New and updated edition

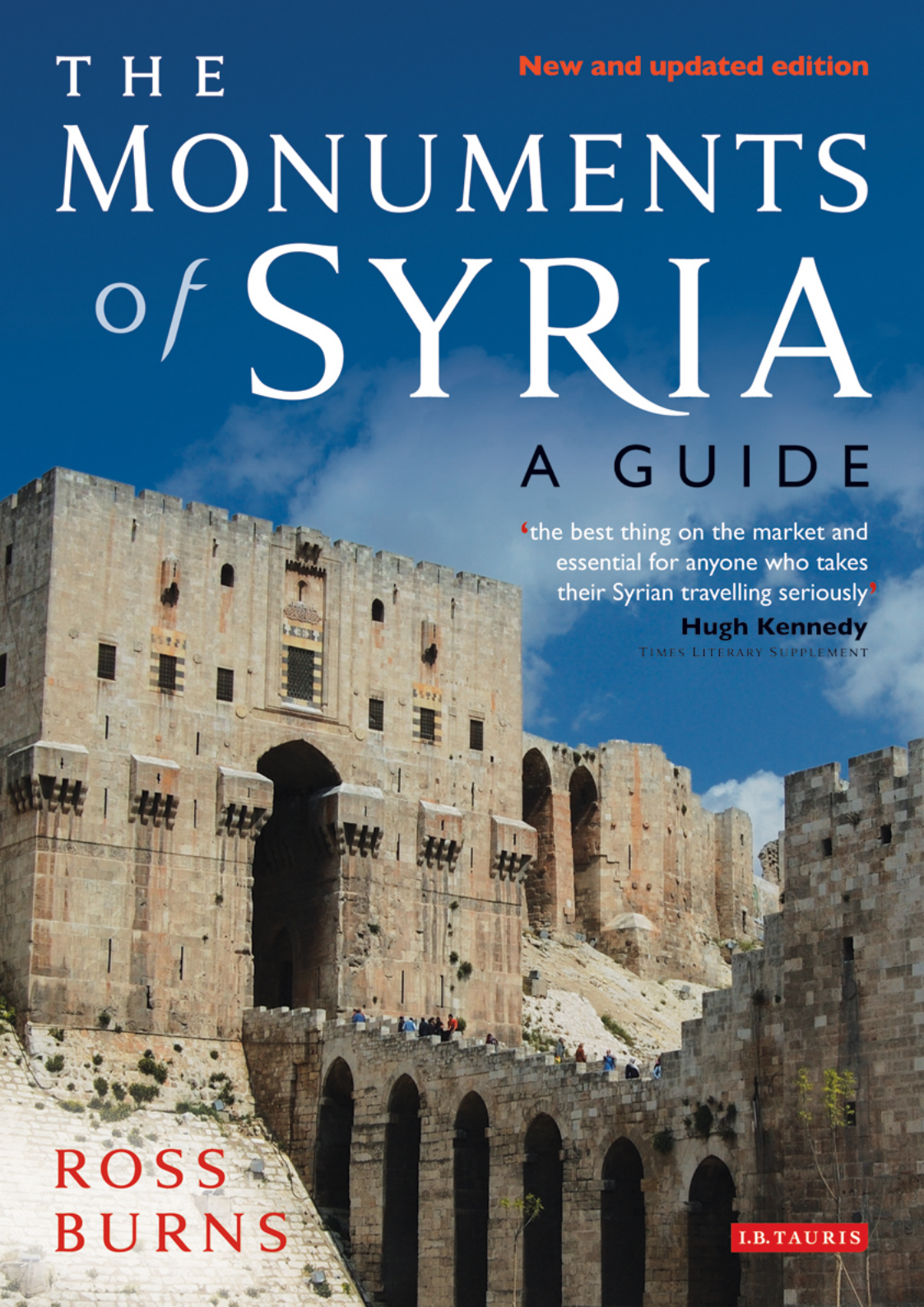
THE MONUMENTS of SYRIA

A GUIDE

'the best thing on the market and essential for anyone who takes their Syrian travelling seriously'

Hugh Kennedy

Times Literary Supplement



ROSS BURNS

I.B.TAURIS

THE MONUMENTS OF SYRIA

A Guide

Ross Burns

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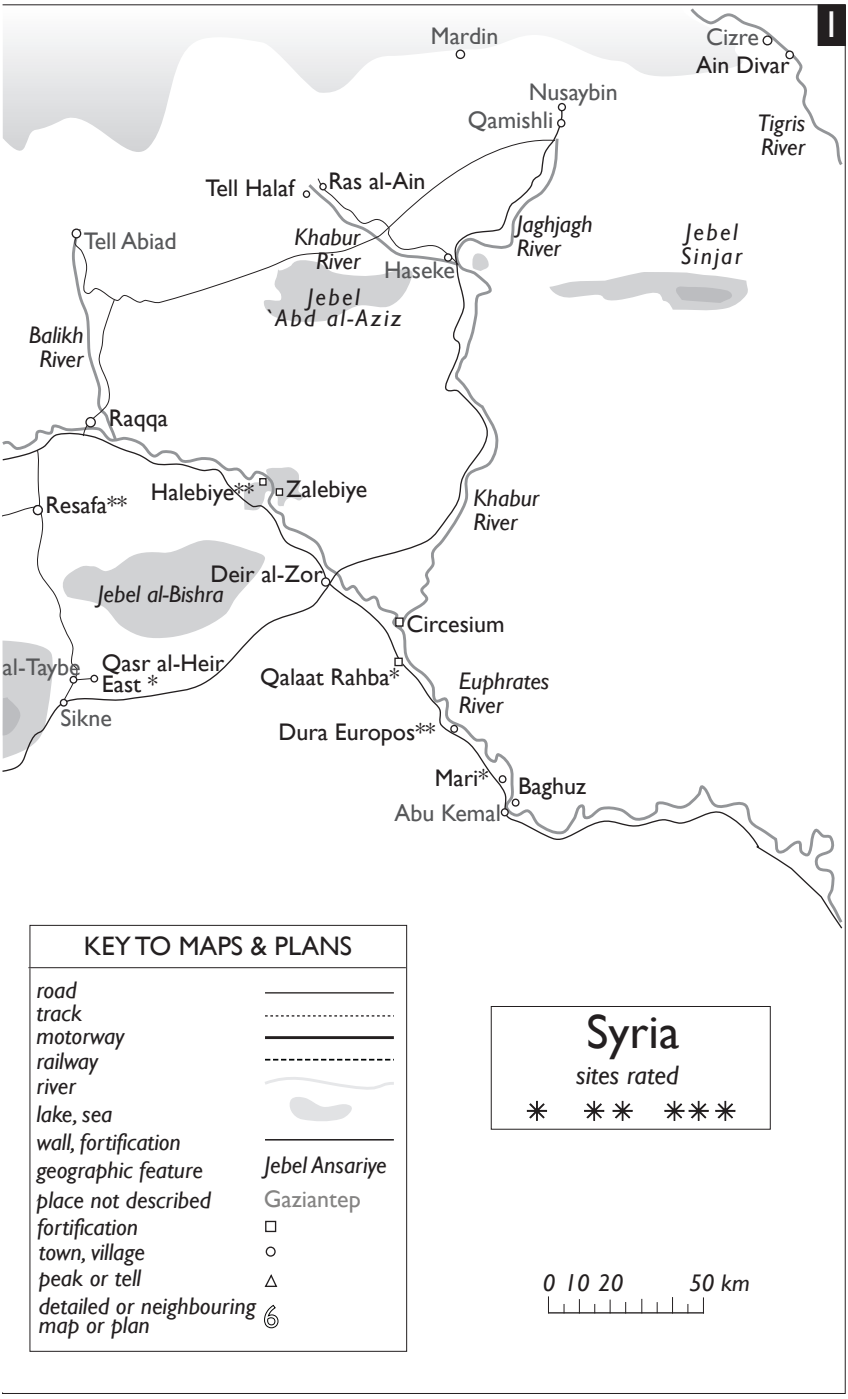
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Abbreviations, Ratings and Symbols

ABBREVIATIONS

Abd	Abbasid (750–968)
AH	after Hijra (Islamic calendar)
alt	altitude (metres)
anc	ancient
Arb	Arab (includes Ayyubids (1176–1260), Mamluks (1260–1516))
Ayy	Ayyubid (1176–1260)
b	born (year)
BA	Bronze Age
bib	biblical
Byz	Byzantine (395–636)
C	century (eg 12C = 12th century)
c	circa (about)
Cru	Crusader (1097–1292)
d	died (year)
EBA	Early Bronze Age (c3000–1900 BC)
Fr	French
Grk	Greek
ha	hectare
IrA	Iron Age (early first millennium BC)
Ism	Ismaeli (mid 12C–mid 13C)
Itn	Italian
km	kilometre(s)
Lat	Latin
LBA	Late Bronze Age (c1550–1200 BC)
m	metre(s)
m^2	square metre(s)
Mam	Mamluk (1260–1516)
MBA	Middle Bronze Age (c1900–550 BC)
Ott	Ottoman (1516–1919)
Phn	Phoenician (early first millennium BC)
REFS	references (main sources used in compiling gazetteer entries)
r	ruled (date range)
Rom	Roman (64 BC– AD 395)
Sem	Semitic
Tur	Turkish
Umd	Umayyad (661–750)

RATINGS
(after a place name)

***	essential
**	well worthwhile
*	worth a detour if time allows
–	limited or specialised interest
T	of interest for historical topography of site

SYMBOLS

*	before a place name indicates a separate gazetteer entry under that title
+	before a number indicates '.. km (or m) further on'
+	after a number means 'more than .. km (or m)'
?	before a name indicates a doubtful identification
??	indicates an unlikely identification

OTHER

- for the purpose of establishing alphabetical order, the definite article 'al-' before an Arabic place name is ignored
- 'St' (saint's name) is also ignored
- key to maps and plans is given on Map 1 (Syria) pages viii–ix
- all dates are AD unless otherwise indicated

Preface to the Third Edition

This book was originally undertaken in the hope that it would help stimulate new interest in the riches of Syria's past and provide a reference work suited to the informed modern traveller. 'In this living museum', as the first edition put it, 'some sort of handbook is needed to guide the visitor through the layers of history, to link the remains to the deeds of men such as Alexander or Saladin and to convey the fact that these are not just pretty stones but remarkable signposts to a complex past ... to make history come alive through the monuments of Syria.'

The exploration of Syria is one of the most satisfying pleasures that remain in the world of travel, a world where many destinations are now overwhelmed by the press of visitors. While conditions for travel in Syria have greatly improved in the past 20 years, it is still a destination that retains a freshness and, above all, a genuine welcome for visitors, especially those who have a lively interest in the country's past. Moreover the country has preserved an openness that has survived all the vicissitudes of the Middle East in recent decades.

