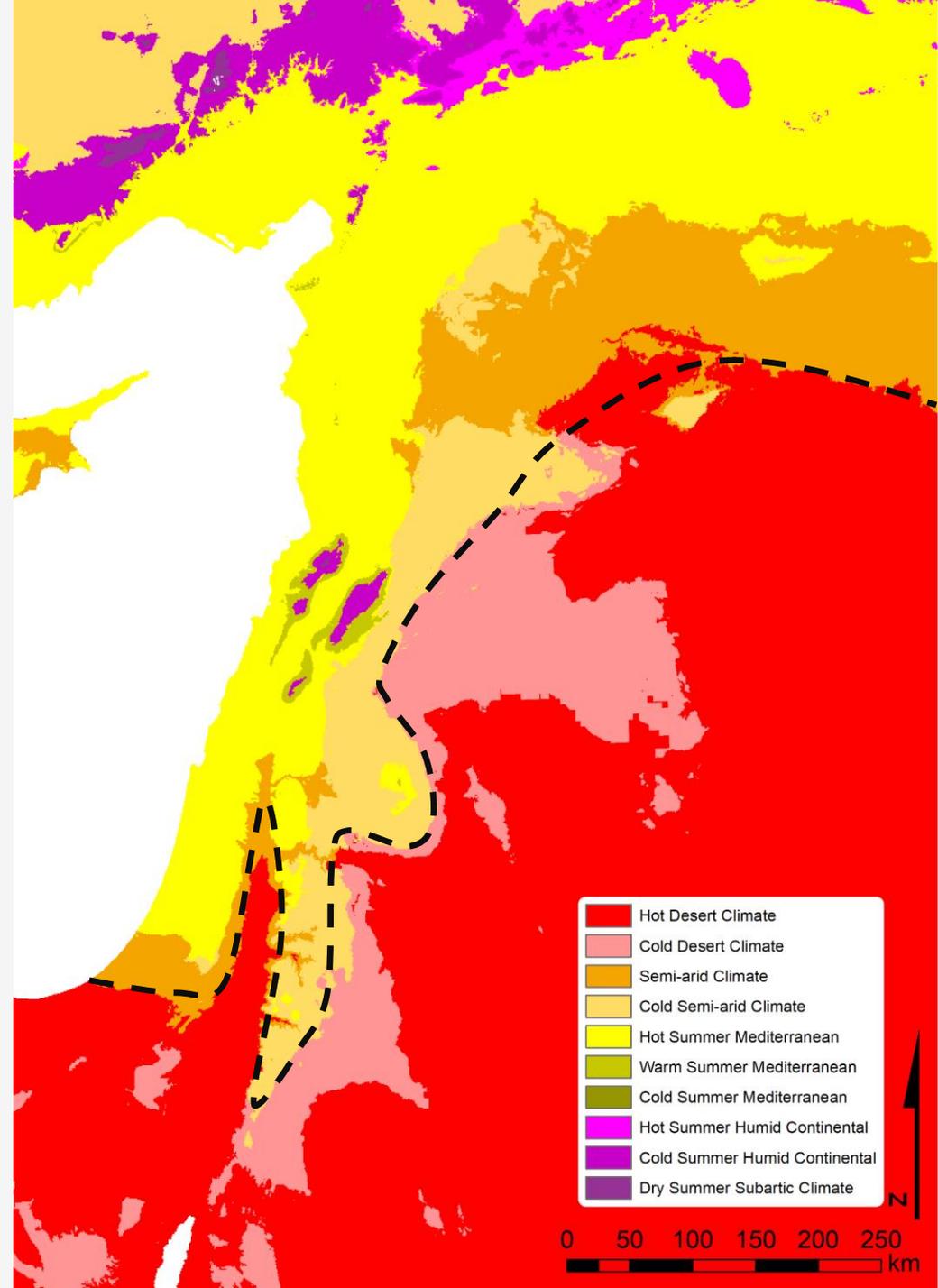
Geography, environment



Basalt region, el-Leja (greyish triangle), and a-Safa (black spot in upper right) – the Black Desert (last eruption ca. 1850)

