

SYRIA: A MILLION-YEAR CULTURE

By Dr. Ali al-Qayyem

Translated by: M. Allam Khoudr

SYRIA: A MILLION-YEAR CULTURE

- ❖ **Preface**
- ❖ **Syria: A Million-Year Culture**
- ❖ **Syrian Antiquities**
- ❖ **Antiquities & Museums**
- ❖ **Cultural Centers**
- ❖ **Cultural Directorates**
- ❖ **Theater**
- ❖ **Plastic Arts**
- ❖ **Culture Palace – Mahaba Festival**
- ❖ **Cinema**

Syria, its Civilizational and Cultural Achievements

By Dr. Riadh Na'san Agha
Minister of Culture

Located between the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and the Arabian Peninsula, Syria has been since prehistoric times a natural and advanced civilizational, cultural, intellectual and artistic junction for these regions. Syria has, therefore, become a bridge and a meeting point for the most important of world thoughts, creativities and ingenuities, illuminating regions of the Ancient Orient with the glamour of its indigenous development and strongly and actively influencing the course of their civilizations.

Throughout history Syria has fully realized its civilizational, intellectual and cultural mission, which reflects the most outstanding development of its civilization and turns its heritage into a multifarious and multifaceted human heritage, marked by openness, tolerance, marriage of thoughts and exchange of knowledge, sciences and cultures.

Syria has long been a scene for development of inventions and human settlement along the banks of its big rivers, including the North Great River, the Orontes Basin, the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers as well as the Syrian steppe. Not only did the "Acheulean" culture emerge in Syria, but also agriculture, domestication of animals, prototype of roundhouses and villages were first born. It is here, in Syria, where civilization first evolved and people began trading agricultural products, developing pottery, shaping metals and producing bronze. Syria witnessed the beginnings of the earliest worship and religious beliefs which sanctified the ancestor worship and granted women top status in society. Syria was the land of the earliest inception of greater cities in Mari (Tel Hariri), Ebla (Tel Merdisk), Ugarit (Ras Shamra), Maskana (Imar - Balis), Tel Leilan, Tel Ashara, Tel Brak in the 3rd and 2nd millenniums BC. It is also here where Aramaic kingdoms appeared and developed into a rich source for human civilization with their trade, intellectual and human activities over a thousand-odd years. The prominently well-established Aramaic kingdoms, including Damascus, Hama, Homs, Aleppo, Sham'al, Ein Dara, Beit Eddini, etc., became brilliant beacons of inspiration, science, knowledge and advanced economic and trade activity.

Syrian cities in the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic eras created a wide and fabulous variety of urbanization and economic, social, cultural, intellectual and religious activities. Syria's civilization has been an inexhaustible and never-ending source of refined knowledge for human civilization and human

achievements over the centuries, reflecting the nation's tremendous contributions to humanity throughout history in the diverse areas of sciences, literature, philosophy, trade and industry. We, in Syria, have been always engaged in a permanent dialogue with history, civilization and human action. Our land abounds in precious antiquities and evidence of the civilizational prosperity witnessed over the centuries, making the country's unique archeological sites a mecca for tourists, visitors, scholars, historians and enthusiasts of art, civilization and cultural tourism.

Syria has offered much to the Arab Islamic culture being the cornerstone in building up the edifice of human civilization with all its implications and diverse aspects. Since time began, the Syrian culture has generously bestowed on us a wealth of splendid boons and we are blessed to relish its fruits and enjoy the magnificence of its arts. Man in Syria had long sailed aboard the dream boat in an endeavor to work out his own inventions, marvelous literature, culture, sciences and arts, where Syria became a land governed by dialogue and tolerance as well as cultural, intellectual and commercial amalgamation represented in a unique civilization and opulent treasure of archeological and historical monuments still standing today as a living example to recount the story of civilization, history, art and mankind since time began.

