A History of Syria in One Hundred Sites

edited by

Youssef Kanjou and Akira Tsuneki

Archaeopress Archaeology

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Gordon House
276 Banbury Road
Oxford OX2 7ED

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 381 6
ISBN 978 1 78491 382 3 (e-Pdf)

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Cover Illustration: View of the excavation at Hummal site
© The Syro-Swiss mission on the Palaeolithic of the El Kowm Area

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Printed in England by Oxuniprint, Oxford
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

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Preface

This book presents the long history of Syria through a journey of the most important and recently excavated archaeological sites. The sites cover over 1.8 million years and all regions of Syria.

Recent political conflicts in the Republic of Syria have caused severe problems and the destruction of cultural heritage, which resulted in concern of archaeologists throughout the world about this tragic situation. The situation also deprives the Syrian people of the right to reconstruct their prehistory and history, both indispensable for reorganising world history. Out of this concern we called archaeologists who undertook excavations at the sites in Syria in recent years and before the conflicts began, to submit contributions, which would describe every important archaeological site in Syria. Based on the contributions written by 110 colleagues, we edited *A history of Syria in One Hundred Sites* in English and Arabic. The effort and excellent feed back to our request in sending us the excellent summaries for each site excavated in Syria is highly appreciated. This volume is a results of their good intentions.

This is an English volume, and we hope that readers of the book will understand the importance and true nature of Syrian history. We also believe that knowledge of Syrian history will help readers not only to have increased understanding of this county but will also help to act as a deterrent to the destruction of Syrian cultural heritage and to facilitate protection of Syrian sites. We plan to deliver the Arabic version to Syrians people and students, who are suffering as a result of the conflict. We believe that knowledge of Syrian history will help them not only to have pride in their own history but will become a cultural deterrent to the destruction of their cultural heritage and facilitate the protection of sites as well.

Youssef Kanjou and Akira Tsuneki

Introduction: The Significance of Syria in Human History

Youssef Kanjou and Akira Tsuneki

As mentioned in the preface, this volume presents the long history of Syria, in the light of results of recent archaeological excavations. For this purpose, 113 colleagues have contributed information on 103 topics for this volume. On the basis of these contributions we have summarized the history of Syria, a history as important as any in terms of the development of human society.

The Richness of Syrian Archaeology

Syria is located at the junction of three vast continents, Africa, Asia and Europe, and this strategic position has involved Syria in the tide of great historical events. Our direct ancestor, *Homo sapiens*, departed from East Africa and dispersed to Asia and Europe through the corridor of the Eastern Mediterranean. When the inhabitants faced the drastic climatic transition at the end of the Pleistocene they began a new way of life, farming and herding (which archaeologists call *Neolithic Revolution*, or the process of *Neolithization*) in the Middle Euphrates basin of Syria. Urbanization also first occurred in Syria and its vicinity as a result of the various strategic resources concentrated in the region, reflecting its position at the junction of many trade routes. During the Bronze and Iron Ages, the surrounding great powers, such as the Akkadian, Assyrian, Hittite, and the New Kingdom of Egypt, invaded and ravaged the area repeatedly. The strategic position and value of Syria was then recognized at that time. During the classical periods, when people travelled from the East along the Euphrates and the Tigris tributaries, they first met the Mediterranean Sea via the Syrian coast, the corridor to the west and Northern Africa. The Silk Road, the most famous of the ancient trade routes, passed through Syria between the Roman Empire and the Han dynasty. From Palaeolithic to modern times, Syria has been one of the most important regions in terms of human history.

Recent archaeological excavations have revealed and confirmed the depth and diversity of Syrian civilization. Newly discovered antiquities have contributed to different perspectives on regional history and civilization. Syria was a cultural centre during various periods, as demonstrated by excavations at Dederieyh, Mureybit, Tell Brak, Ebla, Mari, Ugarit and Palmyra. In all periods, Syrian geographical, social and ethnic environments have contributed to and influenced interactions with those civilizations impacting on Syria.

Syrian cultural influences vary from region to region, and from period to period. The historical traces of south and north-western Syria are different from those of north-eastern Syria, which was a part of wider Mesopotamia. The classical period was one of great prosperity, particularly in the mountainous limestone areas of south and north-western Syria (see the Dead Cities), while during the Bronze Age the riverine areas in the el-Jazierah region prospered (see Chuera, Beydar, Urkesh / Mozan and Leilan).