Geography, environment

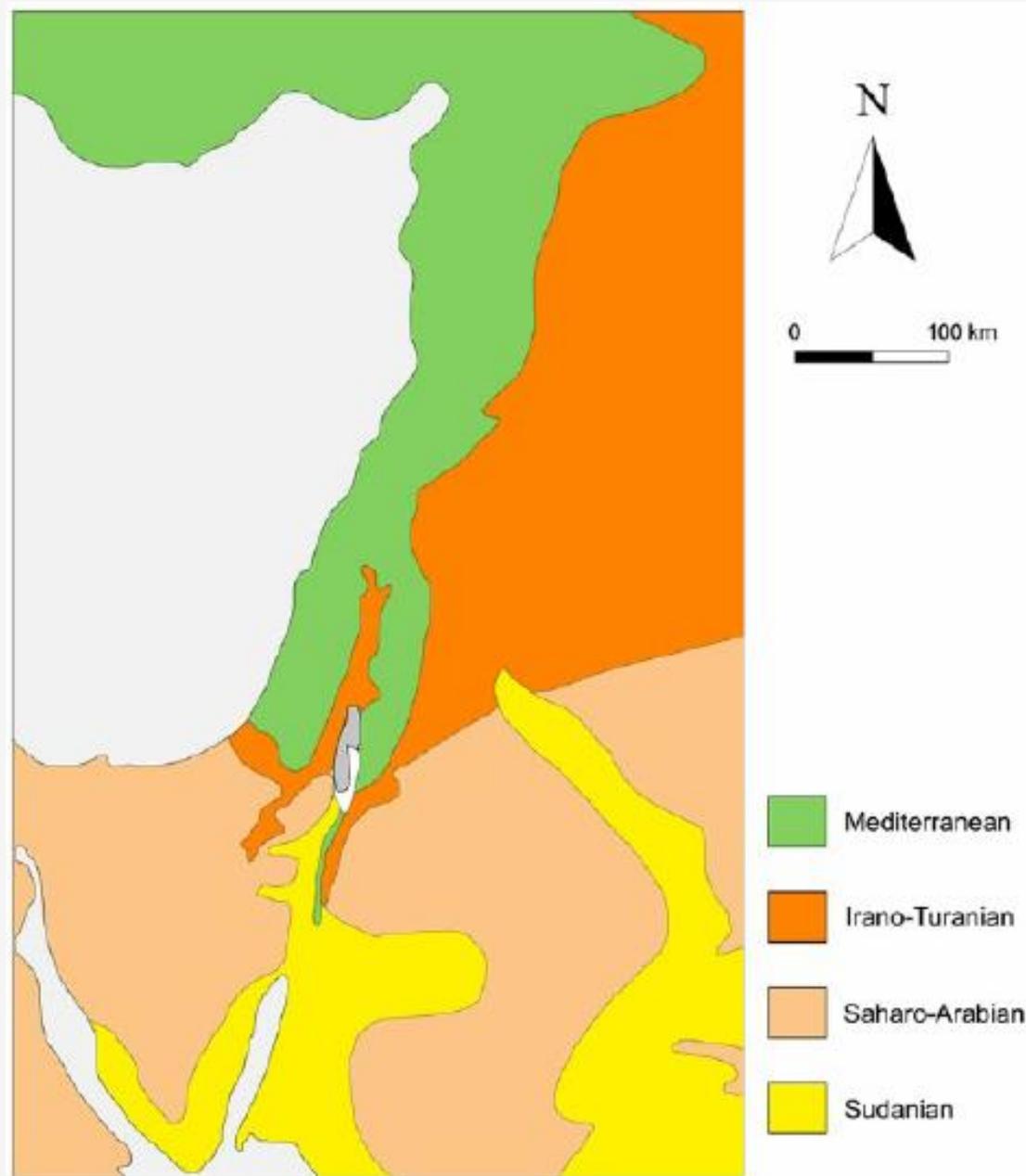
- Mediterranean climate
 - Semi-arid to Desert climate
 - Mountain areas
-
- 200 mm isohyet – limit of dry farming
 - Beyond this isohyet only pastoralism is possible



Beck, H.E., N.E. Zimmermann, T.R. McVicar, N. Vergopolan, A. Berg, E.F. Wood: Present and future Köppen-Geiger climate classification maps at 1-km resolution, *Scientific Data* 5:180214, doi:10.1038/sdata.2018.214 (2018).

Geography, environment

- Mediterranean woodlands (oak, pine, *pistacia*, carob) and shrublands (*maquis*)... olives!
- Irano-Turanian steppe (grassland) and shrubland (scattered *pistacia*, juniper), transitional zone between humid Mediterranean and dry Saharo-Arabian (desert) region



Asouti, E. et al. 2015: Early Holocene woodland vegetation and human impacts in the arid zone of the southern Levant . *The Holocene* 25:10, 1565-1580.

Historical Geography

- Herodotus, Histories 3.91

The fifth province was the country (except the part belonging to the Arabians, which paid no tribute) between Posideion, a city founded on the Cilician and Syrian border by Amphilochus son of Amphiaraus, and Egypt; this paid three hundred and fifty talents; in this province was all Phoenicia, and the part of Syria called Palestine, and Cyprus.



Historical Geography

- Strabo, Geography 16.2.1-3

SYRIA is bounded on the north by **Cilicia** and the mountain Amanus; from the sea to the bridge on the **Euphrates** (that is, from the Issic Bay to the Zeugma in Commagene) is a distance of 1400 stadia, and forms the above-mentioned (northern) boundary; on the east it is bounded by the Euphrates and the Arabian Scenitæ, who live on this side the Euphrates; on the south, by **Arabia Felix and Egypt**; on the west, by the **Egyptian and Syrian Seas** as far as Issus.

Beginning from Cilicia and Mount Amanus, we set down as parts of Syria, **Commagene**, and the **Seleucis** of Syria, as it is called, then **Cœle-Syria**, lastly, on the coast, **Phœnicia**, and in the interior, **Judæa**. Some writers divide the whole of Syria into Cœlo-Syrians, Syrians, and Phœnicians, and say that there are intermixed with these four other nations, Jews, Idumæans, Gazæans, and Azotii, some of whom are husbandmen, as the Syrians and Cœlo-Syrians, and others merchants, as the Phœnicians.



Historical Geography

- Pliny the Elder, NH 5.13-19

Next to these countries **Syria** occupies the coast, once the greatest of lands, and distinguished by many names; for the part which joins up to **Arabia** was formerly called **Palæstina, Judæa, Cœle, and Phœnice**. The country in the interior was called **Damascena**, and that further on and more to the south, **Babylonia**...

Those who make a still more minute division of this country will have it that **Phœnice** is surrounded by **Syria**, and that first comes the maritime coast of **Syria**, part of which is **Idumæa** and **Judæa**, after that **Phœnice**, and then **Syria**...