'Monuments of Syria' is intended as less and more than a guidebook. Less, in that it does not convey any information on hotels, restaurants or banks though it does as much as possible guide the reader to locations which may not be evident from maps. More, in that while it does not claim the authority of an encyclopaedia, it can be used in the same way – to be dipped into as necessary by those interested in a particular site or area, with an additional perspective provided by the sections on historical and architectural developments.

The main changes to this edition come from a thorough revision based on the torrent of information which has been published in recent years and on the impressive work which has been done by the Syrian authorities to improve sites and extend or upgrade the country's network of museums. It is gratifying that so much has improved that the information in the first two editions is already seriously out of date. While the book will look familiar to readers of the earlier versions, the opportunity has been taken to rework the text, add a handful of sites (usually those easier of access or better presented than in the past) and add Arabic place names for each entry. The maps and plans have been revised or reworked and in lieu of the small itinerary maps, larger regional maps form a mini-atlas section towards the end of the book.

I have attempted no new solution to the problems of transliteration from Arabic. I have instead adopted several arbitrary rules:

- Use the simplest commonly accepted versions even when they are not necessarily the most accurate – hence Latakia, not Ladhiqiye. (The 1965 English edition of the Hachette World Guide *Middle East* was adopted as a benchmark but there are a few variations where later more accurate versions have become accepted usage – eg Arwad, not Ruwad; Muhammad, not Mohamed.)
- Keep to 'al-' as the Arabic definite article (rather than confuse the reader by trying to represent the pronunciation slide in, for example, 'Deir ez-Zor').
- As no single method reconciles the differing requirements of spoken and written Arabic in recording *ta marbuta* endings I have followed the Blue Guide's practice in rendering them variously as -a, -eh, -e. The Blue Guide is also followed with regard to medial vowels and not attempting to represent the *`ain* except in rare cases of direct transliteration of Arabic names or titles.
- Where monuments have passed into history under a non-Arabic name, leave it that way (Krak des Chevaliers in lieu of the modern Arabic Qalaat al-Husn; Palmyra, not Tadmor).

In setting the Gazetteer and the Index, articles such as the Arabic 'al-' are included but passed over in setting the alphabetical sequence. Arab names are indexed according to the most distinctive part of the string – e g 'al-Zaher Ghazi' is listed as 'Ghazi, al-Zaher'; 'Mohi al-Din Ibn

al-Arabi' under 'al-Arabi' and hence in sequence, 'Arabi'. 'St' before a saint's name is also included but ignored for the purposes of alphabetical order. In the Index, all mosques and madrasas are listed under their city or town of location then under 'mosque' or 'madrasa'.

I have not cluttered the gazetteer with notes on how and when access to particular buildings may be secured. The general rule is to look perplexed and someone will offer advice as to who might have the key. Smaller mosques are closed between prayer times. Rather than disturb the prayers, a visit just before the midday or evening prayers is the best option. Keys for churches can usually be hunted down from the priest living nearby or a local shopkeeper. Official monuments are much more predictable. Although their hours tend to be standardised (most monuments and sites maintained by the Antiquities Department are closed on a Tuesday), there are local variations regarding the choice of summer and winter hours, the afternoon break and Friday prayers.

The main works consulted for each site or walking tour are summarised in the REFS section at the end of each gazetteer entry with full details in the Bibliography.

All photos – as well as maps and plans – have been prepared by the author who retains copyright. They may, however, be used freely for educational purposes (journal articles, lectures, academic publications up to a limit of ten photos or line drawings) without specific clearance as long as they are clearly attributed.

As this new edition represents the fruit of over 20 years of research and travel, it would be invidious to attempt a definitive list of those who have assisted my work and so risk serious omissions. I have benefited greatly over the years from the assistance of Syrian officials and from the dedicated work of researchers from many countries. The amount of research in the years since the work was first undertaken has increased exponentially. The task of updating the text was correspondingly even more complicated than undertaking it in the first place. As a result of the work of these researchers new frontiers have been broached in our understanding of the region and in demolishing many of the old myths. I hope that by summarising their work in this format, this process can be further advanced.

For Syria is a great laboratory for understanding the flows of one of the world's most significant and dynamic regions. It preserves a greater cross section of the past than most countries of the region (even Egypt) and it is a tribute to the resilience of Syrian society that it offers a welcome to everyone seeking to find in the complexities of the past a better understanding of the present.

Ross Burns
2009

I

SYRIA – HISTORICAL SKETCH

Prelude

For a piece of land which has been fought over for millennia, Syria hardly gives the impression of a lush prize. In shape, present-day Syria is a distorted quadrilateral, pushed out to the northeast to take in a small portion of the Tigris River. The coastline is short (160 km), sandwiched between Turkey and Lebanon. Much of the land is barren or semi-arid with the central Syrian Desert (a rocky steppe, alt 700–1000 m) opening towards the great historical chasm of the Arabian Desert to the south. Along the edges of the Orontes and Euphrates valleys, there is good pasture but much of the area near the coast that benefits from the winter Mediterranean rains is occupied by steep and rocky mountainsides (Jebel Ansariye), leaving little room for the coastal plain.

Yet Syria lies within the crescent that has seen most of the great breakthroughs in agricultural, economic and social life that propelled the key historical changes of the past six millennia. This Fertile Crescent extends from Iraq's irrigated lands in the east to the Nile Valley to the south, taking in its sweep the edges of the hill country in southeastern Turkey and the mountains that hug the Mediterranean coastline between Antioch and Jerusalem. At its heart lie the pastures, orchards and grainfields of Syria.

If today, exhausted as much as anything by the surfeits of history, this land looks at times bleak and unyielding, it occupies a strategic position of incomparable value. Syria bears the traces of many caravan routes, Roman roads, pilgrimage trails and superhighways that testify to its role as a corridor for east-west trade. Across its plains, the rich valley of the Tigris-Euphrates system was linked to the outer world that began at the Mediterranean. Across these steppes, as stability and secure trade developed, goods from as far away as China and India were exchanged. The Persian conquests of the sixth century BC broke down the east-west barriers further. Alexander crossed Syria in his efforts to develop a new order based on an amalgam of Greek and Oriental. Through Roman, Byzantine and Arab times, Syria became the focal point in efforts to maintain a universal empire.

Possession of Syria was essential to any power that wished to control the arteries of history. The task was complicated in that Syria has little in the way of natural borders to ensure its security. To the east, the Euphrates is a highway into Mesopotamia that has never bothered potential aggressors. To the southeast, the great Arabian Desert has historically funnelled its excess energies in the direction of Syria, causing population changes that have marked several of its major historical eras. The northern plains have likewise been a magnet for the disaffected, marginalised by successive changes in Turkey. Much of the historical channelling of forces has focussed on the northwest of Syria at the point where the natural corridor between Europe and Asia spills out onto the plains after negotiating the uplands and circuitous coast of Asia Minor. Here the Greeks and Romans placed their major urban centre, Antioch (now in the Hatay province of Turkey), Alexander defeated the massed armies of Darius and the Crusaders first realised what they had taken on in challenging Muslim supremacy.

But beyond the natural chokepoint in the northwest, Syria is an open land without doors. It has learnt to survive on its wits, by trading and statecraft rather than closing itself off as a fortress land. It has been the classic buffer, though not in the sense of having little coherence of its own and thus perpetually at the mercy of others. It has learnt to transmit rather than to block – to absorb the first ethnic waves from the steppes and desert to the south; to pass on the great themes and ideas that have moved between east and west; to provide a footing between the religious currents that have swept the region.

As this study is concerned with the buildings and monuments that remain in recognisable condition, we will pass over Syria's role in prehistory and its central part in the rise of the methods of agriculture, domestication of animals

and development of urban life that first brought this area out of the obscurities of pre-urban civilisation.

Early Bronze Age (c3100–2150 BC)

When the earliest written records emerge in the Early Bronze Age (third millennium BC), Syria shared in the development of city states that arose in the Sumerian lands to the east, along the Tigris-Euphrates system in Mesopotamia. Though of different (Semitic) origins to the Sumerians, the population of the Mid Euphrates city, *Mari, based its social structures on analogous systems. Literacy, through the development of a system of cuneiform writing (wedge shaped markings in soft clay), stimulated complex legal and trading practices, the local monarchs' power depending on the effectiveness of their control of irrigation and trade. The end of Mari's early phase coincided with the rise of the first truly imperial power in the region, the Akkadian Empire (2340–2150) under the leadership of Sargon whose conquests, reaching from Mesopotamia both towards the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean coast, were consolidated by his grandson, Naram-Sin.

To the west, Mari enjoyed close relations with another trading centre of major importance, *Ebla. Ebla had a Semitic population and by 2400 BC had created a complex web of political links across much of northern Syria though it lacked the basic underpinning that irrigation control gave to other city-states. Under the subsequent rule of the Dynasty of Ur, Mari retained a degree of importance under the Shakkanaku dynasty while Ebla became a subsidiary state.

Middle Bronze Age (c2150–1600 BC)

By 2100 BC, the early experiments in urban societies were disturbed by new population movements that brought Amorite people (of Semitic stock) from the Syrian desert into the settled lands of the Fertile Crescent. This period of urban decay and disruption initially brought an end to much of the pattern of regional trade on which Ebla had thrived and the city fell into decline. After the initial disruption of the Amorites' invasion, many towns absorbed the new population and the development of urban civilisation resumed. The Kingdom of Yamkhad (Aleppo) became a major power in this period, absorbing Ebla into its orbit. Mari enjoyed some independence during the 19th–18th century BC as an Amorite city. The Babylonian leader to the south, Hammurabi (another Semitic ruler, c1792–50) ruled with reformist zeal at home (he promulgated a codified system of law in his name) but this did not distract him from developing an appetite for conquests which caused him to raze Mari around 1759 BC thus terminating the precarious balancing act that the ruler of Mari, Zimri-Lim (r 1775–60), had maintained between Babylon and Aleppo.

For much of northern Syria, this new golden age brought a flowering of international trade (19th–18th centuries BC). The Amorite kingdoms of the north managed to resist direct Babylonian rule but traded extensively to the east – Yamkhad, Alalakh (Tell Achana in the Amuq Plain east of Antioch), Zalmaqum (Harran) and *Qatna (the modern Mishrifeh north of Homs).

Late Bronze Age (c1600–1200 BC)

The next major change to the regional power game came from the northwest. The Hittites (Indo-Europeans by origin) had installed themselves in central Anatolia and brought an end to Babylonian power c1595. To the south, Egypt was thrown into chaos for two or more centuries by the secondary effects of this movement. The Hyksos, a people whose roots are still unexplained but who may have been related to the Amorites or the Canaanite inhabitants of the coastal mountains of Syria-Palestine, were pushed south by Indo-European pressure.