The First Syrian Populations

People have lived in various regions in Syria since the Palaeolithic period, more than one million years ago. Human groups migrated from northeast Africa into Syria, finding suitable occupation sites near springs and rivers where plants and animals flourished. These locations supplied them too with good siliceous rocks for their chipped stone industries. A series of Palaeolithic cultures, such as the Acheulian, Mousterian, Hummalian and Yabrudian, and traces of early human activities, have been discovered in many regions in Syria (see el-Kowm, Wadi Mushkuna and Dederiyeh).

The el-Kowm area in the heart of the Syrian Desert, half way between the city of Palmyra and the Euphrates River, is one of the regions inhabited by Palaeolithic populations since c. 1.8 million years ago. Since then, humans have lived in this area intermittently and developed several new technologies for manufacturing stone implements. The first inhabitants came to Syria with a simple biface hand-axe technology (Acheulian). Over time, they started to make new types of tools such as scrapers and blades, and these new tools spread from Syria to Palestine, Jordan and possibly even to Europe. They hunted various animals such as horses and cattle, but the most important resource for the people of el-Kown was the giant camel – three times the size of the modern camel. These giant camels were a direct ancestor of the modern camel. Based on this evidence, it is suggested that the origin of camels might be the Syrian Desert itself (see Baaz and el-Kowm).

Sedentism and the Emergence of Villages

Towards the end of Pleistocene (c. 15,000 BC), environmental conditions became warmer and wetter than previously. This new, temperate climate accellerated the spread of human occupation throughout Syria. The population increased, and the tools used for daily life improved. Most tools were made of stone, but increasingly the inhabitants utilized new materials such as bone and wood. From c. 12,000 BC, people started to build a new type of house. It was a dwelling with a round plan, a pit

house with a stone foundation wall. The upper part of the house was made of tree branches and animal skins. Gradually a number of these pit houses grouped together and the 'village' appeared in human history. These pit-house dwellings indicate that the inhabitants started to settle down in one place throughout the year. They gave up their nomadic way of life and began to pursue a stable existence in one place. At the same time they became more familiar with the ecology of the animals and plants around them: gazelles became an important food source. The population began to focus on edible wild grains, such as wheat and barley, which were nutritious and could be stored. Several new types of stone tools were developed, including large arrowheads, burins, knives, scrapers and mortars. Sickle blades were used for harvesting wild grains (formed with wooden or bone hafts), becoming important tools. Also from this period the manufacture of ornaments and jewellery became more conspicuous in Syria. This new way of life was named the Natufian Culture, spreading from the southern to northern Levant and lasting nearly 3,000 years. Natufian cultural deposits have been discovered in both north and south Syria (see Kaus Kozah, Abu Hureyra and Qarassa).

Neolithization and the Development of Farming Villages

Around the tenth millennium BC the process of Neolithization began in northern Syria. This was a new way of life based on agricultural cultivation and it changed human life and ideology completely. This cultural and cognitive transition mainly started in the tenth millennium BC and lasted for several thousand years. The most important results of Neolithization were that people no longer depended so extensively on natural resources but started to control other living creatures around them. This Neolithization process began in and around the Middle Euphrates basin in northern Syria, an area rich in water, plants and animals (see Mureybet, Qaramel and Abu Hureyra).

The new way of life provided local populations with more stability and encouraged them to build larger and more permanent villages. Initially single-room circular houses from stones, tree branches and mud were built. Gradually the houses became bigger and the layout changed into a rectangular form with several rooms. Grain storage areas next to the dwellings were added. When family members died they were buried in a flexed position below the house floor or courtyard (see Qaramel and Halula). Communal houses also appeared alongside ordinary family dwellings. These were located in the middle of the village, sometimes ornamented with decorated walls and other unusual features (see Jerf el-Ahmar and Dja'de el-Mughara).

Evidence of the earliest domesticated plants and animals was found in these villages. The first evidence for agriculture was identified by cultivated grains of barley, wheat and lentils. Evidence of the first domesticated sheep, goats, and pigs was also obtained. Knowledge of domestication of plants and animals spread throughout the Levant, following cultural connections and trade routes. After several thousand years, farming spread to Europe, North Africa and other regions of the world (see Halulah and Abu Hureyra).