The age-old journey of generosity and development is carried further today to cover the various cultural domains, including theaters, cultural and music centers, books, antiquities, museums, cinema industry, protection of material and nonmaterial heritage, festivals, symposiums, conferences, cultural weeks and tributes to scientists, men of letters, think-tanks, intellectuals and artists. The progress achieved today evidently comes in line with Syria's historically deep-rooted civilizational message.

Readers of this comprehensive and educational reference book will find it a rich cultural material carefully and deftly penned by Deputy Minister of Culture, Mr. Ali al-Qayyem, an intellectual, scholar and archeologist. This valuable work covers the cultural, civilizational, intellectual and artistic life in Syria over the past million years up to the present day. Dedicating himself to investigate and research the country's history and civilization, which flourishingly burgeoned on our treasured land, the author's creative works abound with love, devotion and enthusiasm to introduce a wonderful review of the cultural origins and generous contributions, which have altogether formed a flurry of cultural activity based on the perception of building up the country and its people intellectually, culturally, socially and economically.

In this informative book, the author has concisely recorded the human, civilizational and cultural experience in Syria, depicting all its aspects and sublime objectives. Historically correlated, this experience remains consistently active under the guidance of His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad who is fully

aware that the progress we have achieved in the course of civilization, science and culture, will certainly help us reach our end goal.

Our culture and heritage are like a vast sea that we can hardly behold its shoreline, and this reference book explores the depths of this sea and introduces us to its hidden treasures in a simplified, modern and attractive method.

**Syrian Arab Republic
Ministry of Culture**

SYRIA: A MILLION-YEAR CULTURE

- **Syria: A Million-Year Culture**
- **Early Urban Civilization in Northern Syria**
- **Damascus: The Oldest Continuously Inhabited City throughout History**

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

By Dr. Ali al-Qayyem

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

Syria is the world's richest resource of archeological sites and historical monuments of time immemorial. With a million-year-old civilization deep-rooted in its history, Syria's land is an opulent treasure of antiquities extending from pre-history to Arab Islamic eras.

Archeological sites and historical monuments recorded in Syria count as many as 42.000. This figure, which is continuously growing, throws more light on Syria's invaluable treasure of culture and architecture. Excavations in Syria over the past few years have attracted world's attention in view of the great historical significance attached to the rare findings unearthed in the country, prompting many scholars and historians to reconsider their writings and re-evaluate their knowledge and learning about this country. Syria is now viewed as the cradle of civilization and the maker of early cultures, arts and everlasting human civilization. Syria, in the eye of the world, is the land where science and knowledge first developed, just like Mesopotamia and the Nile.

A Million-Year Civilization

Archeological excavations in several sites showed that they date back to prehistory where ancient man in Syria had left behind remains of his tools and works of art. The sites holding the historical hidden treasures are distributed across the country particularly in the major river basins and the steppe, demonstrating complete civilization models uninterruptedly covering the stone ages. This continuity enables us to trace back the different circles of the early origin of pre-historic man. The antiquities were discovered in sites like Sit Mirkhu, Rudhu, Abrash River, Shir, Bikassa, Tel al-Kom, Tel Ahmar, Ugarit, Sukass, Tel Mrebit, Tel Biqris, Jarf al-Ajala, Yabroud, Tel Halaf, Tel Brak, Hama, al-Latamina, Efrin, and many other sites.

Archeological and anthropological research and study conducted for the abovementioned sites and elsewhere have provided the required evidence for tracing early civilizations with precise details uncommon in other parts of the world. These discoveries have made it imperative to make Syria the starting point to uncover mysteries of prehistoric times. Excavations in the basin of the Great Northern River (the far riverbed) near the village of “Sit Merkho” in Lattakia have given the evidence that man’s settlement in this area dates back to one million years. A million-year-old complete archeological composition was found in the site, in addition to flint tools representing all prehistoric ages. A corresponding site (al-Khattab site) is also available at central Orontes Basin. These two sites with their opulent antiquities contain the most ancient finds of prehistoric man in the world outside Africa.