A non-Semitic people (with Indo-European connections) called the Hurrians had been moving into Syria in large numbers from the north. A second analogous wave, the Mitanni people, soon arrived to blend

with the Hurrians to form a federation of Hurrian principalities, the Kingdom of Mitanni (16th–14th centuries BC), centred on the present Northeast Province around the Khabur River with links to the 'land of Amurru' to the east. Their region (including the vassal kingdoms of Yamkhad and Alalakh) pressed against the area of Hittite dominance in the northwest. They installed themselves firmly enough to form part of the triangle of powers that fought for dominance in Syria in the 15th–14th centuries BC – Egypt, Hittites and Mitanni – until they were made a client state of the Hittites after a series of marriage alliances in the late 14th century.

Egypt had sought tentatively since the Middle Kingdom (20th–18th centuries) to extend its influence in Syria especially to cultivate the coastal cities to gain access to important inland sources of timber for shipbuilding. After the disruption of the Hyksos period, the Pharaohs returned under the more grandiose pretensions of the New Kingdom in the great campaigns of Thutmose III (early 15th century), Amenhotep II (mid 15th century), Thutmose IV (late 15th century), Seti I and Ramses II (early to mid 13th century). By the 14th century, their main foe in Syria was the Hittite Empire which had come to dominate the local city states (Damascus was taken c1360) who did their best, however, to play the powers off against each other. The chaos of the Amarna period in Egypt helped their purpose. In the end, even the vainglorious Ramses II met his match when ambushed by the Hittite chariotry under Hattusilis II at Qadesh (*Tell Nabi Mend) c1286.

At about this time to the south, the tribe of the Israelites was moving into Palestine from the east with consequences still to be resolved 3000 years later.

The Mediterranean coast as a whole enjoyed a more prosperous and untroubled life based on the sea trade routes built up by the Phoenicians – peoples of Semitic origin who had moved into the region at the beginning of the second millennium and had established a culture that blended Mesopotamian, Anatolian, Aegean and Egyptian influences. In this zone of relative prosperity, the port cities of Ugarit, Gabala (*Jeble) and Arwad were left to get on with the business of making money. Some especially privileged enclaves like Ugarit, which benefited from the copper trade with nearby Cyprus, had succeeded in working with both Egypt and the Hittites against the other or a third party. Their trading contacts brought wider connections including with Mycenae (after 1500) and the Aegean. The tradition was continued in the next millennium by their Canaanite descendants to the south, the Phoenicians, whose 50 plus colonies around the Mediterranean served to spread the first alphabet in the Semitic and Greek worlds.

Iron Age (1200–539 BC)

Syria's ethnic and political chess board, however, was again scattered by the arrival of the Sea Peoples around 1200 BC. Moving in from the west, possibly from the Aegean, the Sea Peoples brought an end to the apogée of Ugarit as well as the Hittite Empire; they were only stopped at the edge of the Nile Valley by the land and sea campaigns of Ramses III (r 1198–66).

In the confusion left by the Sea Peoples' passing, further Semitic population movement arrived from the south in the form of the Aramaeans, a people who concentrated particularly in the north where around 20 so-called 'Neo-Hittite' principalities had arisen – Haleb (*Aleppo), Arpad (30 km north of Aleppo), Tell Barsip, *Tell Halaf, Hattina and Hamath (*Hama). Except for some continuity in dress and language, there was, in fact, no link between the Hittite Empire and the principalities whose original leadership was probably Luwian-speaking (from southern Asia Minor). The arrival of the Aramaeans from the desert further scrambled the mix. The art of northern Syria post-900 reflects this diversity of origins in a clumsy attempt to rival the monumentality of their Assyrian adversaries to the east. In the south, the city-state of Aram-Damascus led a coalition of forces that checked the ambitions of the kingdoms of Israel and Judaea. On the coast, the Phoenician cities

survived the dark age that followed the Sea Peoples' invasions and continued to serve as a conduit for products and ideas between Greece, Egypt and the Asian mainland.

The fragmented Aramaean states, however, were unable to maintain their autonomy in the face of new and vigorous forces from the east. The Assyrian Empire (1000–612) under Shalmaneser took permanent control of parts of northern Syria and Phoenicia from 856 and was confronted by a coalition of Aramaean states at the Battle of Qarqar in 853. Under Tiglath-Pilaser (r 744–27 BC), the Assyrians pushed even more firmly into Syria, ending Damascus' independence in 732. But it required further action by Sargon II (r 721–05), after renewed unrest in Syria and Palestine, to confirm the submission of Damascus.

The Assyrians imposed a skeletal administration in their western lands, being largely content to exploit them for opportunistic booty and slave labour. The spoils and tribute from their raids adorned the palaces of Nineveh and Khorsabad which so fascinated 19th century archaeologists. Even centres such as *Arwad and Sidon (southern Lebanon) could not escape the vehemence of the late Assyrians' ambitions though Sidon resisted even when Assurbanipal came down on it 'like a wolf on the fold' in 668. Eventually it fell, not to the Assyrians, but in 587 to Nebuchadnezzar, one of the first of the Chaldean rulers whose short-lived dominance in Syria (605–539) followed their defeat of the Assyrians (they took Nineveh in 612) after a long period of rivalry in their common home territory in northern Mesopotamia. This was the era of the legendary Babylon, the Chaldean capital, with its palaces and hanging gardens.

Persian Period (539–333 BC)

The Achaemenid Persians annexed much of Syria as a consequence of their move westwards and their defeat of the Neo-Babylonians with the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539. Syria was made their fifth satrapy or province (Abar Nahara – 'beyond the river') with its capital possibly at Damascus. They recognised the pervasive spread of the Aramaean language and its neo-Phoenician script by adopting it as the lingua franca of their empire, ensuring its survival well into the Roman period. The Persians brought a regular and comparatively benevolent system of administration to their 23 provinces but above all the integration of the Syrian coast into the network of exchanges across the east Mediterranean to Greece heralded the first of the great east-west clashes that have focussed on Syria. In their efforts to find a sphere of influence in the eastern Mediterranean, countered so arduously by the Greeks (eg the Battle of Marathon in 490), they focussed in Syria much of the struggle for supremacy throughout the sixth and fifth centuries BC, bringing a uniquely Persian element to the land, of which only a few traces remain (*Amrit).

Hellenistic Period (333–64 BC) (Map T1)

This Greek-Persian contest was decided in the great battles (the first at Issus in 333) in which Alexander the Great defeated the forces of Darius III. Issus lies just to the north of the pass in the Amanus Mountains called the Syrian Gates. After Alexander's death at Babylon in 323, it took some time to settle the apportioning of his lands between the generals. Syria was contested, with northern Syria falling to Seleucus I Nikator (who had already been assigned Mesopotamia) after his victory over Antigonus at the Battle of Ipsus (Phrygia) in 301. The south (including Damascus) and the regions of Lebanon and Palestine were seized by Ptolemy I Soter who had already been given command of Egypt. The Seleucid Kingdom began on an ordered and rational basis but never succeeded in welding Syria into a secure base for the Macedonian dynasty. Applying the principles of government and administration found elsewhere in Alexander's domains, new satrapal headquarters were established – Antioch, Seleucia (now Suweida at the mouth of the Orontes), *Apamea and Laodicea

(*Latakia) were the major centres. Subsidiary centres settled included *Cyrrhus, Chalcis ad Belum (*Qinnesrin), Beroea (*Aleppo), Arados (*Arwad), Hierapolis (*Menbij), and *Dura Europos, the latter to defend the connection between the two main Seleucid domains, Syria and Mesopotamia.

While the Greek soldier-settler element was probably no more than 50,000, the Hellenization of the region was firmly set in process. Many of the city states, however, preserved a high degree of independence and, though they shed their local dynasties to become republics loosely affiliated to the Seleucid Kingdom, retained an increasing degree of freedom of manoeuvre as the Seleucid hold on Syria weakened in the second century. The Ptolemies lost control of southern Syria by 198 BC when it fell to the Seleucid king, Antiochus III Megas (the Great) (r 223–187 BC). This marked the beginning of a temporary resurgence of the Seleucid dynasty which resulted in the Romans (recent masters of Greece) checking Antiochus' forces at Magnesia, obliging him under the terms of the Treaty of Apamea (188 BC) to cede all his conquests across the Taurus. A successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r 175–164 BC) was forced to withdraw from Egypt, again following Roman intervention (168 BC). Attempts to force a policy of Hellenization on the Jews (including the profanation of the Jerusalem temple by setting up an altar to Zeus – the 'abomination' referred to in *Daniel* 9,7) – brought a fierce resistance, including the Maccabees' role in fostering the post-166 BC resurgence of a Jewish state in Palestine. By the beginning of the first century BC, Seleucid Syria was fraying badly at the edges with inroads by the Armenians to the north, the Parthians to the east and the Arab Nabataeans to the south.

Roman Syria (64 BC–AD 395) (Map T2)

The Romans, who since their conquest of Greece had shown interest in the fate of Syria, became increasingly involved. In 64 BC, the Roman legate, Pompey, formally abolished the Seleucid Kingdom and created the Roman province of Syria with its principal city (metropolis) at Antioch. For a time, Syria became part of the setting for the great leadership struggle that brought an end to the Roman Republic. The main centres played with relish the game of switching allegiance between Augustus and Mark Antony as fortunes changed. The Augustan peace and the era of consolidation and prosperity that followed advantaged Syria which became one of the principal provinces of the Empire, remaining under the Emperor's jurisdiction, locally represented by a legate of consular rank. Antioch particularly flourished to become the third imperial city after Rome and Alexandria but other centres such as Damascus, Beroea and the trading hub of Palmyra, also benefited greatly. Under Augustus, four legions came to be stationed in Syria, the level of threat being considerably less, for example, than Germany which garrisoned eight.

Roman administration in Syria gradually took more direct control with previously semi-independent city-states such as Arados, Emesa (*Homs) and members of the loose confederation called the Decapolis (eg Damascus, Deraa and Canatha (*Qanawat)) quietly brought under direct rule by the early first century AD. The process was more slow-moving in Palestine where the collaborative Hasmonaeans had been permitted by the Senate to carve out their own kingdom under Roman protection, partly at the expense of the Nabataeans in southern Syria. (The Nabataeans were also dislodged from Damascus and retreated to semi-independent status in the fastness of Petra (in southern Jordan), fitfully retaining control as far north as Bosra.) The Hasmonaeans were succeeded by the sometimes more rowdy line of Herod the Great (r 39–4 BC) but the Romans took the opportunity of the death of Herod's heirs, Agrippa II in 92/3, to integrate Palestine into the province of Syria.