Beyond **Idumæa** and **Samaria**, **Judæa** extends far and wide. That part of it which joins up to **Syria** is called **Galilæa**, while that which is nearest to **Arabia** and **Egypt** bears the name of **Peræa**...

On the side of **Syria**, joining up to **Judæa**, is the region of **Decapolis**...

...the chain of Libanus, which extends 1500 stadia, as far as Simyra; this district has the name of **Cœle Syria**...

...**Cœle Syria** has the town of Apamea...

- Claudios Ptolemaios, GH 5.15.1-16.10

Syria is bounded to the north by Kilikia and part of Kappadokia...The cities of the **Dekapolis of Koile Syria**...

Palestine (Syria) which is also called **Ioudaia**, is bounded on the north by **Syria** along the line referred to above; on the east and south by **Arabia Petraia** along a line drawn from the eastern limit of Syria to the limit of Egypt...

Historical Geography

- Josephus Flavius

BJ 1.398-400: **Batanaea, Trachonitis, Auranitis**

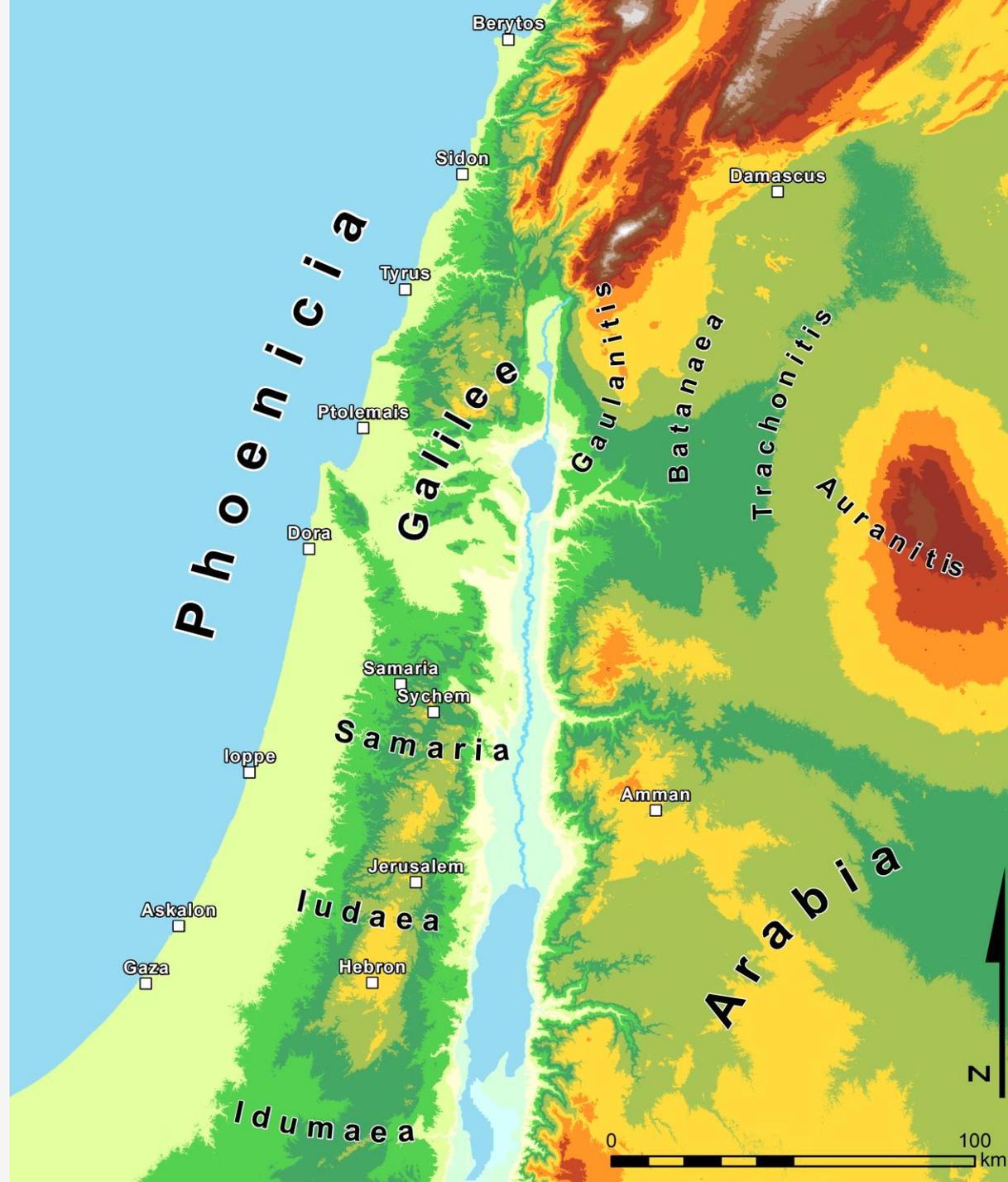
BJ 3.35-47: **Galilee**

BJ 3.48-50: **Samaria**

BJ 3.51-58: **Judaea, Idumaea, Gaulanitis, Batanaea, Trachonitis, Auranitis**

BJ 4.1-8: **Gaulanitis**

...



What and where is Decapolis?

(Gr. *deka*=ten, *polis*=city)

Mark 5.20; 7.31 (around 70 CE, relating to events around 30 CE)

“ And he departed, and began to publish in **Decapolis** how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.”

“And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of **Decapolis**.”

Matthew 4.25 (80/90 CE, relating to events around 30 CE)

“And there followed him great multitudes of people from **Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan (Peraea)**.”

