

Earth 270 Disaster Report: 526 Antioch
Earthquake
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1 Introduction

The 526 Antioch Earthquake was a major disaster which occurred in late May of 526 AD, near the city of Antioch (Sbeinati et al, 2005). The death toll was increased by the influx of visitors to the city for a religious festival, causing an estimated 250000 to 300000 casualties (Glanville et al, 1958).

2 Context Of The Disaster

The city of Antioch was located in northern Palestine, near the modern day city of Antakya in Turkey. Its exact location was roughly 36 degrees 12 minutes N, and 36 degrees 10 minutes E (tools.wmflabs.org, 2018). The region is located near a transform plate boundary between the Arabian and African plates (Hempton, 1987). Because of this tectonic instability, the region surrounding Antioch was considered prone to suffering heavy damage from earthquakes throughout its history (Sbeinati et al, 2005).

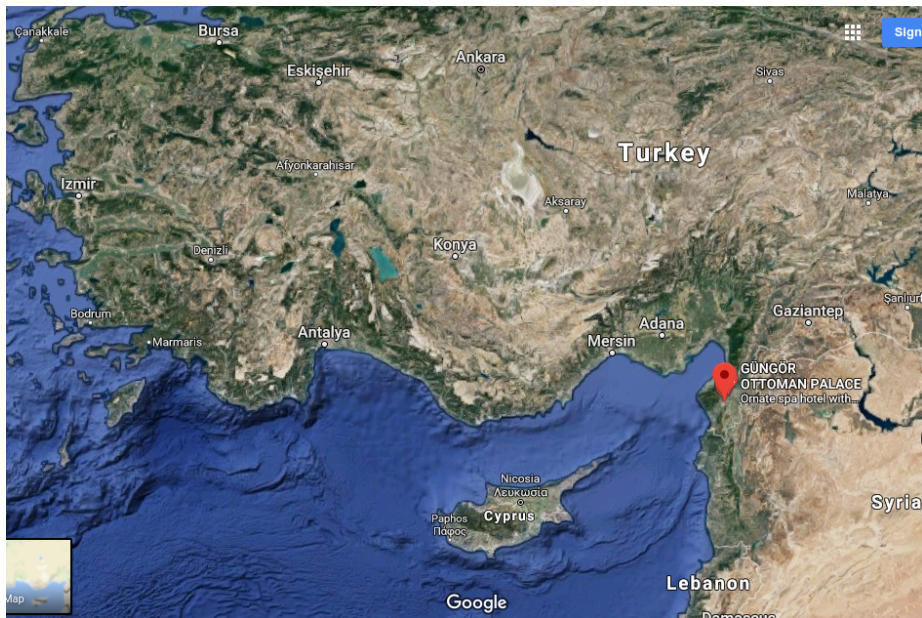


Figure 1: Location of modern Antakya, courtesy of Google Maps

3 The Disaster

Sometime between May 20th and May 29th of 526 AD, the city of Antioch was struck by an earthquake which caused extensive damage. According to John of Ephesus, the earthquake began on the 7th hour of the day, damaging many buildings which were subsequently consumed by fires that raged in the aftermath. Some observers reported evidence of chasms opening up in the earth in the area, as well as relative movement of the ground outside of the city. Liquefaction of soil was observed as well as a potential sighting of a dubious phenomenon known as Earthquake Lights (Sbeinati et al, 2005). The reported sightings of Earthquake Lights may have simply been misinterpreted references to the burning city itself (Stothers, 2004).

4 Analysis

The severity of the disaster was amplified by the coincidental timing of a large influx of visitors to the city, as well as the relative intensity of the event, estimated as a 7.0 on the Richter Scale (Sbeinati et al, 2005). Given the era of the disaster, little reliable warning would have been available to prepare for the earthquake.

5 references

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