The concepts of 'religious' belief appeared in the society of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period in Syria. The most significant indications for this were bull skulls, female figurines and plastered human skulls. Bull skulls were placed within a special room in the residence (see Qaramel and Mureybet). A number of female figurines, whose sexual and reproductive parts were sometimes emphasized, may be regarded as representing a fertility divinity (see Seker el-Aheimar and Shir). The societies of southern Syria had a custom of plastering human skulls, which was clearly a secondary treatment of the deceased body after the primary burial: skulls were decorated with lime-plaster and some were painted decoratively in an artistic style (see Aswad).

Expressive ornamentation and decorated stones (geometric patterns, animals and plants) indicate that the people observed their surrounding environment and held some forms of belief. They started to decorate their houses with wall and floor paintings. The most important paintings are found at Tell Halula. Red-painted designs were visible on the floor of a house, including dancing figures, dating back to c. 7800 BC. The paintings found at Dja'de el Mughara, a site located on the Euphrates, consist mainly of geometric designs (triangle, squares, rectangles) and were discovered on the walls of a communal building with three massive pillars. Many colours were used for the designs and they are the oldest wall (mud wall) paintings known in the world so far, dating to c. 8700 BC (see Dja'de el Mughara and Halula).

Chipped-stone implements formed the main categories among the artefacts from Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites. However from the beginning of the 7th millennium BC, pottery production on a large scale began in Syria (see Shir, el-Kerkh, Seker al-Aheimar). Hereafter, pottery became essential for everyday life. At the same time the use of stamp seals for sealing important items began (see el-Kerkh, Sabi Abyad). This was probably the first sealing system anywhere, and it indicates the recognition of prestige goods that needed to be protected by a sealing system. These seals, therefore, are evidence for private property, trade and administration within Neolithic Syrian society.

In the 6th millennium BC, people started to manufacture other types of pottery, including Halaf ware, an extremely fine painted ceramic with a lustrous surface and well-processed clay (see Chagar Bazar and Sabi Abyad). Kilns were used for firing Halaf painted pottery, and this

period marks the beginning of genuine pyrotechnology (control of fire) in human history. The Halaf people built distinctive buildings with a keyhole-shaped plan with a domed ceiling. This style is similar to the beehive buildings in modern villages around Aleppo in northwest Syria (see Sabi Abyad). The excavations at Halaf sites produced many pendant style stamp seals, suggesting that the people were engaged in trade and exchange as well as traditional farming and husbandry.

In the following, Chalcolithic periods, craft manufacturing was established on a larger scale. Pottery manufacturing kilns have been discovered at some Ubaid Culture sites (see Feres, Kosak Shamali, el-Abr, and Ziyadeh), and subsistence specialization had already begun in Syria during the early Chalcolithic period.

Emergence of Urbanization

It is notable that evidence for the first urban society can be observed among the Syrian Chalcolithic sites, such as Brak and Hamoukar in Hassaka province, and Hamam el-Turkman in Raqqa province. Archaeologists have discovered thick mudbrick walls and gates of monumental public buildings, as well as streets which connected these public buildings at these sites. In addition, many industrial workshops, for textiles, leather tanning and pottery were also discovered. These early urban settlements in Syria may date from the end of the 5th and early 4th millennium BC, and indicate that urban societies appeared in Syria much earlier than in southern Mesopotamia – areas archaeologists and philologists have traditionally thought of as the birthplaces of urban society during the late 4th millennium BC. Ancient cities in southern Mesopotamia, especially Uruk, have long been the focus of discussion about the beginning of urban society. However the results of new excavations in Syria challenge this view. Some researchers argue that Syria provided a possible starting place for urban society (see Feres and Hammam al-Turkman). Considering the early development of agriculture in Syria (Neolithization in Syria appeared much earlier than in southern Iraq), Syria could also provide a possible origin for the appearance of more complex societies, such as cities.

In the late 4th millennium BC, large Syrian settlements became specific 'cities' and radical changes appeared in social and religious life. The appearance of large temples and a writing system were important innovations, indicating the formation of religious and economic authorities. In this period, it seems that there were two centres of significant civilization in Syria. The first was in the Middle Euphrates region, which had a close relationship with the civilization of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia. The other was in the upper Khabur tributary region, where a local Syrian civilization prospered. The representative site in the latter area is Tell Brak, contemporaneous with the civilization of Uruk. One of the most important discoveries was the so-called 'EyeTemple', which has revealed many eye-shaped amulets.