Josephus BJ 3.446 (ca. 90 CE, relating to events in 66-72 CE)

“So he sent away his son Titus to [the other] Cesarea, that he might bring the army that lay there to **Scythopolis, which is the largest city of Decapolis...**”

Josephus Vita 341 (ca. 100, relating to events in 66-72 CE)

“ For before ever I was appointed governor of Galilee by the community of Jerusalem, both thou and all the people of Tiberias had not only taken up arms, but had made war with **Decapolis of Syria**.”

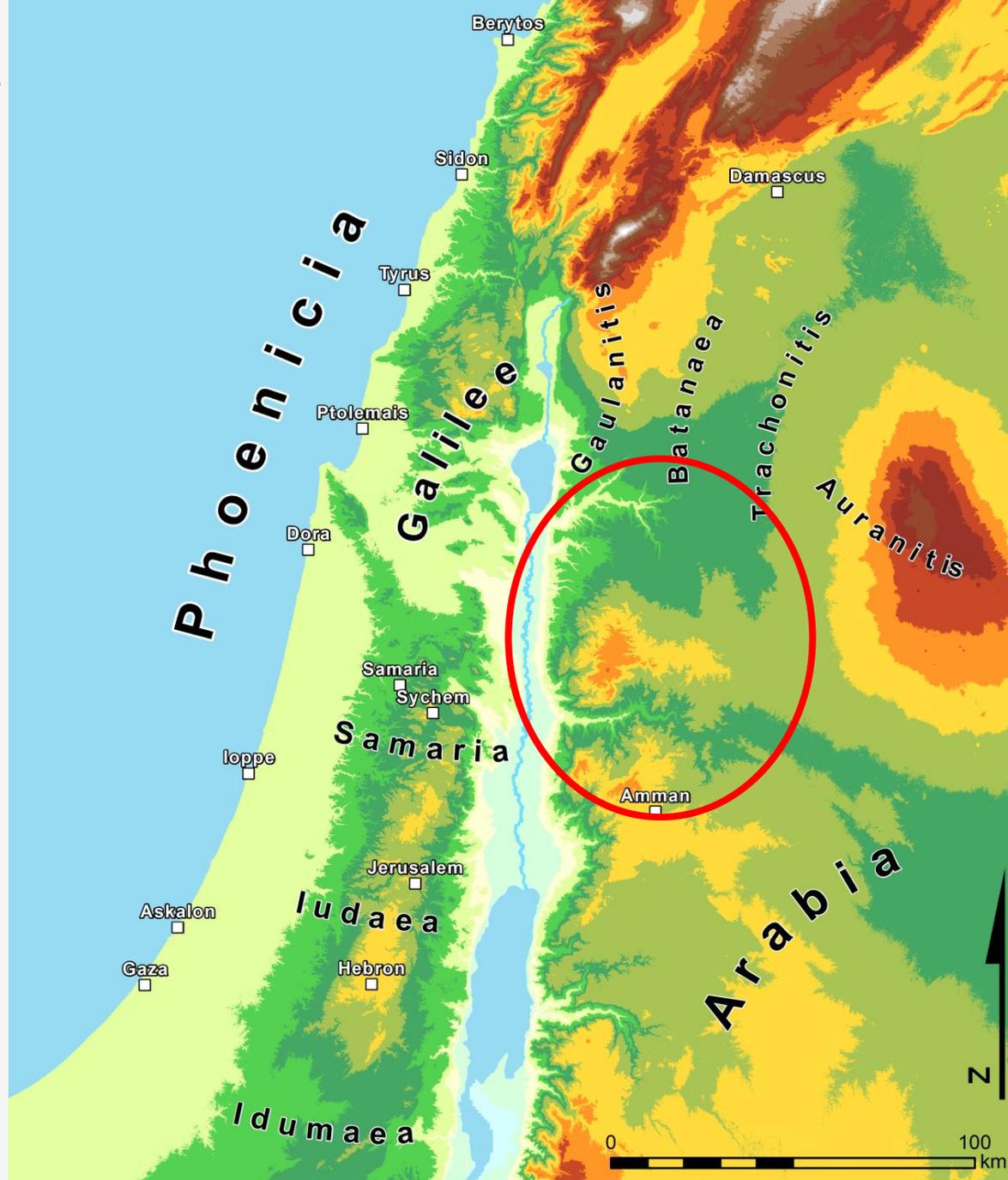
Pliny the Elder NH 5.16 (before 79 CE)

“ On the side of Syria, joining up to Judæa, is the region (*regio*) of **Decapolis, so called from the number of its cities; as to which all writers are not agreed.**”

What and where is Decapolis?

	Pliny	Cl. Ptolemaios
Damascus	+	+
Dion	+	+
Hippos	+	+
Gadara	+	+
Pella	+	+
Scythopolis	+	+
Philadelphia	+	+
Raphana	+	-
Gerasa	+	+
Canatha	+	+
Capitolias	-	+
Abida/Abila?	-	+