Syria: a Million-Year Culture

Excavations at the Latamna site near the city of Hama uncovered one of the earliest camps of hunters in the ancient world dating back to half a million years. It is one of four similar sites well-preserved from the world’s most ancient resources of Neolithic productions by the caveman in the Middle East. Findings at this site testify to rich human civilization that flourished there 20.000 years ago.

Extraordinary Sites

The site of Houdat Kom in the Syrian steppe (midway between Palmyra and the Euphrates) is a unique model of Syria’s prehistoric sites where archeological “Tels” (hills) extend over an area of 12 km rich in natural water springs – some of them dried up and others still flowing around which

half-million-year old human settlements have been discovered. Hundreds of thousands of the world's rarest Stone Age tools along with skeletons have been also discovered at this site.

It may be noted in this context that a geomorphologic team has discovered significant remains of prehistoric man from the 4th geological period (Quaternary Period) dating back to 600.000 and 10.000 years BC. Evidence of "Kabbariya" civilization which prevailed from the Euphrates to Palestine dating back to 10.000 BC was also discovered in the same area, adding clear-cut proof to the cultural unity of Bilad al-Sham from the Euphrates to Palestine.

Syria: a Million-Year Culture

The 20th Century Groundbreaking Discovery

Back to the dawn of history, excavations recount the story of people living in Syria in the 5th and 4th millenniums BC and how they established permanent settlements, the remains of which were found at a number of sites, including Tel Brak, Habbouba Kabira, Tel Qannas, Jebel Arwa, and other sites as well.

We have also explored the remains of royal dynasties represented in the 3rd and 2nd millenniums BC – antiquities found in certain sites which have drawn the attention of international circles of culture and science over the past few years. A special emphasis may be laid on the antiquities excavated at Ebla (Tel Merdikh) site, which was viewed as the archeological event and the groundbreaking discovery of the 20th century for its amazing findings, including an estimated number of 16000 cuneiform tablets inscribed in Arabic alphabet dating back to 2400-2250 BC. Interpretation of these tablets recount that Ebla was the capital of a great empire that held a major trade hub of a vast area extending from northern Syria to Palestine on the one hand, and from the Mediterranean to Mesopotamia on the other. In fact Ebla had played a vital and efficient political role over the centuries.

Civilizational Heritage

Speaking of Syria's antiquities and civilization, it is equally important to bring to the fore the excavations at Mari (Tel Hariri) and Maskana (Imar) sites, which throw light on Syria's middle age where its cultural heritage is

best illustrated in the ancient arts, especially the inscriptions excavated at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) on the Syrian coast, as well as Tel Dinit and Ein Dara. Other sites of equal archeological importance also include Tel al-Milabiya, Tel Kashkashouk, Tiniz, Tel Mashnaqa, Tel Eitbeh, Tel Bdeiri and other sites. Excavations at the said sites uncovered the following:

- 1) Remains of the oldest human settlements at Khabur Basin, Tel Halaf and Tel al-Abid, date back to the 5th century BC.
- 2) Settlements which served as key trade centers for exchanging agricultural and industrial products.
- 3) The Khabur Basin during the Akkadian period (3000 BC) was a prosperous and developed region, artistically and culturally speaking.
- 4) In the 2nd millennium BC, civilization of the region showed diversity and development in various aspects.
- 5) Remains from the 1st millennium BC are profusely available in the Khabur River area.
- 6) During Islamic Arab eras, the area enjoyed noteworthy economic and strategic importance.