Urbanism developed further in the Uruk period. The settlements were linked through a network of villages, towns and small cities, all of which were administered by a large city. This situation emerged in southern Mesopotamia, where the huge settlement of Uruk, with huge temples and large public buildings, required collective action and the ability to organize and allocate work. This necessitated central control, and apparently at Uruk this role was fulfilled by some form of religious authority (Hammam al-Turkman).

One of the most important developments in this period was a system of writing. Evidence for the earlier stages of writing includes small clay pieces in various forms (tokens), comprised of signs and symbols; these must have been used for calculating and the recording of goods and communications between the various interested parties. This system shows economic development in tandem with increasing agricultural surpluses, animal husbandry and the evolution of trade. At this period it was necessary to confirm ownership of resources, particularly when the products and goods were transported from one place to another (see Shiyukh Tahtani).

One of the main advances was the emergence of temples with distinct and clear architectural styles, consisting of a main central room and two side rooms (the so-called tripartite temple). This complex was provided with an altar and its inner walls were decorated with multi-coloured clay corn mosaics. It is clear that rituals were practised in these buildings. Such temples were discovered at Tell Brak in Hassake and Jabal Aruda on the banks of the Middle Euphrates (see Hammam al-Turkman).

A representative city complex in this era was excavated at the site of Habuba Kebira, located along the Euphrates River; it was fortified with 3m-wide mudbrick walls which extended for 600m.

The Era of City-States

In the 3rd millennium BC a new authority having a different culture and administrative system appeared, generally referred to as a 'city-state'. The city-states had a governor, army and agricultural lands, and were often in conflict with one another. They ruled the surrounding villages, and the religious and political authorities organized the various aspects of the social and religious life of the cities' inhabitants and local villagers. In later periods, many such cities developed, or united to form kingdoms and sometimes even empires (see Mari and Leilan).

It is clear that there were several factors which helped these embryonic city-states to flourish. The evolution of agriculture, sometimes with an irrigation system, produced sufficient the surpluses to support the ruling elites and armies. The development of trade routes (Anatolia, the Mediterranean coast, and southern Mesopotamia) empowered Syrian cities, especially those located on the banks of the Euphrates, to act as major trading centres for the collection and distribution of important resources, including minerals and timber (see Munbaqa, Tulul el-Far and Jerablus Tahtani).

By 2600 BC several kingdoms had appeared in Syria, varying in size from region to region. In the Euphrates valley and the Khabur headwater, the capital city covered 100 hectares (see Leilan) and the secondary centres reached 15–30ha (see Baydar). The cities on the Balikh River grew to 50-65ha (see Hammam al-Turkman). These areas incorporated fortification walls for the cities, and even smaller villages had external mudbrick walls (see Selenkahiye and Halawa). This period also provides clear evidence of warfare (see Mohammed Diyab, Al-Rawda, Baydar and Bderi).

During this era Syria was relegated to the role of buffer zone between the great powers of Iraq and Egypt. In these societies, social division had widened and social classes distinguished between rich and poor, workers and artisans, farmers and nomads (see Arbid, Umm el-Marra, Qumluq, Barri, Abu Hamad and Wreide).

Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of this era was the form of writing. Cuneiform was used widely in economic, social and religious spheres. Evidence from clay tablets indicates that there were special schools for teaching cuneiform writing. Clay tablets were collected in an archive similar to present-day libraries. Such archives, containing several thousands of cuneiform tablets, were discovered at Mari and Ebla. Ancient cities had schools where bureaucrats practised reading and writing, in addition to engaging in religious affairs (see Leilan, Ashara/Terqa and Beydar).

The Renaissance of Syrian Cities

After the end of the Early Bronze Age, some drastic political changes occurred. Most of the existing Syrian states collapsed around 2,000 BC, yet some small towns managed to continue without interruption. However, from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, there seems to have been a renaissance of Syrian cities with technological innovation, adaptation to environmental conditions, and the appearance of new ethnic groups (see Sakka, Banat, Ashara/Terqa, Afis and Tuqan).

Written sources indicate that this period features the appearance of the Amorites, with their own kings and language, and who controlled Syria and most of Mesopotamia. Their influence extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Gulf. The Amorite people originated from the Syrian Desert (*Badia*), later moving to the Euphrates region and later into Mesopotamia. It seems that this drastic change in the region was due to the appearance and development of the Amorite people. The abandoned settlements revived as large centres, such as Mari, Ebla and Chagar Bazar. The period might also represent the return of the local populations themselves, who rebuilt their towns based on the former administrative models and adjusted to become even more successful (see Sakka, Ali al-Hajj, Chagar Bazar, Taban, Masaikh and Mishrifeh/Qatna).