Economically, Syria flourished and became not only an entrepôt zone of

Roman Provincial Divisions

The following summarises the administrative divisions under which the broader region of Syria was ruled in Roman and Byzantine times. The original province of Syria did not include a number of principalities or city-states which the Romans allowed to continue within its provincial bounds, including the cities of the Decapolis – Canatha (*Qanawat), Deraa, Dion and Damascus within present-day Syria – and Emesa. These were gradually absorbed under direct rule from Augustus' principate until Trajan's incorporation of the Nabataean Kingdom in 106.

DATE	EMPEROR	PROVINCES	CAPITALS
64 BC	[Republic]	Syria	Antioch
AD 69	Vespasian	Syria	Antioch
		Judaea	Caesaria
106	Trajan	Syria	Antioch
		Judaea[1]	Aeolia Capitolina
		Arabia	Bostra
194	Septimius Severus	Coele Syria	Laodicea
		Syria Phoenice[2]	Tyre
		Arabia	Bostra
		Syria Palaestina	Aeolia Capitolina
		Mesopotamia	Nisibis
295	Diocletian	Arabia	Petra
		Augusta Libanensis	Bostra
		Syria Palaestina	Caesarea (after 365)
		Phoenice	Tyre
		Coele Syria	Antioch
		Augusta Euphratensis	Cyrrhus
		Osrhoene	Edessa
		Mesopotamia	Nisibis
c395	Arcadius	Syria Prima	Antioch
		Syria Secunda[3]	Apamea
		Phoenice Maritima	Tyre
		Phoenice Libanensis[4]	Damascus or Emesa?
		Palaestina (three provinces)	
		Arabia	Bostra
		Euphratensis	Cyrrhus
		Osrhoene	Edessa

In many cases, provinces cover only limited parts of present-day Syria.

NOTES: (1) Renamed Syria Palaestina in 135 when Jerusalem (Aeolia Capitolina) became the capital; (2) Included the main towns of southern Syria – Damascus, Emesa, Palmyra; (3) Justinian (mid sixth century) created a third Syrian province (Theodorias in honour of his wife) out of the coastal area around Laodicea; (4) Chief towns were Damascus, Emesa, Heliopolis (Baalbek) and Palmyra.

central importance in the east-west trade in luxuries (from China, India and Trans-Oxiana) but a major agricultural producer whose grain and wine supplied a good share of the Roman market. To service this commerce, trade routes were systematised through the building of roads, including the north-south Via Maris and Via Nova Traiana and the east-west route through Palmyra that saved considerable time and effort over the northern route following the Euphrates. Settlement and agricultural activities were pushed out into new areas such as the rocky hill country between Antioch and Beroea (*Dead Cities/Limestone Massif), the marginal zone south of Beroea or the region south of Damascus known as Auranitis (box on Hauran under *Suweida page 289). The cities were upgraded to reflect this prosperity and the energy of the urban upper classes who underpinned it (largely Greek-speaking, though of varied origins). Thus Damascus, already replanned by the prosaic Greek military, was given a more monumental appearance through the provision of a widened and colonnaded axial thoroughfare (immortalised in the New Testament as Straight Street) and a vastly enhanced sacred precinct for the Temple of Jupiter-Hadad (*Damascus – Umayyad Mosque).

Other cities such as Apamea, Palmyra, Laodicea-ad-Mare (Latakia), Canatha (*Qanawat) and Bostra (*Bosra) were given similar treatment. The latter two were replanned after Trajan's more aggressive policy of direct control resulted in the annexation of the Hauran in 106 and the creation of the province of Arabia (in the area south of Damascus and east of Palestine). Rome regarded Syria as a prized province and the position of legate was a valued appointment. Visits by several Emperors brought particular privileges to cities such as Bostra (capital of the new province of Arabia), Damascus (raised to metropolis by Hadrian, 117) and Palmyra (renamed Palmyra Hadriana in 129).

The second century AD was an era of unparalleled stability with Syria particularly favoured by contrast with the troubles that still beset the Romans in the province of Judaea to the south where, after the first Jewish-Roman war of 66–70, a second revolt under Bar Cochba in 132 brought an even more vehement Roman campaign to efface the insurrection and scatter the Jewish population. Syria's eastern borders took on an increasingly strategic significance to the Romans in the face of the perceived threat from the Parthians whose presence across the Euphrates had resulted in successive Roman attempts to dominate the Parthian heartland since the late first century BC. As the Parthians hit back into Roman territory, the campaigns in the east became more vigorous and draining, requiring imperial command from the early second century. The military presence in the region grew and with it the influence of Syrians in Rome itself became more direct not the least through links formed by Roman commanders on station in Syria, such as the future emperor, Septimius Severus. His marriage in 187 to Julia Domna, the daughter of the High Priest of Emesa (Homs), brought a line of 'Syrian' emperors which reached its nadir in 218–22 in the alarming eccentricities of Elagabalus.

By the late second century, the Parthian wars were a dominant pre-occupation with Parthia the only organised power anywhere along Rome's frontiers able to conduct a centralised campaign against the Empire's might. The challenge began to affect the prosperity even of such a flourishing centre as Palmyra which had successfully lived off its ability to act as a go-between in trade across hostile frontiers. The permanent military presence was pushed out as far as the Khabur River by the mid second century. Palmyra came under direct Roman rule (colonia from 212) and the sleepy local garrison at remote *Dura Europos on the Mid Euphrates was reinforced with imperial forces.

The sporadic confrontation with Parthia became more persistent by the end of the second century and turned into a more aggressive and focussed Sasanian threat following the takeover of Persia after 224 by Ardashir and particularly under his successor, Shapur I. Successive emperors

Roman Syria – Routes and *Limes*

Roman control of Syria was based on a highly developed system of roads and frontier forts which reflected both defensive and commercial needs. After the mid second century, the main axes were thoroughly replanned. North-south communication along the traditional Via Maris following the coasts of Syria and Phoenicia was supplemented by the new north-south routes – the Strata Diocletiana which ran from Sura on the Euphrates to Damascus via Resafa, Palmyra and Dumeir and the Via Nova Traiana which continued the axis southwards via Bosra to Aila (modern Aqaba, Jordan's port). East-west routes either crossed the desert on partly-improved carriageways (provisioned with milestones and watering points) or skirted it along the fertile lands to the north (eg the route via Cyrrhus and Zeugma and on to present northeast Syria; or further south via Chalcis ad Belum (Qinnesrin)). Within the bounds (*limes*) of the closely administered province, roads were now constructed to a high standard of durability (*Roman Road, Bab al-Hawa) better able to negotiate difficult and circuitous terrain (*Roman Road, Wadi Barada). Most roads, however, were of loosely compacted stones with a surface of gravel, on an average 6 m wide and slightly sloping from the centre. In steppe areas, a border of stones sufficed to mark a carriageway cleared of protrusions.

While the initial deployment of four Roman legions reflected as much internal security as frontier defence, by the end of the second century AD, the military deployments and creation of a fixed line of forts reflected the shift of priority to the east. The system of forts was generally aligned along the eastern frontier zone with a particular concentration in the northeast to meet the Parthian (later Sasanian) threat. The thick clustering of forts and sub-forts in the Euphrates/Tigris zone was intensified by the fourth to sixth centuries though most of the remains of this activity are identifiable only by aerial photography. By the Byzantine period, the major building effort shifted further to the west and sites such as Resafa or Halebiye were re-constructed under Justinian's great defensive works program.

Roman forces in Syria rose to a total of six or seven legions (30–40,000 troops?) by the end of the second century supplemented by provincial auxiliaries, many of them locally recruited. The legions and their probable bases were as follows: VI Ferrata, Latakia; X Fretensis, Cyrrhus; XII Fulminata, Raphaneae; III Gallica, Zeugma.

over four centuries were to pit themselves against the Sasanian determination directly to challenge Rome's presence. By the mid third century, the situation on the eastern frontiers of Syria was parlous, the low points being the fall of Dura Europos in 256 and the capture in 260 of the Emperor Valerian in person by Sasanian forces at Edessa (southeastern Turkey), in spite of the presence of a Roman force of 70,000.

The humiliation of Valerian's capture, his torture and subsequent death were telling blows to Roman pride but symbolic of the general loss of authority at many points on the imperial *limes* by the mid third century. The Sasanians had already challenged Rome as far west as Antioch and the Romans were happy to exploit any assistance they could get to hold the situation. They thus eagerly backed the ambitions of a Palmyrene oligarch, Odenathus, who campaigned on Rome's behalf deep into Sasanian territory (Ctesiphon 262) but who was unfortunately murdered in 266. His wife, Zenobia, carried on but had a rather different view of the relative power of Rome and Palmyra. She sent forces to Egypt and tried to engineer the takeover of Antioch in 271. The Emperor Aurelian clearly felt the challenge to central authority had gone too far and took to the field to check Zenobia. She fled Antioch, her forces failing to put up any challenge to Aurelian's outside Emesa in 272. Back in Palmyra, she again decided confrontation was best avoided and slipped out of the besieged city towards the Euphrates. Captured by the Romans in her attempt to cross the river, she was led

off to Rome to grace Aurelian's triumph; Palmyra, after a second revolt against its occupying forces, was razed.

Syria's agricultural base was not fundamentally undermined by the repercussions of these events to the east and the building programs of the third century in much of Syria reflected the continued prosperity of the region, now divided further with the creation of the new province of Coele Syria after 194.

Christianity

By the time the Emperor Constantine gave official recognition to Christianity after 313, increasingly encouraging it as the state religion, Syria (and particularly Antioch) was already an area of intense Christian activity going back as far as the missions of St Paul in the mid first century. Christianity, with its blending of Jewish and Greek influences, was at first one more element, albeit a powerful one, in the Syrian melting pot. Before Christianity became part of public life in the fourth century, churches (as in the house-church unearthed at Dura Europos) were merely adapted dwelling places. After the official recognition of Christianity, they took on the form and scale of Roman public buildings. The pilgrimage phenomenon sponsored by Constantine's mother, St Helen, with her visit to the holy sites of Jerusalem in 324 later proliferated in Syria, complemented by the arrival of the monastic tradition (from Egypt) and the veneration of places associated with ascetic and saintly figures. By the sixth century, Syria was dotted with countless village or monastic churches as well as major pilgrimage centres such as those honouring the ascetic, St Simeon Stylites, or St Sergius in northern Syria.

But the diverse ingredients in the Syrian church were never totally at rest with each other. The philosophical debate over subjects as arcane as the division between Christ's physical and divine natures became overriding pre-occupations that divided eastern and western strands within the Church (Monophysites-Oriental versus Orthodox-Western), often seemingly becoming codeword debates with deep political and social undercurrents.

