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Sommario/riassunto	This work is an attempt to apply the serial method to the study of the countryside in Roman and Byzantine times, in a region of northern Syria: the Limestone Massif, where very large numbers of remains and in excellent state of conservation of ancient villages and their parcels. In this region forty-six villages were selected as a sample. They are divided into three groups, where they form complete sets, in the ebels Sim'n, Brš, Il A'la and Zwiye. They total 4,700 rooms reserved for men's homes and as many intended for economic functions, ie a population which must have peaked at around 20,000 inhabitants. Beyond the permanence of the agrarian landscapes and the main characteristics of the economy and society, this region experienced two major phases of expansion, one until the middle of the third century, the other from 330 to 550. The second phase, the best known, is marked by a considerable increase in the number of men and by an economic progress which has taken on an extensive form, enlargement of the land, then intensive, diversification of production with a view to

sale. All in all, this population grew, while growing richer, in a context of urban expansion, which proves that the wealth of the cities and that of the countryside, far from being mutually exclusive, were complementary. In the middle of the sixth century, the gap widened between the number of men, which still tended to increase, and resources which levelled off, resulting in a long period of economic stagnation and impoverishment marked, in the short term, by severe subsistence crises and epidemics. Construction activity stops but the villages remain densely populated. The Islamic conquest does not entail any major consequences in the material life of the peasants. Their abandonment will not begin until the beginning of the 8th century, with the decline of the Umayyad Caliphate.