Conflicts and wars between the states must have been frequent – there is recurrent evidence of fortifications with outer and internal supporting walls, glacis, ramparts, and strong city gates. Several types of new weapons were also found from tombs at these sites (see Bazi, Munbaqa, Qala'at Halwanji, Tuqan, Mishrifeh/Qatna).

The Era of International Relations

Amorite domination ended in Syria around the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, according to the evidence of the destruction at Yamhad (Aleppo) and Ebla. External invasion, such as the Mitannian attack on northwest Syria, revealed the beginning of a new era in Syrian history (see Tell Ahmar/Til Barsib). In Syria the period between 1600 and 1200 BC can well be considered the age of 'international' empires, as Syria became a pawn in the confrontations between great empires – the Mitanni, Egyptian, Hittite and Assyrian (see Sianu and Toueini).

Egypt dominated south Syria and the Mediterranean coast, while the Mitanni spread into northern Syria, where their capital, Washshukanni, was located (see Fekheriye). Later, after the victory of the Hittites over the Mitanni, Hittite power began to control northwest Syria. After the battle of Kadesh (Nabi Mend), the Hittites and Egyptians controlled northwest and southern Syria respectively (see Nabi Mend). Northeast Syria continued under Mitannian control, however soon afterwards the Assyrians attacked the Mitanni from the east and destroyed their capital. As a result, northeast Syria (Khabur area) fell under Assyrian control (see Fekheriye).

Towards the end of the 2nd millennium BC, which coincides with the end of the Late Bronze Age, local Syrian and foreign hybrid cultures emerged. For example in northwest Syria there was a strong influence from the Hittite culture, manifested through the many seals and cuneiform texts found at several sites (e.g. Emar and Ugarit). Mitanni-Hittite impact can be observed at Munbaqa and Ugarit, and Assyrian influence in the Khabur area (see Munbaqa, el-Abd, Ugarit, Taban and Mozan).

At the end of the 2nd millennium BC, major Syrian cities, such as Emar, Ugarit, Hammam al-Turkaman and

Tell Brak, were either abandoned or destroyed. It has been suggested that the Syrian principal cities, especially along the coast, had been invaded and destroyed by the so-called 'sea people' who had arrived from the Mediterranean Sea. We may also suppose other causes for the collapse of these cities, such as increasing internal pressures in local societies (see Ugarit, Meskene, Iris and Amrith).

Syria as a Dependent State

Aramaean influence appeared and spread into central and north Syria before the end of the 2nd millennium and many Aramaic kingdoms were established. This formation process was very similar to that of the Amorites in the early 2nd millennium BC. Each Aramean tribal group was called by the family name, 'Bit' (house), following a coastal Phoenician writing system. The most important Aramaic kingdoms were established at Halaf (Kingdom of Guzana – the Kingdom of Bit-Bahiani), Ahmar (the Kingdom of Bit-Adini), Damascus (the Kingdom of Aram Damascus) and North of Aleppo (the Kingdom of Bit-Agushi). The upper classes of these states lived in elaborate structures based on a new plan, and their settlements were decorated with artistic features – basalt sphinxes and lion statues at the gates of the temples and palaces. The most notable temples are the Ain-Dara temple and the 'Storm God' temples at Aleppo and Tell Halaf (see Halaf).

Conflicts occurred frequently among these kingdoms and with the new Assyrian Empire. Eventually the new Assyrian Empire attacked all the Aramean areas except those on the Mediterranean coast - which was later to become Phoenicia. In the Phoenician regions the people of Sukas, Kazal and Ras Ibn Haani were engaged in trade and maritime activities. Among the most important trading commodities were metals of various kinds, especially bronze objects that were traded into inland Syria. Local artisans were also engaged in craft manufacture, in particular of skilfully-made ivory ornaments (see Kazal, Mastuma, Afis, Qabr Abu al-ᶜAtiq and Sianu).

The Iron Age was marked by developments in certain characteristics that can be clearly identified. Economic and political development placed Syria within a broader network of international relations than ever before. At the beginning of the Iron Age the changing economy depended on the dynamics of the temple complex and relied on the regional 'state' having its own cultural and ethnic links. New forms and styles of art and architecture evolved in this era. Syria fell under the control of the great regional empires: New Assyria, New Babylonia and Achaemenid Persia (see Sheikh Hamad, Ajaja, Arslan Tash and Ahmar).