Byzantine Era (395–636)

The adoption of Byzantium (renamed Constantinople) as the second capital of the Empire under Constantine foreshadowed the final transfer of the Roman capital to the East in 395, the start of the Byzantine era. Under Theodosius II (r 408–50), a '100 year peace' with the Sasanians brought some respite from the debilitating eastern wars but they became a major distraction again by the mid sixth century, absorbing much of the resources of Justinian's reign (r 527–65).

In spite of the troubles on the frontiers and the deep divisions that rent the Church (the Arian heresy in the fourth century; Nestorianism in the fifth century; and the dogged controversy over Monophysitism that continued from the fifth to the seventh century), it was a time of continued prosperity in the more settled parts of Syria. The limestone country west of Aleppo continued to prosper, based on its olive oil exports; the Hauran was intensely exploited; the cities remained thriving. Church and monastic projects abounded and Syrian builders developed a repertoire of styles (see pages 222–4 below) that adapted metropolitan and neo-classical models and blended them with elements from the east, often achieving a rather bizarre local mix whose remains are richly evident. In fact, no area of the Mediterranean world contains such a wealth of evidence of this period as can be found in the many churches, village and monastic remains of Syria.

For all its efforts to marry the eastern and western elements in Syrian society, continuing the process which had begun even before Alexander, Byzantine rule by the sixth century had begun to run out of solutions. The controversy over Monophysitism had become a corrosive element provoking intense local resentment against the imposition of orthodoxy from Constantinople. The Sasanian Persians made increasing inroads into Syria, their destructive raids punctuated by

a devastating series of earthquakes. In spite of the efforts of Justinian and later emperors to stabilise the eastern frontiers, by the early seventh century, Syria was virtually incapable of putting up serious resistance to the prolonged occupation by Chosroes II who brought his presence in Antioch to a climax with the slaughter of 90,000 of its inhabitants. The Byzantines had tried diplomacy under Maurice (r 582–602) but were subsequently divided by their leadership struggles. By the time they rallied themselves to recover Syria (626), the country was so perpetually wearied by war, famines, earthquakes and plagues that it seemed virtually indifferent to its fate. After centuries of warfare, the Roman and Persian worlds had fought each other to a standstill.

Arab Conquest (632–61)

Into this near-vacuum came the armies of early Islam. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, his successor in the leadership of the faithful (the Caliphate), Abu Bakr, encouraged his forces to take further steps beyond the tentative moves begun by Muhammad himself to find new outlets to the north for the military, religious and commercial energies of the new Arab leadership. Few Syrian centres put up much resistance. Damascus surrendered twice, the second time in 636 after the crucial defeat of the Byzantine forces at Yarmuk. The small element of new population that the desert Arabs initially introduced gradually blended with the existing Semitic-based people, the distinctions further blurred by the unhurried process of conversions to the new faith of Islam. In contrast to the often heavy-handed imposition of Byzantine orthodoxy, Islam's introduction depended more on tax incentives than coercion and thus aroused little active resentment from the local (and for many centuries, still basically Christian) population.

For almost two decades, the new leadership remained based in Medina and southern Iraq. After Abu Bakr, the Caliphate passed to Umar (caliph 634–44), Othman (caliph 644–56) and then Ali (caliph 656–61), the four comprising the group of Rashidun or 'right-guided' caliphs. Ali's leadership, however, was challenged by Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan, the leader of the Umayyad faction who believed Ali had not sufficiently dissociated himself from the murderers of Othman. Ali was murdered by a disaffected former supporter. Of Ali's two sons, Hassan and Hussein, Hassan did not press his claim to the succession. Muawiya had already taken the Caliphate and promptly decided to move the capital to Damascus (where he had built up his power base as Governor).

Umayyads (661–750)

The Umayyad Caliphate brought in what is perhaps one of the most fertile and inventive periods of Syrian history. The perpetual search for an east-west balance was given a new and vigorous interpretation in an eclectic blending of Byzantine, Persian, Mesopotamian and local elements. This interaction resulting from the collapse of the antique world and the rise of Islam is still not fully explored or explained but the snapshot we are provided in the remains of the period attest to the complexity of forces at play in Umayyad Syria. The establishment of the supremacy of Arabic and the centrality of Islam within the Empire was done with a skilful hand. It was a period of great intellectual curiosity which flourished in an atmosphere of laissez-faire under Muawiya's judicious and moderate political leadership. The warrior-aristocracy of the Umayyads readily absorbed ideas from Syria's rich mixture of cultures and aspired to be the successors of the Romans and Byzantium. Damascus became a major centre (the Umayyads' realms eventually stretched from the Indus to Spain), a focus of political, religious and artistic creativity that gave the city a dynamism it had rarely enjoyed.

Gradually, however, the Umayyads' focus turned away from the larger Mediterranean world. Not only did they find few interlocutors interested in dealing with the new power (western Europe had not even begun to emerge from barbarian night; Byzantium was still struggling to hold itself together in its remaining lands)

but it had to meet to the east a new trend towards a much harder-edged form of Islamisation. The germ was sown as early as Muawiya's reign (661–80). His assumption of power had exacerbated the split between the Umayyad clan and the followers of Ali, led by Ali's remaining son, Hussein, on the death of Hassan in 669. Muawiya was succeeded by his son, Yazid (r 680–3). Pro-Yazid forces drew the small band of Hussein and his followers into battle at Kerbala (southern Iraq) on 10 Muharram 61 AH (680), slaughtering Hussein and all but a few of his companions. Among those taken into captivity in Damascus was Zainab, sister of Hussein. The tragedy of Kerbala was to rankle for centuries. Eventually it would perpetuate the division between orthodox followers of the Umayyad Caliphate (later to be called Sunnis) and the unrequited supporters of the house of Ali (Shiites); it gradually deflected the focus of the Umayyad world towards the challenges to its cosmopolitanism that were germinating to the east.

At first, however, the opposition to their Caliphate having been driven underground, the Umayyads embarked on the most confident period of their administration. This was marked by major building projects at home and expansion abroad, especially under Abd al-Malik (r 685–705) and al-Walid (r 705–15). The latter was responsible for the immense project of the new congregational mosque in Damascus (*Damascus – Umayyad Mosque) which 1200 years later still bears striking witness to the richness and variety of the Umayyads' inspiration.

After the defeat of the Umayyad attempts to dislodge the Byzantines from Asia Minor, the Empire turned increasingly away from efforts to seek a place in the hostile or indifferent Mediterranean world to address the challenges from the east. Hisham (r 724–43) was the last of the great Umayyad rulers. After him the dynasty declined, exhausted by Shiite disaffection and the military incursions from Central Asia, Byzantium,and in North Africa. The line petered out in a succession of debauched or incompetent caliphs, palace tensions and rebellions in the provinces of Persia and Iraq. A pretender, Abu al-Abbas, emerged in Iraq and marched on Damascus in 750. The Umayyads were eliminated, one grandson of Hisham fleeing to Spain where the Umayyad line survived for a further 500 years.

The new dynasty, the Abbasids, represented the eastern (Persian) tradition and a more theocratic version of the Caliphate, consciously spurning the attempts of the early Umayyads to marry eastern and western influences. The Abbasids transferred the Caliphate to Iraq (Kufa, until the founding of Baghdad in 762) and Syria became merely a neglected backwater, punished for its adherence to the corrupt and lax line of the Umayyads.

Abbasids (750–968)

The Abbasids never matched the vigour or the territorial spread of Umayyad power. The promise held out in the plan of Caliph Mansur for a new capital on the Tigris banks at Baghdad (built on a bold circular plan) was never carried through by his successors. Only Harun al-Rashid (Abbasid Caliph 786–809) had the flair to give the Caliphate wider status. He attracted an embassy from Charlemagne, the latter gaining from his gesture the right to protect Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem.

But the Abbasids failed to give sustained momentum to the development of a unified Islamic polity. Within two centuries, the heartland was increasingly invaded by Turkish nomads who displaced the Arab-Persian political elites. Regimes based on alien leadership now became the rule that marked virtually every era until modern times. The Turkish and other successive infiltrations prevented efforts to restore a Mid East-wide empire (a situation which was only securely reversed with the rise of the mamluk system in the 12th and 13th centuries). The process began in the mid ninth century with the Abbasid domains fragmenting through independent dynasties assuming power in provinces such as Egypt (Tulunids after 868; Fatimids after 905) and Persia (Sasanids after 874).

The caliphs themselves became hostage in Baghdad to foreign 'protectors' such as the Seljuk Turks from 1037.

Syria, once again, was contested from many directions. In this period of unparalleled confusion, the struggle for political dominance was matched by a resurgence of the Shiite-Sunni tensions as various factions fought to impose their views on an increasingly Islamicised population. Heterodox sects of all persuasions sprang up in this no-man's-land of empires with Shiism (and its Ismaeli variant) the dominant trend even in the cities (especially Aleppo). Rebellions and disaffection abounded and many sects simply retreated to the mountainous and desert areas, there preserving a separate identity which is evident today in the country's ethnic and religious complexity. (It was at this time that the Maronite sect took refuge in the mountains of Lebanon, illustrating that diversity and fragmentation were not the sole prerogative of Muslims.)

Syria's political history during this period can only be traced at the local level, separate lines of political succession being established in northern and southern Syria, depending on their degree of exposure to events in Egypt, Iraq (especially Mosul, the seat of Seljuk power), Byzantium and Turkey. Aleppo was controlled by the Hamdanid dynasty (944–1003) whose impetuous adventurism only served to make Aleppo a virtual protectorate of the Byzantines and later of the Fatimids. The Bedouin Mirdasid family then nominally ruled the city (1023–79) in a balancing act that recognised Fatimid suzerainty without provoking Byzantine intervention. The Seljuk Turks who had extorted from the putative Abbasid caliph a mandate to govern northern Syria effectively took over under Alp Arslan as sultan (1070–2). The Byzantines had been seeking to profit from this instability by intermittently seizing parts of northern Syria under Emperors Nicephorus II Phocas (r 963–9) and John I Tzimisces (r 969–76) but their campaign had petered out with the signing of a treaty in 997 accepting Fatimid supremacy in Syria.

Damascus, like Aleppo, experienced in the ninth to 11th centuries a time of anarchy, with a period of rule in the ninth century by the Cairo-based Ikhshidid dynasty. After 961, the Fatimids, a Shiite dynasty, supplanted them in Cairo. Though the Ikhshidids paid nominal allegiance to the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, the Fatimids set up a rival Caliphate. The significance of this Baghdad/Cairo polarisation was to make Syria a battleground for inter-Muslim tensions, a situation which prevailed until a viable centre of power was effective in uniting the Middle East.

