

PENTAPOLIS

This area derives its name from the five Greek cities of Cyrenaica: Berenice-Euesperides/Benghazi, Arsinoe- Taucheira (Teucheria)/Tukrah, Ptolemaïs/Tulmaythah, Apollonia/Sozousa/Marsa Susah, and Cyrene / 'Ayn Shahhat. The history of the Pentapolis was dominated by three centers of attraction and potential peril: the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the desert hinterland populated by Berber tribes having strong relations, often peaceful but not seldom hostile, with the Greek maritime towns and the fertile, Greek-dominated plateau overlooking the coastal zone. In northern Africa the Pentapolis was the westernmost link of the Greco-Oriental world. Beyond the border at Philaenorum Arae/Ra's al-'Ali, separating Libya Pentapolis from Tripolitania, the Latin West began.

Ptolemaic [Cyrenaica](#) became a Roman province in 74 B.C. It was united, at the latest, under Augustus in 27 B.C., to Creta, with which it formed one province. During the principate the eastern part of Cyrenaica was detached and joined to the province of [Egypt](#) as the [nome](#) Marmarice (called Libya Inferior in late antiquity). As a separate province, Cyrenaica, designated as Libya Superior or Libya Pentapolis, was a creation of the reforms of DIOCLETIAN. It was separated from Creta between 293 and 305 and formed part of the *dioecesis Oriens*, whose administrative head, the *vicarius*, had his residence in Syrian Antioch on the Orontes.

There are no ancient sources giving a comprehensive treatment of [late antique](#) Pentapolis. Information is relatively rare and must be assembled from various authors, except for the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, a period covered by the works of SYNESIUS, bishop of Ptolemaïs and metropolitan of Pentapolis since 412 (Lacombrade, 1951; Bregman, 1982; Roques, 1987).

Toward the end of the fourth century, Ammianus (XXII.16.4) describes Cyrene as *urbs antiqua sed deserta*, (ancient but deserted city) and Synesius draws a dramatic picture of the conditions in the contemporary

Pentapolis, ruined by the incursions of the desert tribes of the Ausuriani and the Mazices. Insecurity appears to prevail; the collapse of Greek city life and civilization seems to be imminent. But the notice of Ammianus is possibly anachronistic and the statements of Synesius may be overdrawn according to the rules of rhetoric and for the sake of eliciting benefits and relief from the imperial administration (Roques, 1987, pp. 27-40).

To judge from the archaeological and epigraphical evidence, political and military conditions seem to have improved after the time of Synesius. The administrative and military headquarters of Libya Pentapolis were moved, perhaps between 440 and 450 (Roques, 1987, pp. 94f., 226), from Ptolemas to Apollonia, which meanwhile had received the Christian name Sozousa. It served henceforth as the metropolis of the province. Notwithstanding economic difficulties and disruptions caused by tribal raids, the fabric of city life and agricultural activity in the hinterland did not crumble. But the pressures were felt, making necessary the restoration of vital defenses and city installations by JUSTINIAN (Kraeling, 1962, pp. 27f.).

The Arab conquest of the Pentapolis in 642 by the troops of 'Amr ibn al-'As inaugurated a new epoch. However, the Greek towns did not disappear suddenly. Ptolemaïs/Tulmaythah, for instance, continued to serve as port for the highly productive region of nearby Barqah. But gradually the old structures fell apart and the [Berbers](#) became predominant. Barqah, the urban center around which they were established, came to lend its name to the whole region formerly styled as the Pentapolis or Cyrenaica (Goodchild, 1967). That is a remarkable shift and a clear indication that the "five cities" had lost their [leading](#) role.