Writing also took another leap forward, represented by the Phoenician alphabet, and branching in due course into the Aramaic and Greek alphabets. The writing system was no longer dominated by specific elites, or official institutions, linked to the palace or temple (see Ugarit).

An important ideological development occurred in terms of burial customs, whereby the deceased were cremated and their charred bones then transferred into a ceramic vessel. This new custom was observed in several cemeteries. The use of gravestones also started in this era. Along the Syrian coast different types of graves appeared for the elites, including the use of decorated sarcophagi (see Tell Afis).

After the new Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire of the Achaemenian dynasty (550–330 BC) took control of Syria. The region was now designated Abre Nahr, dominated by local kings, and although the land was well exploited agriculturally, its commercial role was still important (see Tell Tuqan).

Syria in the Classical World

Syria was led into Classical times by Alexander the Great in 333 BC. After his death, Syria became part of the Seleucid State, named after the founder of the dynasty, Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander's generals. The first capital was Seleucia on the River Tigris, which was transferred subsequently to Antioch in Syria. Three further new cities were founded at Laodicea (Latakia), Apamea and Sleuceia Pieria, and these centres formed the Syrian 'tetrapolis' as the main cities of the Seleucid State. These cities were constructed according to a grid plan: one of the most important features of this era. This plan consisted of a main thoroughfare with intersecting streets at right angles, with a standardized location for public buildings: temples, palace, theatre, markets, and strong external walls with towers and gates.

Hellenistic culture dominated during this period in Syria, reflecting the combination and interaction of the wider Greek influence with the regional and ancient Near Eastern civilizations of Syria. These interactions are visible at archaeological sites from this era, especially in features involving the arts (sculpture and mosaics), temples, monumental public buildings, theatres, ceramic industries, etc. Settlers established their own schools to instruct their children in Greek culture (see Jabel Khalid).

The Roman commander Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus overthrew Greek governance in Syria in 64 BC, making the country the centre of the eastern Roman Empire, later called Syria Palaestina. The Romans restored the building and urban planning of the Hellenistic period, based on the same model. The most important Roman cities in Syria were Bosra, Cyrrhus, Antioch, Dura Europos, Resafa, Apamea and Palmyra (see Cyrrhus and Palmyra). The trade roads in this period were paved,

with Syria having 22 Roman roads connecting the cities and neighbouring lands. Roman roads intersected in the centre of large cities, such as Palmyra and Apamea (see Cyrrhus). The ancient Syrian cities in this period can be distinguished by their orthogonal (Hellenistic) city plans, with a preferred axis and city walls. The public buildings (temples, theatres, baths and monumental gates) were modified and enlarged in the Roman period (see Resafa, Musaytbeh and as-Sin).

Luxury items were gradually introduced into private dwellings and palaces in the cities of Antioch, Cyrrhus/ Nabi Hori, and others. The house sizes often exceeded 1,000m^2, with courtyards, corridors and reception rooms with tiled mosaics. Beautiful paintings decorated the houses found at Apamea, Bossra, and even small towns, e.g. Shahba. The most elaborate paintings represented the mythological world, depicting characters such as Orpheus, Aphrodite, Hercules, etc. (see Resafa, Qinnasrin, el-Kasra and Cyrrhus).

Syria continued to prosper in the following Byzantine period, with an increased population and the wide distribution of settlements in most areas. Many Byzantine settlements (with churches, monasteries, cemeteries, tombs, high-status dwellings, olive presses, etc.) established in northwest Syria (and now known as the Dead/Forgotten Cities), reflect the increased prosperity in this region. It is believed that this prosperity was mainly due to olive cultivation on the limestone massifs. The 'Dead Cities' exported large quantities of oil to the markets of the Roman-Byzantine world. Over 700 Romano-Byzantine sites were discovered in the mountains in this area (see Sergilla, Shyzar and Qinnasrin) .

Most of the settlements in the Classical period in Syria were established in the Hellenistic period and flourished until the end of Byzantine times. Among them all the city of Apamea was paramount – in the Hellenistic era this city had its own mint, and its religious significance was emphasised particularly by a temple to Zeus-Beols there. The city boasted a main street axis some 1850m long and 37.5m wide. Other features included a large market, a public bath, and a large residence for the governor (see Cyrrhus, Sura, Zenobia Halabiya).