Syria: a Million-Year Culture

Fort Suleiman

Another noteworthy monument of Syria's antiquities lies in Tartous: the Fort Suleiman, a large temple that was dedicated to worship the Canaanite god Baal. Remains left from this temple date back to the late 2nd or 3rd centuries BC. It is one of the best preserved Syrian temples comprising the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbeck and the Temple of Bel in Palmyra. It may be noted in this context that other important excavations were also carried out at various sites, including Sab'e, Shahba, Bosra al-Sham, Qanawat, Palmyra, Terqa, Tel Mozan, Sheikh Hamad, Tel Lilan, Totool, as well as the Abbasid monuments seen today in Raqqa, monuments and cemeteries of Palmyra, and Apamea. Other buildings of historical significance in Syria, including Madrasas (religious schools), citadels, castles, fortresses, caravansaries,

bimaristans (hospitals), mosques, churches, palaces and obsolete ancient cities, have all witnessed remarkable restoration works to preserve these distinguished architectural, religious and historical landmarks.

Museums ... Museums

Expansion of excavations and growing archeological activities in Syria over the past few years necessitated the creation of more museums to house the huge number of digs and finds unearthed at tens of sites across the country. Over 40 museums are today available in Syria, where some of them have been designed in new architectural style and modern technologies, while other museums have been set up on ancient archeological sites famed for their historical and art features in an effort to breathe new life into these beautiful monuments and invest them as tourist attraction sites and other museum purposes. Such museums include Azem Palace (changed into the Museum of Art and Popular Traditions), Madrasa Jaqmaqiya (Museum of Arabic Calligraphy), Bimaristan al-Nuri (Museum of Science and Medicine, Damascus), the Mandate House (Lattakia Museum), Murad Pasha Khan (Ma'arat al-Nu'man Museum), Arwad Citadel, al-Shuta Khan, House of Khaled Azem (Historical Museum of Damascus), and other museums.

Finally, the information mentioned above may only be seen as brief hints and headlines of a great civilization and a remarkable cultural and historical heritage of Syria. Syria is a country rich in hidden treasures, antiquities and outstanding excavations which testify to several civilizations that settled on its land and offered splendid scientific and cultural achievements that influenced world knowledge over the centuries.

Early Urban Civilization in Syria's Jazira

The Ministry of Culture as well as national and foreign architectural missions have been making extraordinary archeological activities in Syria's northeastern region of Jazira over the past few years. More than 30 missions headed by prominent scholars from different parts of the world have conducted excavations and archeological survey campaigns. This intensive effort has uncovered several names of amazing sites and cities hidden in archeological "Tels" (hills).

The special attention attached to Syria's northeastern region of Jazira may be ascribed to the fact that it was the part most habitable in Bilad al-Sham throughout history in view of its abundant water resources all year round: rainfalls, rivers, springs, elevated groundwater level, plain topography and rich brown soil suitable for both irrigated and un-irrigated cultivation – rarely found in West Asia. The Jazira region also had natural routes (Khabur, Balikh and Jaghjagh rivers), in addition to large areas of tributaries and valleys which came across – in ancient times – trade and strategic routes linking Syria with both Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean.

Studies conducted by archeologists show that Syria's Jazira in the 3rd millennium BC witnessed large-scale un-irrigated cultivation, which in turn led to economic, agricultural and trade growth in centers of production, creating cultural, religious and political infrastructure. As a result, "urban civilization" or "civilized development" which - in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC - yielded magnificent "cities" similar to those known across Mesopotamia (Ur, Uruk, Larsen, etc.), or in Syria where such "cities" spread over tens of massive architectural "Tels" (hills), including Tel Lilan, Tel Brak, Tel al-Khwiera, Tel Berri, Shagher Bazar, Tel Ashara, Tel Sheikh Hamad

Numerous ancient Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform tablets contain lots of information related to city locations and human settlement centers across Syria's northeastern region of Jazira. Cuneiform texts unearthed at Mari (Tel Hariri) in the middle Euphrates region include letters sent by Iakim-Adad ruler of Sajaratomb City to King Zimri-Lim of Mari. Names of cities and villages spreading between the Euphrates and upper Khabur River were also mentioned in the tablets. Over the past few years, several archeological missions have carried out comprehensive archeological survey operations for the "Tels" (hills) located in this region. Archeological, architectural and topographical documentation of relevance was part of the research and results yielded by these operations published in specialized scientific journals.