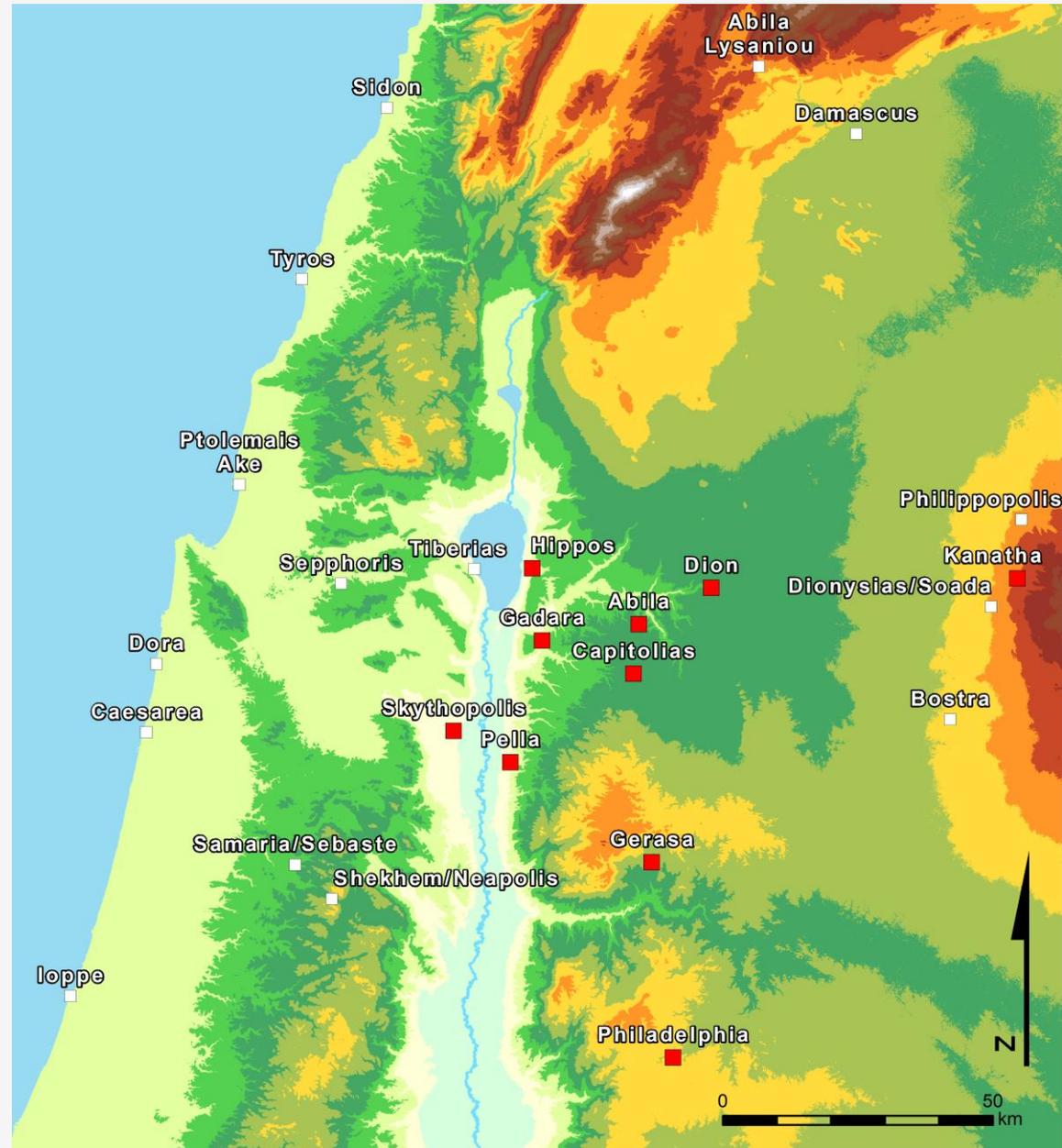
Cl. Ptolemaios: +6 additional places, many of them unidentified



What and where is Decapolis?

	Pliny	Cl. Ptolemaios
Damascus	+	+
Dion	+	+
Hippos	+	+
Gadara	+	+
Pella	+	+
Scythopolis	+	+
Philadelphia	+	+
Raphana	+	-
Gerasa	+	+
Canatha	+	+
Capitolias	-	+
Abida/Abila?	-	+

Both include Abila Lysaniou but exclude Abila
(perhaps Abida in Cl. Ptolemaios?)



What and where is Decapolis?

Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 80.16

“Decapolis, sicut in Euangelio legimus, est autem **regio decem urbium** trans Iordanem circa Hippum et Pellam et Gadaram.”

- Only geographical region?