Another major city of the time was Palmyra, because of its significant military, political, economic and cultural influence. In a famous action, Queen Zenobia of Palmyra announced secession from Rome and established a kingdom with Palmyra as its capital. Her territory extended beyond modern Syria and Palmyra continued to prosper during her reign: the abundance of archaeological remains indicates its particularly rich culture (see Palmyra). However, as is well known, her reign did not last and Palmyra and its lands were eventually re-taken by Rome.

Syria in the Islamic World

In the later 7th century, Arab Muslims arrived in the Levant and conquered most of the Syrian cities under Roman occupation. The majority of them continued under their new overlords, while some declined and some new towns emerged (see Qinnasrin).

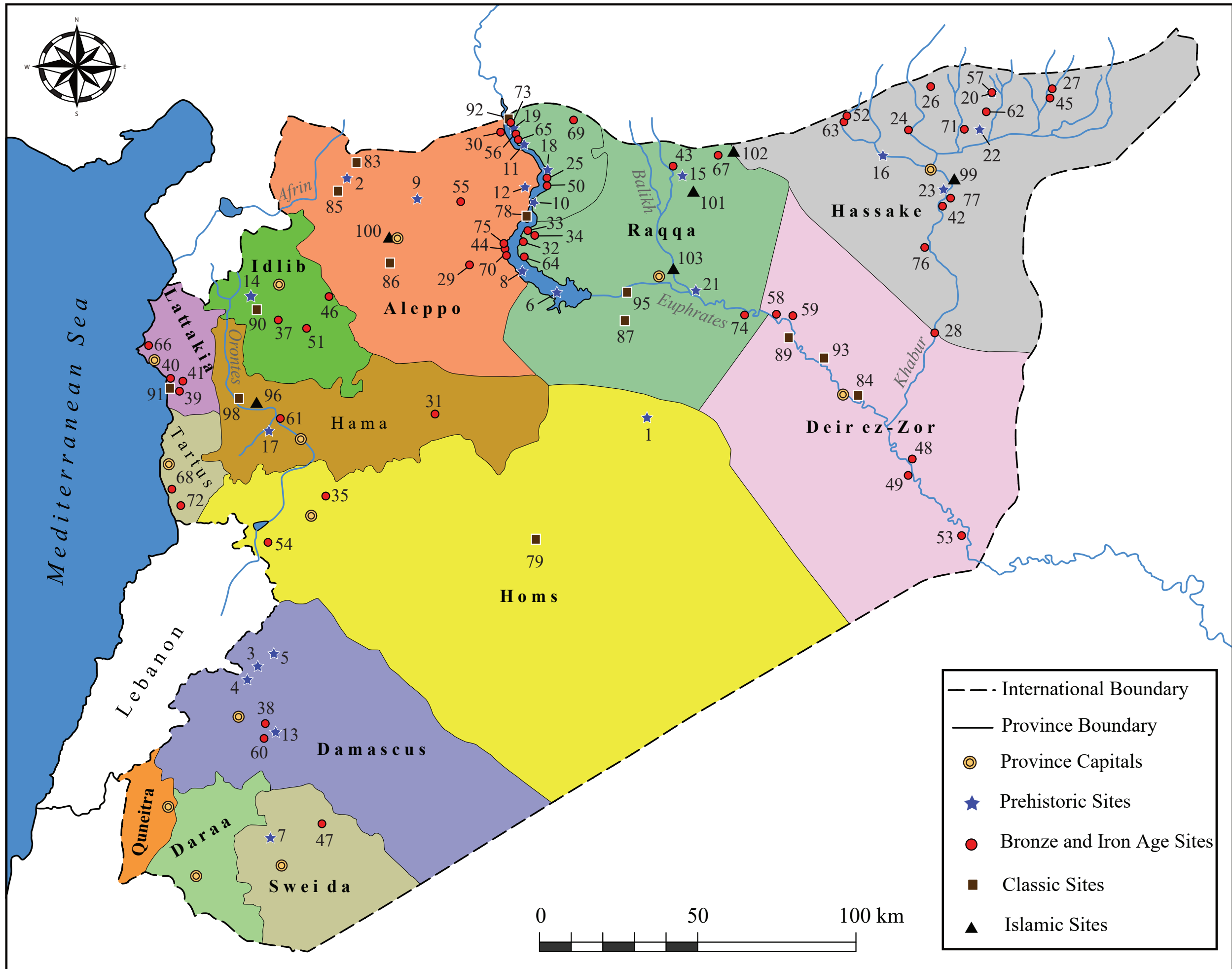
Although documentary evidence clearly shows the intellectual and cultural aspects of the Islamic period, archaeological excavations confirm the information provided by historical sources (and much previously unknown information has been revealed by such enterprises, e.g. Tell Damir).