Tel Leilan (Shubat-Enlil)

Tel Leilan is one of the most important sites in Syria's northeastern region of Jazira. Located 25 km southeast of Qamishli, Tel Leilan rises 15m above the level of neighboring Khabur plateau. The site consists of both a 90-hectare

low land surrounded by a wall and a 15-hectare highland "acropolis", which formed the city center along with its temples, stepped-tower and public buildings. Since 1978 an expedition from the US Yale University headed by professor Harvey Weiss has been excavating the site. The team has so far uncovered some 100.000 pottery relics which represented the different periods of the site's history. The Yale University team also found that the oldest plain area at Tel Leilan dates back to the 5th millennium BC. It was also made clear that this site gained special importance in the 3rd and 2nd millenniums BC, while from 2500 to 2400 BC Tel Leilan was the largest trade center in the Khabur Basin. Excavations at the "acropolis" uncovered a big temple built in adobe on the ruins of an older temple with a wonderful north façade decorated with niches and voluted semi-columns lying in between.

Harvey Weiss sees that the 2nd-millennium-BC city at Tel Leilan is the city of "Shubat-Enlil" – meaning residence of the god "Enlil". In ancient times the city was known as "Shekhna", which was taken over by King Shamshi-Adad who ascended the throne and made this fortified city the capital of his kingdom.

Tel Sheikh Hamad (Dur-Katlimmu)

While an archeological university team from Germany were excavating at the site of Tel Sheikh Hamad along the Khabur River, they uncovered pieces of dried mud. A thorough study and examination of these pieces revealed that they were cuneiform tablets of extreme importance, and when deciphered they showed that they were official documents inscribed in the 13th century BC during the reign of King Shalmansur I and King Tukulti-Ninurta I. It was later discovered that the hidden city under the ground of Tel Sheikh Hamad is the city of Dur-Katlimmu. This was the third "Tel" (hill) in the Khabur Basin after Tel Ajaji "Shadykanu" and Tel Berri (Kaht or Kahat).

Early Urban Civilization in Syria's Jazira

The archeological team excavating at Tel Sheikh Hamad discovered the features of a large city enclosed with a high wall and gates. Ruins of an official palace were also discovered at the same site along with 900

cuneiform tablets lying in one of the chambers of the palace. They were the earliest tablets unearthed in the Khabur Basin forming the first local source of our information about the Khabur valley civilization in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC.

Tel Ajaji (Shadykani)

In the late 19th century, well-known British scholar Lapard dug up several sites at Tel Ajaji, south of Hasaka and found relics of a royal palace dating back to the Assyrian period. Lapard also made notes saying the city of Shadykani was hidden inside Tel Ajaji, which was verified by successive excavations carried out in the late 20th century. A local archeological team discovered two limestone engravings within the palace portraying winged bull and lion. It may be noted that such structures were used as decoration for royal palace gates in ancient times.

Tel Berri (Kaht – Kahat)

Located near River Jaghjagh, one of Khabur River's tributaries, Tel Berri held a stone engraving – discovered by local inhabitants in the 1950s – with a cuneiform inscription making reference to the city of Kaht or Kahat. However, an Italian archeological team has been conducting methodological excavations at this important site over the past few years. Results reached by the archeologists show features of a city that flourished in the 3rd and 2nd millenniums BC.

Archeological survey operations confirmed the presence of over a hundred “Tel” (hill) sites along the banks of Khabur River, indicative of plethora of antiquities rarely found in other parts of the world.