Inscription from Eceabat (Marmara, Turkey) 90/100

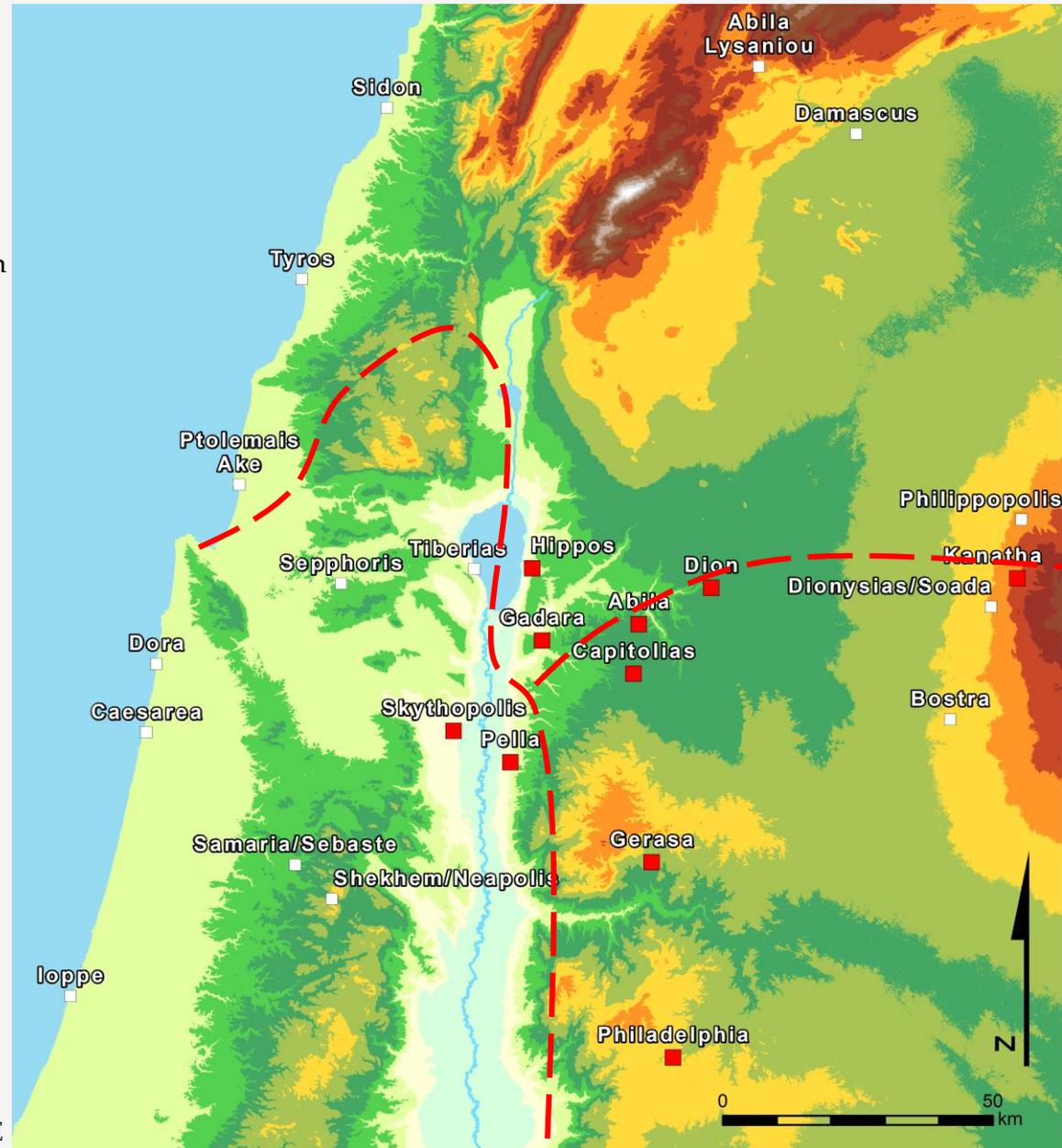
CE :

“...ηγησαμενω Δεκαπολεως της εν Συρια...”

Equestrian praefect/procurator of the Decapolis district in the province of Syria?

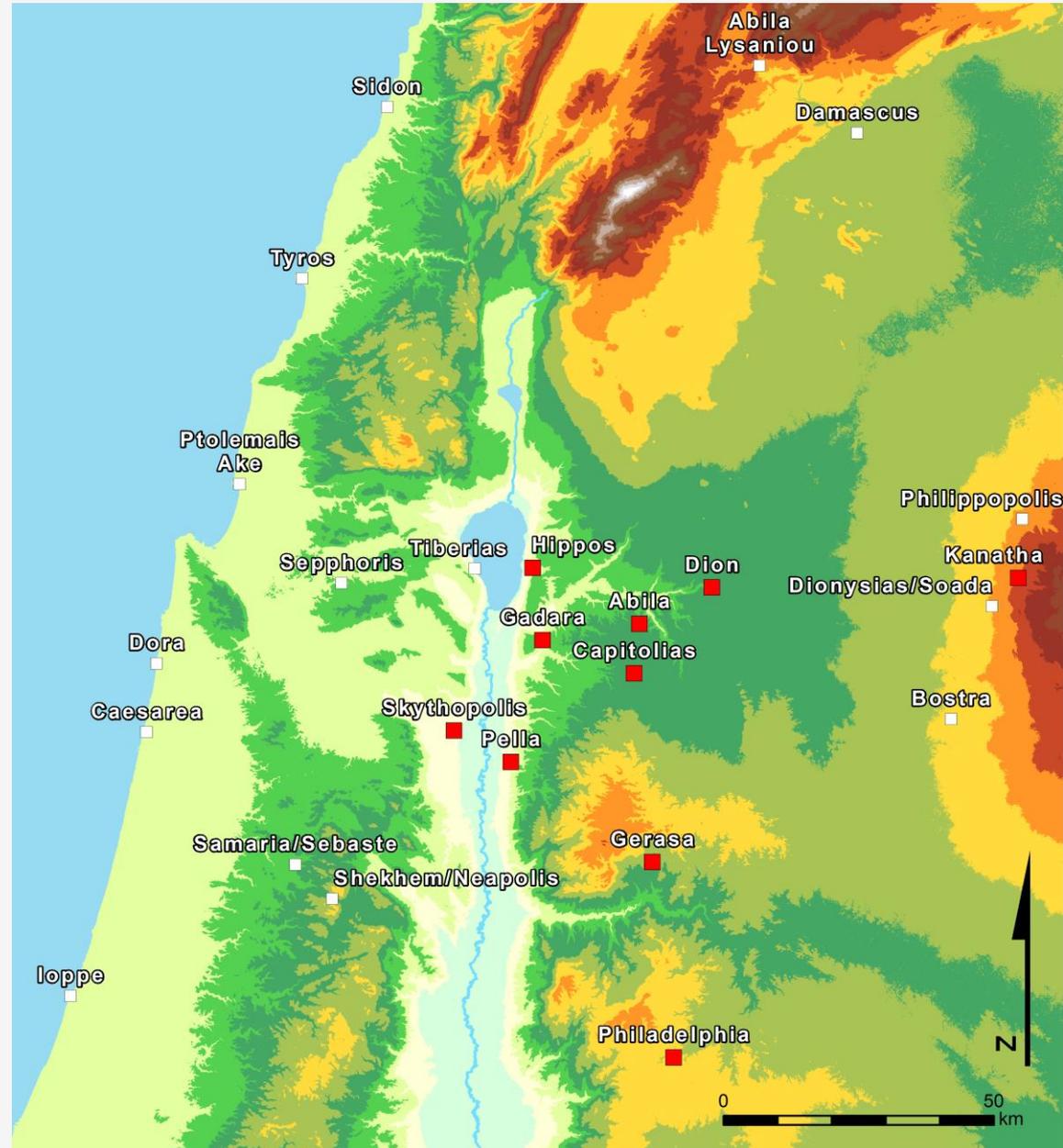
(Isaac, B. 1981: *The Decapolis in Syria, A Neglected Inscription*. *ZPE* 44, 64-74.)