When, between 293 and 305, [Cyrenaica](#) became a separate province (Libya Superior, Libya Pentapolis), a *praeses* (governor) residing at Ptolemas (at least at the time of Synesius) took charge of the civil administration. Military authority lay with the *dux Aegypti et Thebaidos utrarumque Libyarum* (Roques, 1987, pp. 123-213,

215-95). But toward the end of the fourth century the Pentapolis, whose center was about 465 miles (745 km) from Alexandria, was separated from the Egyptian diocese and received a *dux* (general) of its own who resided in Ptolemais and perhaps was responsible for Libya Inferior as well. In the middle of the fifth century, the Libyan provinces together formed one military region, but now each had a *dux*. In any case, a *dux Pentapoleos* is attested in 472 (*Codex Iustinianus* XII.59.10); his post may have been created to check the incursions of the Ausuriani.

An edict of the [emperor Anastasius I](#) (491-518) provides detailed information on the office of the *dux Pentapoleos* and the military organization of his province ([Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum](#), Vol. 9 [1938], no 356; for corrections cf. Reynolds, 1978). We learn about two types of troops: the *kastresianoï* (*castrensiანი*), stationed in camps (*castra*) and defending the access to Pentapolis, and the *arithmoi* (*numeri*), garrisoning the towns. Important reforms took place under Justinian (527-565). His edict XIII (538/539 or, less probably, 553-554) is especially concerned with [Egypt](#) and the Libyan provinces.

Unfortunately, the regulations for Libya Superior (the Pentapolis) are missing from the extant text, but we can surmise that, as elsewhere, supreme authority in the province passed to the *dux* with a civil governor, a *praeses*, under his orders. The *dux* was directly responsible to Constantinople. We know from Procopius (*De aedificiis*, VI.2) that Justinian not only reorganized the administration but also took practical steps by building or repairing city walls (at Teu-cheira, Berenice, Boreion) and erecting fortifications (in the monasteries Agriolode and Dinarthison).

According to the rules established by the Council of NICAEA in 325, authority to confirm newly elected bishops lay with the bishop of the metropolis of each province (canon 4). In certain cases, however, older traditions prevailed. The Council of Nicaea thus recognized a series of exceptions to the general arrangement and enacted in canon 6 that “the

ancient practice should be preserved in Egypt, Libya, and the Pentapolis, such that the Alexandrian bishop may have control of all of these, since this is also the custom for the bishop of Rome.” This traditional authority of the Alexandrian bishop in ecclesiastical matters of the Pentapolis is put in evidence by the rulings of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria (246-264), in the controversy with SABELLIANISM, which was particularly strong in Cyrenaica.

In the fourth century, the Christian communities of that region were torn by the conflicts between orthodoxy and ARIANISM. According to the church historian Philostorgius (I.8.a; ed. J. Bidez, p. 9), five bishops of the Pentapolis (of Boreion, Berenice, Teucheira, Barqah, and Ptolemaïs) sided with Arius. Around 360, Arianism was still a dominant force in the But toward the end of ATHANASIUS' life (r. 326-373) and under the rule of the emperor Theodosius (379-395), orthodoxy, which was strongly defended both by the patriarch in Alexandria and by the imperial court in Constantinople, triumphed over its “heretical” adversaries, and paganism, in decline since the beginning of the century, virtually disappeared.

Synesius, metropolitan since 412 (residing in Ptolemaïs), draws a vivid picture of the strength of Christian life in contemporary Pentapolis. The numerous “village” bishoprics (besides those in the “five cities”) attest the spread of Christian communities in the hinterland of Cyrenaica: Boreion, Barqah, Dysthis, Erythron, Limnias, Olbia, Palaibiska, Theodorias (following the list of Roques, 1987, p. 340), to which Tesila may be added.

Later on, monophysitism prevailed in [Egypt](#) and seems also to have been dominant in the Pentapolis. This dissent with Constantinopolitan orthodoxy ought to have facilitated the conquest of the Pentapolis by the troupes of 'Amr ibn al-'Aṣ in 642 (Goodchild, 1967). Teucheira/Tukrah was the last Byzantine stronghold to succumb when Amr launched a second attack in 644-645 with the help of the naval commander Sanutius, an

Egyptian Christian in the service of the Arab cause.

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