Tel Bideiri

Excavations at Tel Bideiri uncovered a large area of remains of an ancient city dating back to the Bronze Age, leading to conclusions about functions of the city at that period, style of living and social structure as well as natural environs hosting the city and type of dwellings. Remnants of food and animal bones were examined and analyzed. Excavations showed that the oldest substantial evidence of human settlement in this location dates back to the 5th millennium BC. Long-term human settlement during the bronze Age was also traced at the south slope of the hill where 25 layers of antiquities

rest at this site, starting from the earliest Bronze Age (Chalcolithic Age) (first half of the 3rd millennium BC) until the end of the Neo-Bronze Age (second half of the 2nd millennium BC). The biggest architectural dig of this age was a 2.20m-thick adobe-built wall preceded by a subordinate sloping wall constructed of pressed mud and a gate reinforced with flat stone slabs in the larger wall.

Tel Ashara (Terqa)

Tel Ashara is a few kilometers distant from the south of the mouth of Khabur River at the Euphrates. This “Tel” hides inside its mounds of earth the remains of Terqa Kingdom, which was equal in area to Babylon throughout its history. The early emergence of this kingdom dates back to 3200-3000 BC while older remains have not been excavated as of yet. But relics were found of a city (that emerged almost in the same date) enclosed by a huge fortified wall unparalleled in magnitude in any other site in the same period whether in Syria or Mesopotamia. Although the 2 km-circumference wall is not extraordinary if compared with larger ones in later periods, yet it is quite impressive in terms of size and dimension in the 3rd millennium BC. The most remarkable quality of the wall of Terqa may be its 20m-thickness which was uncommon in city walls in this period and only appeared a few centuries later. Another distinction of Terqa wall is that it was built in adobe while other walls built at later stages used pressed mud. Results read by radiocarbon C-14 analysis gave the wall an age ranging between 3000-2700 BC and 1600 BC.

Excavations at Terqa site uncovered remains of Ninkara Temple, which was dedicated to worship goddess Ninkara. The House of Buzurm was also discovered near the temple. This house was ravaged by fire in ancient times. Ashes and ruins of the damaged ceiling and walls of the house remained in situ, while furniture and other household items have not changed appearance since 3700 years until today. Around 100 cuneiform clay tablets were found in one of the rooms of this house. The importance attached to three tablets lies in their detailed content about legal relations among the people in the 2nd millennium BC. Seventy-six potteries, probably used for preserving household supplies were also discovered in another room of the house. It may be interesting to point out that one of the uncovered jars contained remnants of clove seeds which do not grow in Syria. It is, therefore, believed that the seeds were imported from their original land of cultivation in India.

Early Urban Civilization in Syria's Jazira

Tel Mozan (Aurkish)

Excavations revealed that inside Tel Mozan there lies the ancient city of Aurkish – capital of the Horites – that was lost since the 3rd millennium BC. This discovery was supported by several cuneiform-inscribed tablets and cylindrical stamps and sealings which were uncovered in the relics of the royal palace belonging to Horite King Topkis and his Akkadian-origin wife Aknitom 2300-2200 BC. This lost capital has finally become a reality confirmed in a detailed study on 700 stamp prints, including 170 inscribed in cuneiform alphabet. The stamps had been used to mark jars, baskets and pots stored inside the storerooms of the palace in Aurkish city to safeguard their contents. The majority of these stamps held the Queen's name or any of her court officials, indicative of the special status accorded to the stamps on the one hand, and the opulent wealth enjoyed by the kingdom on the other.

Digs so far discovered at Aurkish provide the evidence that wonderful products, advanced architectural civilization and remarkable development in trade and political relations were all available at this city in the 3rd millennium BC. Further evidence showed that Aurkish was the sacred home for Horite legends where master god Kumbari who judged matters of the ancient world in justice had resided in this city.