- Major administrative changes after annexation of Nabataean kingdom 106 CE
- Approximate provincial boundaries in the 2nd c. CE (Syria, Arabia, Judaea/Syria Palaestina)



What and where is Decapolis?

- Hellenistic foundation
(Ptolemaic/Seleucid dynastic name) →
excludes Damascus; Canatha-Kanawat
unsure
- Compact block of territory → excludes
Damascus, somewhat Canatha
- I.e. Greek colonial settlement
- Greek culture and *polis* institutions
 1. Greek language
 2. Greek religion/cults
 3. Gymnasium
 4. Magistracies and offices (*boule*,
archon etc.)



History of research

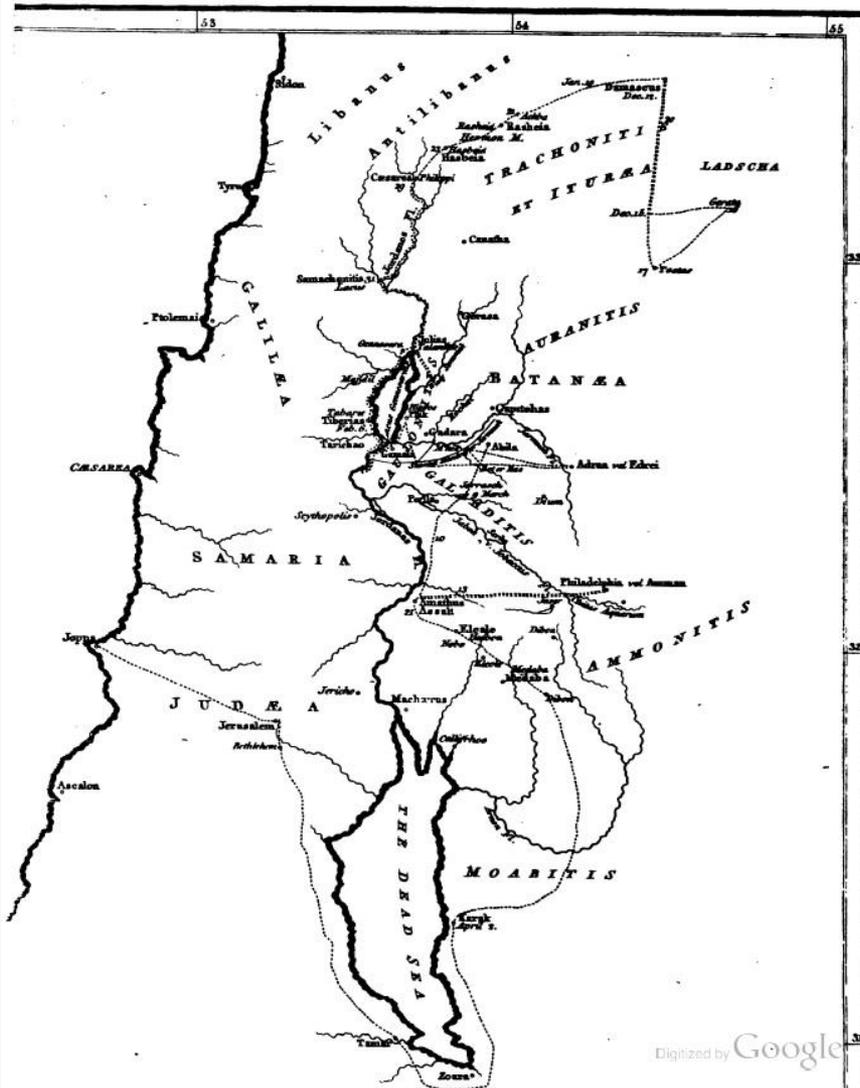
“It was generally agreed that these ten Greek cities (*poleis*) founded in northern Transjordan and adjacent areas during the Hellenistic period were formed into a political or economic confederation sometime by the Augustan era, providing a buffer or a barrier against the aggressive attacks of the Jews and Arabs of the region.”

(Graf, D. 1992: Hellenisation and the Decapolis. *ARAM Periodical* 4, 1-48.)

We shall see

History of research

- Early travellers
- Ulrich von Seetzen, Johann L. Burckhart, Victor Guérin



A
BRIEF ACCOUNT
OF
THE COUNTRIES
ADJOINING
THE LAKE of TIBERIAS, THE JORDAN,
AND
The Dead Sea.

BY
M. SEETZEN,
CONCEILLER D'AMBASSADE DE S. M. L'EMPEREUR DE RUSSIE.