The Omayyad Dynasty was assiduous in developing architecture, such as mosque complexes, shrines, palaces, houses, baths, etc. Subsequent Muslim dynasties eagerly constructed fortifications and castles as a result of persistent conflict, especially during the Crusader/ Ayyub period. Most well-preserved Syrian castles may date back to that period, such as those at Aleppo and Shayzar (see Aleppo Castle, Citadel of Shayzar and Qalat al-Mudiq). A number of palaces, for instance those at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi and Resafa, were constructed over the period, as well as large mosques in the centre of each city, as represented by the Umayyad mosques in Damascus and Aleppo (see Madinat el-Far and Kharab Sayyar).

Islamic art and ideology flourished. Calligraphy and abstract decorations on the facades of mosques and other buildings are the most notable representations of this, especially in Aleppo and Damascus. Most Islamic art is abstract, represented by geometric shapes, floral motifs, arabesques and calligraphy, and rarely represent the human form (see Aleppo Castle).

Muslim control also saw the development the ceramic industry in various aspects of pottery making, such as clays and pastes, surface finishes, painting, etc. New techniques were developed, such as metal oxide coating. A number of pottery workshops have been excavated, including the important kilns producing Raqqa and Mamluki pottery (see Tuneinir).

After the Mamluk period, Syria became a part of the Ottoman Empire for over 400 years until the end of World War I. The modern history of Syria must be told by historians rather than archaeologists. However, archaeology can often provide new insights for the reconstruction of modern Syrian history, thus contributing to a more integrated discourse.



1- el-Kowm oasis
2- Dederiyeh Cave
3- Wadi Mushkuna
4- Baaz Rockshelter
5- Kaus Kozah Cave
6- Abu Hureyra
7- Tell Qarassa
8- Mureybet
9- Qaramel
10- Jerf el-Ahmar
11- Dja`de el-Mughara
12- Hallula
13- Aswad
14- el-Kerkh
15- Sabi Abyad
16- Seker al-Aheimer
17- Shir
18- Kosak Shamali
19- al-`Abr
20- Chagar Bazar
21- Zeidan
22- Feres
23- Ziyadeh
24- Beydar
25- Banat
26- Mozan
27- Leilan
28- Sheikh Hamad
29- Umm el-Marra
30- Jerablus Tahtani
31- Al-Rawda
32- Munbaqa
33- el-Abd
34- Ali al-Hajj
35, 36 Mishrifeh (Qatna)
37- Mastuma
38- Sakka
39- Iris
40- Toueini
41- Sianu
42- Taban
43- Hammam al-Turkman
44- Selenkahiye
45- Mohammed Diyab
46- Tuqan
47- Khirbet Al-Umbashi
48- Masaikh
49- Ashara (Terqa)
50- Bazi
51- Afis
52- Fekheriye
53- Mari
54- Nebi Mend
55- Qala`at Halwanji
56- Ahmar
57- Chagar Bazar
58- Humeida
59- Qabr Abu al-`Atiq
60- Tulul el-far
61- Massin & Nasriyah
62- Arbid
63- Halaf
64- Halawa
65- Shiyukh Tahtani
66- Ugarit
67- Chuera
68- Amrith
69- Arslan Tash
70- Meskene
71- Bari
72- Kazel
73- Qumluq
74- Abu Hamad
75- Wreide
76- Ajaja
77- Bderi
78- Jebel Khalid
79, 80, 81, 82 Palmyra
83- Cyrrhus
84- As-Sin
85- Gindaros
86- el-Iss
87, 88 Resafa
89- Zenobia - Halabiya
90- Sergilla
91- Musaytbeh
92- Dier Qinnsrin
93- Kasra
94- -
95- Sura
96, 97 Shayzar
98- Qalaat Al Mudiq
99- Tuneinir
100- Aleppo Castle
101- Madinat el-Far
102- Kharab Sayyar
103- Damir

Map shows the location of the sites mentioned in the text.