The continued rise of the Seljuks (nominally subservient to the Baghdad Caliphate) now brought the struggle for Syria to a new phase. The supremacy of the Seljuk Turks was sealed at the Battle of Manzikert (in eastern Turkey) in 1071 which saw their victory over the Byzantine forces of Romanus IV Diogenes who was taken prisoner. They went on to take most of Syria, including Damascus in 1075, and by 1078 were in Jerusalem. By the late 11th century, under Alp Arslan and Malik Shah I (sultan 1072–92), the Seljuks were sufficiently strong in Syria to block the Fatimid dynasty's efforts to maintain control of southern Syria, though Damascus oscillated between the two centres for some time. The Seljuk supremacy began to ring alarm bells in Europe, particularly given the apparent weakness of the Byzantines, and was in large part the stimulus that led to the 12th–13th century crusading movement which called for the recovery of the Holy Places by Christian arms.

Crusades (1098–1291)
(Map T3)

After centuries of comparative isolation, the Crusades brought to Syria another of the great clashes of worlds which have marked its history. After Pope Urban II (1088–99) made his stirring appeal to arms at the Council of Clermont-Ferrand in 1095, the Christian army that poured into Syria in 1097 found that the Seljuk leadership had disintegrated and that the land lacked any unified command for resistance. Not that the Christian

armies were much more united, rent by serious problems of leadership and disputes over tactics. During the nine month siege which resulted in the brutal taking of Antioch (when little respect was paid to the city's still-considerable Greek Orthodox population), the armies divided. Baldwin of Boulogne headed east to set up a separate principality at Edessa (southeastern Turkey). Bohemond was made Prince of Antioch while Raymond, Count of Toulouse set out for Jerusalem with what remained of the largely rabble army. Their taking en route of *Maarat al-Numan produced another gross massacre but still there was no concerted Muslim resistance.

From Maarat, the Crusaders marched south along the Orontes Valley and then turned towards the coast again through the Homs Gap, taking on the way the Kurdish fort which was to become the site of the great castle now known as the Krak des Chevaliers. Tripoli (northern Lebanon) was the next major objective but the city put up a fierce resistance and had to be by-passed while the army went on to take Jerusalem in 1099. It took some time for the various Crusader princes to consolidate their hold on the Syrian coastal areas. Tripoli was finally taken in 1109 but smaller centres such as *Latakia and *Tartus as well as the mountainous region around *Masyaf fell earlier. But the Crusader domains were never a compact and tightly defended entity. The division of control between various families – Raymond, Count of Toulouse, now installed in Tripoli; Bohemond and later Tancred in Antioch; Baldwin in Edessa – their mutual rivalries and separate designs on the Jerusalem Kingdom and their lack of sizeable or professional standing armies meant that many compromises had to be made with the Syrian environment. The divisions between the Muslim cities and leaderships, the fact that the Muslim/Christian gulf was often less important than the temptation to make alliances of convenience in pursuit of local power struggles, the ambiguous position of local Christian communities – these factors and more blurred the great faultline that theoretically ran between the Muslim and Christian worlds.

Yet the confrontation ran on for almost two centuries. To the Muslims, the Crusaders' religious pretext for intervention was never credible, Christian subjects of the Islamic states rarely suffering any distinct disadvantages and Christian pilgrims having long been accepted in the Holy Land. The Crusaders' presence was thus seen as a straight invasion in which religion was a veil cast over territorial motives.

The Franks, as they were known to the Muslims, stayed on in their main bastions, controlled some areas of countryside and precarious communication routes between, brought in fresh recruits through renewed crusading campaigns in Europe, married, died and constructed castles and churches. Though they held on to the slender coastal strip, their hold inland (even when consolidated after 1150 by the transfer of key fortresses to the Hospitaller and Templar orders) was at best precarious given the lack of manpower and popular support in the countryside. They rarely managed to threaten the main Muslim population centres. They got little help from – and did little to advance the position of – local Christians (usually Greek Orthodox and thus aloof from the aspirations of the Westerners). As the Muslim forces rallied to the new centres of Sunni power in Damascus and Aleppo, the process of slow attrition of the Crusaders' positions set in.

Islamic Resurgence

Aleppo was the first centre for Muslim consolidation under the Zengid regents (atabeqs), Zengi (r 1128–46) and his second son, Nur al-Din (r 1146–74), nominally subservient to the Seljuk sultan of Mosul and through him to the caliph in Baghdad. They continued the Seljuk policy of restoring Sunni orthodoxy, rolling back the gains made by Shiism under Fatimid encouragement and through the Persian-inspired Ismaelis. Sunni Islam became a more distinct rallying point against the alien threat, its concepts of inner character and righteous living being embodied in the Sharia (Islamic law code) and systematised

through the work of the urban religious leadership, the *ulama*, and a new network of educational and religious foundations.

The Zengids complemented this consolidation of the spiritual defences of their realms with a consolidation of their physical preparedness. They regained the Crusader outpost at Edessa (1144) and destabilised the Crusader presence in the Orontes Valley. By 1154, they had brought Damascus under their control, uniting for the first time the resistance to the Crusades in Syria into a single front and thus refining the concept of jihad.

The consolidation of orthodoxy and the encirclement of the Crusader forces took most of the century to complete before Muslim forces in Egypt and Syria were linked under one command (thus denying the Crusaders the capacity to play off Cairo against Damascus). Nur al-Din completed the process, making serious inroads into the Crusader presence in the Syrian coastal mountains, but it was taken further by Saladin, the nephew of one of his commanders, Ayyub. Saladin (a Kurd by origin) wrested the succession from Nur al-Din's infant son in 1176, having earlier (1171) ended the Fatimid era in Cairo by nominally restoring the authority of the Abbasid Caliphate. Damascus, for long the frontline centre of resistance to the Crusader presence in Jerusalem, became his preferred forward base and there he initiated the line of Ayyubids (1176–1260 – after his family name) which later took the form of separate dynasties in Damascus and Cairo. From there he completed the unification of Syria, taking full control of Aleppo in 1183 and thus securing strategic depth for a vigurous campaign against the Crusader forces. By 1187 he had lured King Guy of Jerusalem into the disastrous battle at Hattin in Galilee which saw the mass destruction of the Christian army and brought the fall of Jerusalem to the Muslim forces.

Crusader Syria withstood the loss of Jerusalem. The concept of a jihad to unite Muslim ranks rarely had much currency outside the areas directly affected by the Crusaders' depredations. Even Saladin's brilliant campaign in 1188 (see box page 16) did not touch off a consolidated effort to dislodge them from the great fortresses at the Krak or Marqab or from the cities of Tartus, Latakia or Antioch. After Saladin died in 1193, the inspiration had gone. Disputes resulted in the fragmentation of his realm between rival sons and it took nine years before the Ayyubid lands came together again under his brother, al-Adil (sultan in Damascus 1196–1218; in Cairo 1200–18). One of his successors in Cairo, al-Kamil I Nasr al-Din (1218–38), even handed back Jerusalem to the Crusaders by treaty with Frederick II in 1229, a move that provoked outrage and rebellion in Damascus. (It was recovered by the Muslims after falling to a Turkish marauding army in 1244.) The Ayyubids' line petered out by 1260, crippled by squabbles between Saladin's many descendants, though there were occasional signs of local vigour, for example the rule of his third son, al-Zaher Ghazi as Governor at Aleppo (1196–1215).

Mamluks (1260–1516)

By the mid 13th century, the focus of the Muslim/Crusader struggle had moved to Egypt which became the target of the later Crusades. From Cairo came the second great Muslim revival with the rise to open political power of the Mamluks (professional guards usually of Central Asian or Turkish background) in a palace coup of 1250. The first of the Mongol invasions of Syria, under Hulaga, inspired the Mamluks to rally the flagging forces of Islam (Battle of Ain Jalud – 'Goliath's Fountain' – on 3 September 1260) and to take over Damascus from the last Ayyubid, al-Malik al-Nasr II. The ruthless leadership of the Mamluk sultan, al-Zaher Baybars (r 1260–77), gave renewed momentum to the anti-Crusader cause and the debilitated Christian presence was rapidly dislodged from Antioch (1268) and from the bastions at the Krak and nearby *Safita (1271). The concurrent campaign against heterodox Shiites brought the Ismaeli castles of the coastal mountains under Sunni rule (*Masyaf). The process continued under Sultan Qalawun (r 1280–90) who routed the remaining Crusader

Saladin's Campaign of 1188

After Hattin and the taking of Jerusalem, Saladin spent the next campaign season in a series of whirlwind strikes against Crusader positions in Syria. His main concern was to block the incursion of a German Crusader army then en route through Asia Minor and to complement his diplomatic contacts with the Byzantines aimed at discouraging them from giving the Germans access through Byzantine territory. His tactical objectives were not to drive the Crusader presence in Syria into the sea but to reduce the extent of territory they could make available to a German force. Thus he decided against any frontal assaults on the main Crusader strongholds where resistance developed but rather to roll up their weakly manned positions inland and bottle up the Christian forces in major centres – Tortosa, the Krak, Marqab and Antioch.

His tactics were a brilliant success. The taking of over 50 Crusader positions (for the moment, reducing the Kingdom of Jerusalem to a small enclave around Tyre) fatally weakened the Crusader presence, denying them the capacity to interdict the major inland north-south routes. The weak Crusader response to his campaign justified his assumptions about the capacity of an alien force to maintain its presence on hostile territory. The last gesture of Saladin, the occupation of the castle of Baghras, virtually under the nose of Bohemond, Prince of Antioch, showed the ultimate powerlessness of the Frankish forces. What is perhaps most remarkable, however, was that it took almost another century for the Muslim successors of Saladin to capitalise on this realisation and nudge the remaining Crusader forces out of the East.

LIST OF MAIN ENGAGEMENTS

1187	
4 July	Battle of Hattin
2 October	Jerusalem falls
1188	
30 May	arrives at Krak – decides not to attack
3–8 July	sacking of Tortosa, passes Marqab, burning of Baniyas
16 July	takes Jeble
23 July	siege of Latakia succeeds
29 July	Château de Saône (Qalaat Saladin) falls after three days
1 August	Balatonos (Qalaat al-Mehelbeh) falls
5 August	Bakas falls
12 August	Shugur falls
20 August	arrives at Qalaat Burzey
23 August	Burzey falls
28 Sept	Baghras besieged

forces with their successive retreats from Marqab (1285), Latakia (1287), Tripoli (1289) and Tartus (1291).

