

Antioch as described by Libanius

The old city

196. And now it is the proper time to describe the situation and size of the city, for I think there can be found none of those which now exist which possesses such size with such a fair situation. Beginning from the East, it stretches out straight to the West extending a double line of stoas.

197. These are stretched out to such a length that merely to pave such a space would require a great force of men, while to go to the end from the beginning is a toil, which requires the help of horses; thus gently sloping and unbroken is it throughout, unchanged by mountains, streams or by steep slopes, or any other kind of difficulties, as in a picture in which the colours combine according to their natural value.

198. Side streets begin from the stoas, some running to the north through the completely level area; the others which run to the south towards the first slopes of the mountain rise gently, extending the inhabited areas to such a distance that it preserves harmony with the scheme of the remainder of the city but is not, by being raised too high, cut off from it.

The new city

203. Such then is the form of the old city. The new city stands on the island which the division of the river forms. Flowing from above in one stream, and keeping this form for the most part, it divided itself and, surrounding this place, made it an island. One of the streams flows between the two cities, while that on the other side of the new city proceeds, after having formed the island, to unite its course and make the river the same as it was before it was parted.

204. The form of this new city is round. It lies in the level part of the plain, the whole of it in an exact plan, and an unbroken wall surrounds it like crown. From four arches which are joined to each other in the form of a rectangle, four pairs of stoas proceed as from an omphalos, stretched out towards each quarter of the heaven, as in a statue of the four-handed Apollo.

205. Three of these pairs running as far as the wall, are joined to its circuit, while the fourth is shorter but is the more beautiful just in proportion as it is shorter, since it runs toward the palace which begins hard by, and serves as an approach to it. [...]

218. Thus the stoas do not contribute to pleasure any more than they do to those things which are of the greatest importance among men; and to those stoas are added the hippodrome and the theatre and the bath, the one large enough to be filled with the running horses and to furnish seats to the multitude of the city, thanks to the abundance of the tiers, and the other re-echoing and assisting it in giving pleasure, with the flute, the lyre, song and the many forms of enjoyment which stage provides.