PUBLISHED FOR THE PALESTINE ASSOCIATION OF LONDON.

BATH:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY NEYLES AND SON, ABBEY-CHURCH-YARD;

AND IN LONDON BY HATCHARD, PICCADILLY.

1810.

History of research

- Palestine Exploration Fund: *Survey of Western Palestine* (1872-1880) Tiberias, Kh. el-Kerak, Scythopolis...



History of research

- Gottlieb Schumacher

Across the Jordan (1886) – Dion, Adraha

The Jawlan (1888) – Hippos, Caesarea
Philippi/Paneas

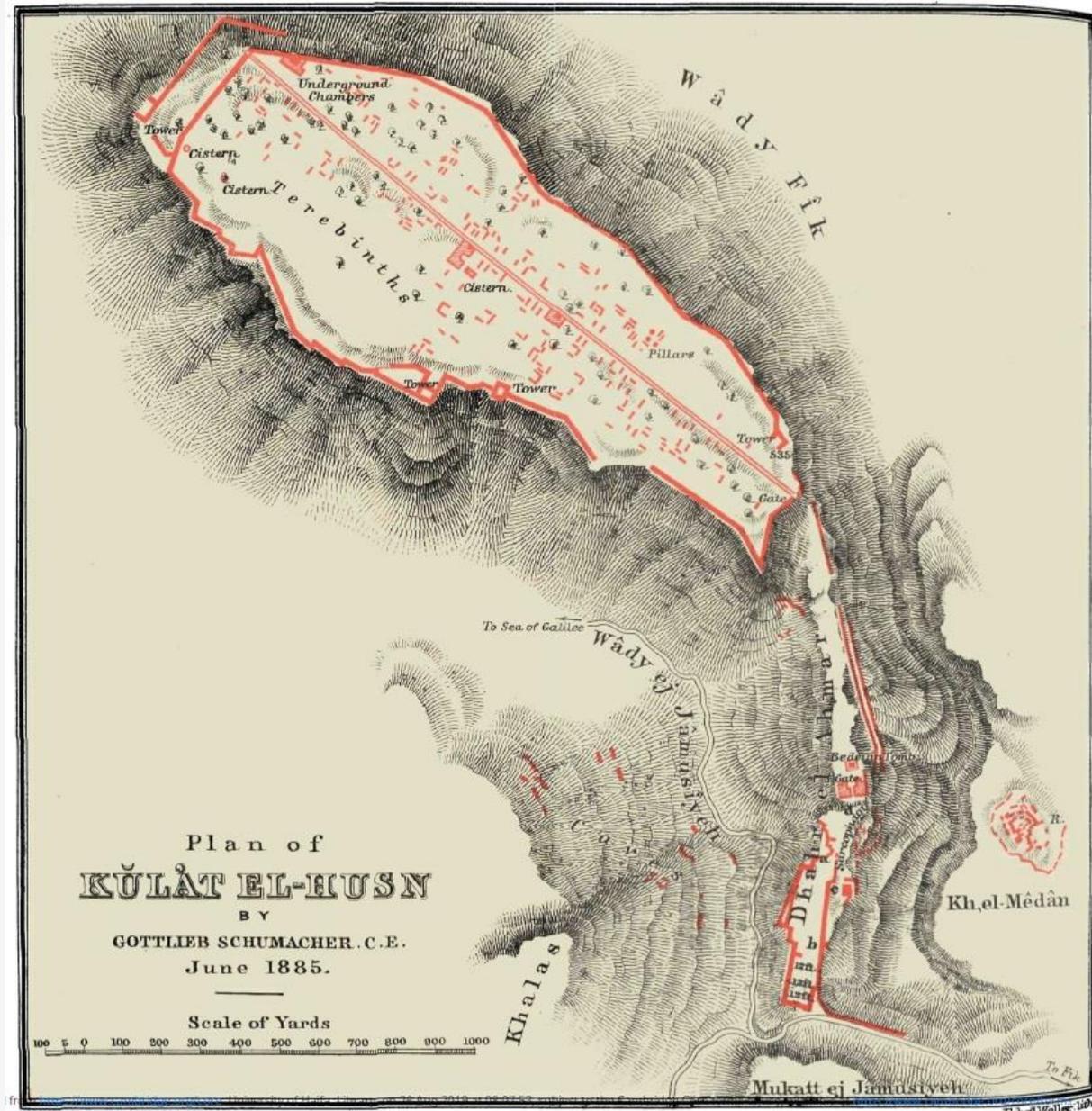
Pella (1888)

Dscherasch (1895)

Northern Ajlun within the Decapolis (1896)

– Gadara, Capitolias, Abila

<https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Schumacher%2C+Gottlieb%22>



History of research

- E. Brünnow, A. von Domaszewski

Die Provincia Arabia (1904-1909)

- A. Musil

Arabia Petraea (1907-1908)

- *Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904-5 and 1909*
- The photography archive is very valuable as many structures were destroyed since

<https://researchphotographs.princeton.edu>

“is-Sanaman,” Archaeological Archives, accessed January 27, 2020, <http://vrc.princeton.edu/archives/items/show/47700>.



History of research

Excavations

- Scythopolis (1927-33, 1989-96 - tell; 1986-2002 - lower town)
- Hippos (1949-1952, 2000-)
- Gadara (with breaks since 1976)
- Philadelphia (1927-1935, various excavations since 1967)
- Abila (with breaks since 1980)
- Pella (1978-1985, 1994-)
- Gerasa (1907, 1928-1934, various excavations since 1980)

...