The Mamluks, though aliens, rapidly built themselves networks of alliances with the principal families and religious establishments (*ulama*) of the main Syrian cities. Under their guidance and with the aid of the endowments often funded by their governors, the early Mamluk period was another golden age for Damascus. Though not the centre of the Mamluk realms (that remained Cairo), it was made the second capital by the early 14th century, greatly favoured by the early sultans as demonstrated in the 171 building projects undertaken during the period. Its governors were highly connected and often very effective (most notably Tengiz, Governor of Damascus 1312–40). Elaborate chains of command were set up to ensure that they did not arrogate independent authority. By

1312, the Mamluks had largely achieved all they had set out to gain and a period of sustained prosperity set in for most of the century. After 1380, however, a series of disastrous civil wars weakened the leadership and renewed threats of bedouin and Tartar assaults. After the last, and most disastrous, Mongol invasion of 1400–1 under Timur (Tamerlaine), the Mamluk sultans never quite recovered their stride.

In 1390, the succession of Bahri Mamluks (1260–1382 – mainly Turks or Mongols) had been replaced by a largely Circassian line of Burji Mamluks (1382–1516). A period of consolidation began in 1422 and the long rule (1468–95) of Sultan Qait Bey brought renewed stability to Syria. But the most notable reminders of the late Mamluk period are the numerous mausoleums. (Elisséeff notes that the Mamluks 'who lived uncertain of what the next day would bring, tried at least to secure themselves a sepulchre'.) In the end, Mamluk rule collapsed as much from its unpopularity (due to the extortionate demands placed on its Syrian subjects) as from the swift inroads of a new Turkish incursion, this time in the form of the Ottoman military.

Ottomans (1516–1918)

The Ottoman Turks had already taken much of Asia Minor (including Constantinople from the Byzantines in 1453) before they moved in on Syria. Many of the upper class rallied spontaneously to them in 1516, the Mamluk garrison quietly slipping out of Damascus to allow the new Sultan to make his entrance. Shortly after, under the long reign of Suleiman (known to Europe as Suleiman the Magnificent – r 1520–66), the administration of Syria was systematised, its population counted and its revenues stabilised. The early Ottoman period (especially the 16th–17th centuries) brought a new impetus to the development of the three Syrian provinces (*vilayat*) – Aleppo, Damascus and Raqqa. The role played by the Syrian provinces in the administration and provisioning of the annual pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca did much to advance the economy and external trade grew. Under the provisions of the Ottoman 'capitulation' treaties with European powers, Aleppo became the base for a substantial foreign trading presence, a role that Damascus shared only to a limited extent.

Ottoman rule was a reasonably loose arrangement, considerable power being devolved to the local governors (*wali*, holding the rank of Pasha), as long as the central coffers were supplied with tax revenue, the Hajj provisioned and the security interests of the empire respected. The sultan's role as caliph was broadly accepted by Sunnis and helped confer legitimacy on Ottoman rule. There was little attempt to impose a Turkish cultural identity and what borrowing there was of ideas and projects from the capital often became modified in local detail. The millet system which ruled minority communities through their religious leaders tended to reinforce the existing forces which had set up distinctive minority quarters in the cities and enclaves in the more remote parts of the countryside. The minorities largely thrived under Turkish rule, the Christians in particular playing an intermediary role in the rise of external commerce under the watchful eye of the Western powers. By the 18th century, however, Turkish rule was stagnating and the economic fortunes of Syria began to diminish with more intense competition from trade routes via the north or via the sea routes to Asia.

The 19th century was again a troubled period for Syria. The 1831 expedition of Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Muhammad Ali who had set up his own power base in Egypt in defiance of Ottoman authority, pushed the Ottoman forces back across the Taurus. Egyptian rule brought in a more tolerant dispensation that saw the first European residents of Damascus and encouraged the Christian communities to play a more assertive role in public life. Ibrahim Pasha was forced out in 1840 and Ottoman rule uneasily restored. In 1860, partly as a result of the Druze-Christian troubles in Lebanon, a terrible massacre broke out in Damascus after a Muslim attack on the Christian quarter.

The Ottomans restored calm but the situation provoked the landing of French forces on the Lebanese coast. By now, Syria was considerably more open to foreign influence. European educational institutions began to operate in the second half of the 19th century but much of the initiative had already been lost to the more outward-looking cities of the coast, notably Beirut.

Damascus was thus slow to adopt the Arab nationalist sentiments that were encouraged in the case of Cairo, for example, by the development of the Arabic-language press. (There was no Arabic newspaper in Damascus until 1897.) Some reformist Ottoman governors such as Midhat Pasha (1878–80) were well in advance of most of their subjects and introduced on their own initiative civic improvements that enhanced the amenities and sanitation of the main cities. The first paved road for wheeled traffic since Roman times was opened between Beirut and Damascus in 1863. A railway from Beirut to Damascus and the Hauran was opened in 1894 and a supplementary line from Rayyak (in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon) north to Homs and Aleppo was later completed. In 1908, the German-built Hijaz Railway connected Damascus with Medina.

Syria anticipated a new deal for the Arab subjects of the Empire with the overthrow of the Ottoman Sultan Abd al-Hamid II in 1909 by the Young Turks. Disappointment at the continuation of Turkish rule and the imposition of policies of 'Turkification' gave new stimulus to Arab nationalism. In 1914, Damascus was made the general headquarters of German and Turkish forces in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Damascus became a base for rising Arab feeling against Turkish domination, focussing particularly on the aspirations of Amir Feisal, son of Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, to liberate the Muslim holy places. World War I was a time of extreme privation in Syria and Lebanon with Turkish indifference and maladministration aggravating the effects of food shortages, leading to starvation and serious epidemics.

French Mandate (1922–45)

Allied and Arab nationalist forces entered Damascus on 1 October 1918, the city having been abandoned the day before by its Turkish garrison. Elections to a National Syrian Government the next year and the appointment of Feisal as King cut across British and French ambitions and were overturned by the establishment under the provisions of the Versailles Treaty of a French Mandate in Syria (along with a corresponding French Mandate in an enlarged Lebanon and British Mandates in Palestine and Trans-Jordan). The mandate was imposed by force of arms in 1920 and was accepted at best grudgingly thereafter.

France faced a hostile population and wearying resistance. In 1925, a serious revolt broke out in the Hauran and spread to Damascus where the French resorted to mass bombardment of the city. Having tried to break Syria up into more malleable portions (separate 'states' were declared in the Hauran, the Alawi area and northern Syria), the French succumbed to rising nationalist agitation with limited constitutional independence in 1943, the Vichy French by then having been dislodged in favour of the Free French. The Mandate formally ended in April 1945 with Syria's admission to the United Nations.

2

DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHITECTURAL FORMS IN SYRIA

Bronze and Iron Ages

Although Syria is of critical importance in the scientific study of the remains of the Bronze and Iron Ages and provides an extraordinary range of sites that have been researched over the last century, the scope of this book is restricted to remains that are recognisable as buildings or as monuments to the past. Only a limited number of remains of these early periods are covered in this volume namely those of major historical importance (*Ebla, *Tell Halaf) or where the physical remains uncovered by researchers provides unusually rich evidence of the architectural practices of the period (especially *Ugarit, *Mari, *Ain Dara).

The early sequence of buildings does not represent in itself a continuous tradition, the pattern was continually disrupted by the waves of invasions and cross-currents of influences that washed over Syria. While the remains of temples at sites such as Ugarit do show the beginnings of an architectural style that will emerge later as a steady trend (box on Syro-Phoenician Temples below), most of the architectural development is only broadly related to common themes such as the evolution of the internal courtyard as the basis of palace design. If the results are thus ad hoc and cumulative, the effects are nevertheless striking when seen on the scale achieved in the Palace of Zimri-Lim at Mari with its 275 rooms or in the main palace of Ugarit with 90 or more rooms on the lower (stone-built) floor plus upper storeys. Major settlements were generally fortress-cities, walled for defence against newly-developed weapons such as cavalry (based on the horse-drawn light chariot) and archers. A citadel was located on the highest ground, defended by two or three outer walls of beaten earth or stone, surrounded by a moat, intended to resist siege devices such as moveable towers and battering rams. Within the walls, houses were usually of mud brick, some with an upper storey.

The development of decorative elements in palace and temple design is likewise only randomly visible in our survey. At Mari, there are fragments of wall-painting

Syro-Phoenician temples

Several temples in Syria which are variously described as Roman, Palmyrene, Phoenician or in the style of Baalbek, actually bear many traces of a common lineage which is largely local in inspiration, but takes on many Roman or classical attributes. What is common to the Allat, Bel and Baal-Shamin temples at *Palmyra, the Phoenician-Persian temple at *Amrit, the Roman temple compound at *Husn Suleiman and even the Temple of Jupiter in Damascus (*Damascus – Umayyad Mosque) is a common Syro-Phoenician ancestry.

The idea of isolating the temple cella from the clutter of its surrounds and locating it in an open compound is an idea that first appeared in Syria (Ugarit temples) and later gave rise to the fully free-standing Greek version. The earliest clear example is the late fifth or fourth century compound at Amrit, a curious site just south of Tartus which betrays an eclectic mixture of influences from local Phoenician to Mesopotamian-Persian. Here can be seen the basic idea of a large open temple compound at the centre of which stands a small naos or cella. The areas for public assembly are kept open and the room reserved for the image and priestly worship of the gods is enclosed in a relatively small space. (The same idea can be seen in reconstructions of Old Testament religious buildings.) In front of the naos are an altar for public sacrificial rites and a small pool for lustrations. The provision at Amrit of a sacred lake around the central island is not found at any other sites.

In later examples, the naos increases in size, even taking on some of the appearance of the classical temple itself (surrounding colonnade etc) but is still small compared to the vast spaces of the walled and/or arcaded enclosure. The altar and lustral pool survive (Palmyra). So too does the corner tower, a format found in the *Palmyra – Bel temple as well as in the curious building at *Dumeir. The most flamboyant achievement is the Temple of Jupiter Heliopolitan at Baalbek (Lebanon) which is outside the scope of this book but which represents an overblown version of forms found in the major classical and Phoenician sites of the region.

and the use of orthostats to line gateways or courtyards is evident by the early Iron Age, developing into the bold use of stone-carved panels or free-standing sculptures at Tell Halaf (*Aleppo – Museum) or *Ain Dara.

Seleucids

Virtually all of Seleucid Syria has been lost to posterity in later re-building[1], though the tendency in the Roman period to respect the Greek town plan (based on the Hippodamian grid – *Damascus – Straight Street) means that the principles used in planning Greek cities endured even if the actual fabric was considerably embellished (usually on a grandiose scale – *Palmyra, *Apamea). *Dura Europos is a good example of a Greek fortress adapted to Persian and Roman needs. In fact, until recently there was no evidence of a major Hellenistic fortress that was not rebuilt by the Romans, indicating that at least the Greeks' capacity to pick strategic sites could not be improved on even if some of their cities (eg Beroea – *Aleppo) failed to prosper as major civilian centres in Roman times.

Roman Period

Though remains of the early imperial period are scarce, in architecture the second century AD seems to have seen a drift away from the orientalising trends of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods and a closer observance of imperial norms. The mixture of styles that marked the vast project developed from the late first century BC, the *temenos* of the Palmyra Bel Temple, is a last throw in terms of the heavy use of the orientalising repertoire for major projects. But local preoccupations survived at the level of individual sponsorship, for example in the rectangular tower tomb and in funerary art at Palmyra (see box under *Palmyra – page 229).

Syria is well furnished with 12 examples of Roman theatres (of which at least six are preserved in substantial form), including one of the most intact in the Mediterranean world, at *Bosra. Although its construction in sombre basalt gives a different impression from the dazzling stone of Leptis Magna (Libya) or Aspendos (Turkey), its survival virtually intact (only the *scaenae frons* had to be reconstructed) and the sweep of its nearly intact *cavea* make it a monument of singular significance. Though not the largest in Syria (see box below), other examples only manage to suggest their former proportions, though the small examples at *Jeble and *Shahba are reasonably well preserved.

The theatre boom in Syria does not seem to have begun until the mid second century, reflecting the increasingly prosperous basis of the communities and their acquisition of more distinctly Roman tastes. We have no evidence of theatre construction in the Hellenistic period (though Damascus and Antioch are reported, from written evidence, to have had theatres by the early first century AD). The remaining examples follow Roman models though the Syrian builders were more inclined to chose sites on flat ground (eschewing the advantages of building the huge structure into a hillside) and construction is almost always in stone (as opposed to brick used in the Roman world to the west).

Roman theatres

site	diameter	capacity	date
Apamea	139 m		late 2C
Bosra	102 m	6–9000	late 2C?
Cyrrhus	115 m		c150
Jeble	90 m	7000	–
Palmyra	90 m		2C?
Shahba	90 m		mid-3C

City Plans

Other manifestations of the classical period can be found in diverse forms in Syria. The expansion of cities generally

1 A French team has excavated the Hellenistic fortress at *Ras al-Basit. An extensive citadel has also been found by an Australian team at *Jebel Khalid.

Roman city plans

city	main axis	width	grid elements	date
Aleppo (Beroea)	1.00 km	20–25 m	120 by 46 m	?
Apamea	1.85 km	37.5 m	105 by 53 m	115–180
Bosra	900 m	23 m	V	105+
Cyrrhus	400+ m	7 m*	?	?
Damascus	1.35 km	26 m	100 by 45 m	late 2/3C
Laodicea (Latakia)	1.50 km	5–7 m	112 by 57 m	192–211?
Palmyra	1.20 km	25 m	V	mid 2– 3C

* = between columns only ? = not known V = variable

respected the basic Hippodamian grid of Hellenistic times (see box above). To this was added, however, a specifically Syrian embellishment – the principal axis (*decumanus* or *cardo maximus*) was considerably enlarged and lined with colonnades to shelter pedestrians from the sun, frame the commercial booths or shops to the rear and provide a sumptuous setting to major civic buildings. The effect is still observable at *Palmyra and on an even grander scale at *Apamea. Few new cities were founded under the Romans. An exception is Philippopolis (*Shahba), a curious attempt to establish a later Roman 'model town' to commemorate the local ancestry of the reigning emperor, Philip the Arab (r 244–9).

Temples and Civic Works

Roman temples are found in various locations, mostly remote from population centres which might have re-used their stone for subsequent construction. There are several examples of Roman baths (*Barad, *Shahba, *Bosra) but few extant examples of houses. Some prosaic but impressive engineering accomplishments survive (eg sections of stone-clad Roman roads – *Roman Road – Bab al-Hawa; the bridges east of *Cyrrhus; the cistern at *Bosra), attesting to the intensive nature of Rome's development of this prized and largely peaceful province. Perhaps most impressive, though, are the lonely sentinels on the outer frontier – the outposts at Dura Europos and Cyrrhus, both fortress cities of Greek origins. But the centre-piece of Rome's accomplishment in stabilising the area is Palmyra which also bears witness to the intense (and finally tragic) attempt to build from an isolated society a culture blending eastern and western styles bound together by recognition of the commercial advantages of the Pax Romana.

Byzantine Period

The transition to the Byzantine period with its emphasis on architecture in the service of Christianity is the theme of the fourth to fifth centuries in Syria. Leaving aside the notable fortresses of *Resafa, *Qasr Ibn Wardan and *Halebiye, the Byzantine period is largely measured by its extraordinary variety of churches, with which Syria is exceptionally well endowed. (For this reason, and given the profusion of sites in this category, the architectural development of church styles is examined here in some detail.)

Churches

Syria being a crossroads of diverse influences, more than one tradition is reflected in the evolution of architectural styles of early Christian churches. Influences include: the Roman basilica

model, adapted to religious use; local domestic architecture; eastern styles (including the surmounting dome); and temple architecture. Also to be factored in are regional variations, often reflecting availability of materials, and (after the fourth century) liturgical and doctrinal fissures within the Christian hierarchy which influenced architectural practice.

The earliest churches of which we have evidence were converted private houses. The example at *Dura Europos is the most remarkably preserved (it was transported in the 1930s to a museum at Yale University) and the earliest (early third century), before the official recognition of the Church under Constantine. From the next century comes the house converted to a church in the village of *Kirkbizeh.

The tradition subsequently became more evidently diverse, the availability of building materials playing a large role in regional variations. In the north, the chalky local limestone was easily worked. Usually the basic plan followed the basilica tradition. In the Hauran, the local basalt was heavy and unyielding. The lack of wood and the need to work basalt into roofing slabs no longer than 2 to 3 m imposed a different range of technical needs including the transverse arch and the centralised dome plan. This gave rise to an inventive local tradition different from that of the north and remote from any major metropolitan centre such as Antioch.

Evolution of Church Plans

Most of Syria's early churches are dated, making it relatively easy to trace the variations in their design. Some even record the name of the architect. By the end of the fourth century, church design had become highly ambitious, for example the cathedral at *Barad (built by the architect Julianos – 27 m wide by 39 m). The buildings may lack the refinement of design of counterparts in the area of Antioch, more readily influenced by imperial and metropolitan styles, but the construction is solid and precise.

By the second half of the fifth century, Syrian churches were beginning to show signs of the bold experimentation that is evident in other parts of the Mediterranean world. At *Qalb Lozeh, the plan had become so big in scale that new structural devices were needed, especially in order to allow for the opening up of the side aisles. Whereas the outer aisles were previously divided from the central nave by a row of columns, the latter were replaced by broad squat piers which support wide sweeping arches, with added devices such as the dramatic archway enclosing the apse and solid towers flanking the west entrance (an idea which has precedents in Hellenistic buildings).

Syro-Byzantine church plans

By the early fifth century, the elements of the typical northern Syrian church plans from this heyday of Christianity were largely in place. The design, repeated in scores of villages of the 'dead cities' zone, comprised a basilica plan with the nave terminating to the east in a semi-dome over the sanctuary housed in a half-circular apse. On either side of the sanctuary was a small chamber – on the north, the *diaconicon* or sacristy/vestry and a room often used as a martyrium for the veneration of saints' relics. (One of these chambers might support a tower.) The roof above the nave was usually of pitched timber, avoiding the arched stone or domes found in the south. In many churches, the centre of the nave was occupied by a horseshoe-shaped *bema*, a raised platform or tribunal, perhaps intended to serve for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

The entrance to the church was often through a doorway on the south side, especially in early examples. Later there was a tendency to develop the west front with either a wide *narthex* or vestibule or a narrower one enclosed between flanking towers. Social convention prescribed in many areas (but especially in the neighbourhood of Antioch where greater orthodoxy prevailed) the separation of women and men, the former being confined either to the western end of the church or in a separate gallery above the nave.

Shortly after, a project of massive proportions was undertaken a little to the north at *Saint Simeon to commemorate the monk who had spent the later part of his life as a hermit on a small platform atop a pillar. The pilgrimage to commemorate St Simeon had taken off with great vigour even before his death. The imperial authorities probably sought to use it to divert the local population from their heretical attachment to Monophysitism and thus poured funds into the ambitious project – a four-basilica pilgrimage centre, constructed in the last decades of the fifth century. This gigantic construction re-introduced many aspects of classical decoration to the Syrian repertoire, probably via architects and craftsmen imported from Antioch or further afield.

Pilgrimages to the shrines of martyrs inspired many of the churches constructed during the remainder of the Christian period in Syria. The cathedral dedicated to St Sergius at *Resafa represents the 'final stages of majestic authority' of the basilica plan.[2] Dating from the sixth century, it typifies the bold concepts employed post-Qalb Lozeh to divide the centre from the side aisles by means of leaping arches carried on stout piers. The same principle is employed in the Church of Bissos at *Ruweiha (sixth century) though both show the structural weakness of a design which failed to provide sufficient lateral support to hold the towering arches and their surmounting masonry clerestories.

Materials, Decoration

The use of stucco and plaster provided a finish to most churches quite different to that now conveyed by the mellowed and mottled stone. In the south, most were plastered inside and out; internal plastering (and probably the application of frescoes) was employed in the north. Traces of floor mosaics have been found in some churches and transferred to museums for preservation.

Centralised churches

In a different stream is the tradition of centralised churches, usually based on a circular domed structure placed on top of square lower walls. The earliest dated example found in Syria is the cathedral at *Bosra (511–2). The basic method of resolving a round room within a square building by the use of corner *exedrae* flanked by niches had been used in Roman architecture, particularly in the construction of baths (as at Bosra itself) but its translation into Christian buildings is a southern Syrian initiative. Later examples were found at Jerash (nearby in northern Jordan) and at Constantinople (Church of Sts Sergius and Bacchus (518–27); Baptistery of Hagia Sophia).

The second notable element of the Bosra design is the central circular arcade, technically called a colonnaded quatrefoil. The device also came from classical sources and had already passed into church architecture by the time the Bosra cathedral was built. Such examples are found in the Church of San Lorenzo in Milan, the martyrium at Seleucia ad Pieria (near Antioch) and (later) in the centralised churches at *Resafa and *Apamea.

The Bosra church thus has clear roots in the Hellenized traditions of the Mediterranean world and the local tradition of centralised dome structures. The trend was taken much further in, for example, Hagia Sophia, once the technical problems of expanding the centralised design had been resolved by the later development of pendentives and flying buttresses to spread the excessive weight bearing down on vulnerable points.

Another remarkable non-basilica design is the Church of St George at *Ezraa in southern Syria, probably the oldest continually-used church in Syria whose origins go back to AD 515. It differs from other centralised churches in that its basic shape is octagonal, thus rendering the problem of resolving the transition to the circular dome less formidable. The shape is heavy and solid, the effect inside sombre with little natural light but the impression is remarkable for the sheer survival power of the building.

2 Milburn 1988: 126.