Damascus: The Oldest Continuously Inhabited City throughout History

Damascus is the world's oldest continuously inhabited city throughout history. Several writings and descriptions by Arab historians, including Yaquobi, Maqdisi, Ibn Jubair, al-Blatheri, Ibn Battuta and others linked Damascus to the beginning of creation and even dated the city back to Adam, maintaining that he had taken a Damascus suburb called Beit Abyat as his residence, and that Eve lived in another village still standing today called Biet Lahya or Beit al-Aliha (the house of god). It is also said that Abel stayed in Maqra, while Cain lived in Tiniyah. The majority of such historians believe that Damascus was the homeland and birthplace of Prophet Abraham and that his father, Azar, used to sculpture statues there as well.

It is also said that Damascus derived its name from (Damasheq), one of Noah's grandsons and that Jairun, another grandson of Noah, had built Damascus itself. It is further believed that Prophet Hood stayed in this city and erected the wall of its temple – the first wall built in history. Many stories, accounts and descriptions were made about Damascus and its history. In spite of the importance attached to these stories and numerous evidences of Damascus's role and historical majesty since time immemorial up to the present day, they all remain within the boundaries of accounts and legends which do not provide the basic scientific facts required by historians.

Let's have a look at the excavations and archeological research recently made about several locations of Damascus city:

Revolution of Civilization

The period extending between the 8th and 6th millenniums BC may be of extreme importance to Bilad al-Sham in general and Damascus in particular. In this rich part of the world, a complete set of critical changes developed right here in this region. The salient points of these important changes may be listed as follows:

- 1) Departure from caves and establishment of villages built in open areas.
- 2) Stages of human settlement in such villages.
- 3) The village in itself as an architectural achievement and development of its outlines and indications.
- 4) Production of foodstuffs.
- 5) Technological development and new technologies.
- 6) Ideological development as manifested in art or burial ceremonies.

In the early 8th millennium BC in Bilad al-Sham, changes that began with the nomadic age had completed. Societies which settled in villages of early hunters created a new productive and economic system capable of providing them with a better source of living. These societies had moved from gathering cereals and hunting animals to production of agricultural crops and domestication of animals. The move into the organized productive economy formed a turning point in the life of these societies and laid the ground for emergence of later civilizations. The change was effective enough to make scholars describe it as the "Neolithic age revolution". Apart from the

circumstances that led to the birth of agriculture and domestication of animals whether they were cultural, social, environmental, geographical or demographical motives, or these factors altogether – birth of agriculture was the colossal civilization step realized by man, without which the civilization of today would have never been possible. It may be said that with the birth of agriculture, development of human life moved at amazingly accelerated pace, where dramatic changes laid the ground for emergence of states and civilizations. In order to realize the role played by Damascus in these changes and development of human settlement, reference should be made to geographical and environmental factors: throughout its history, Damascus has always enjoyed abundant water resources and fertile soil which both helped in realization of earliest human settlement on its land as evidenced by archeological excavations at several sites of Damascus, including Tel Aswad, Tel Ramad, Tel Khuzama, Tel Gharifa ...

Tel Aswad

It is located at the Ghuta oasis of Damascus in a swampy area between two lakes. Tel Aswad measures 270m by 225m and 5m above ground level. Several excavations have been carried out at this site and carbon-14 dating proved that human settlement at this site dates back to 7790-6690 BC, i.e. the first Neolithic age which had not witnessed clay making. In light of the architectural style and stone and flint tools unearthed at this site as compared with other sites, it was found out that remains discovered at Tel Aswad are composed of dense set of round tubes full of ashes and burnt plants. The tubes intersect with other tube and later tubes also intersect with older ones. Cylindrical pits with straight sides (possibly silos) were discovered amongst the tubes. Archeologists discovered among the relics a great number of adobe bricks made of mud mixed with straw and thatch. The bricks are flat at their bottom and curved at the top with human finger prints on the upper side. These adobe bricks were found as burnt relics under debris, or lined up together or even used as flooring in the form of a “platform”.

Damascus: The Oldest Continuously Inhabited City throughout History

These excavations showed that Tel Aswad was a village consisted of small-size and round-shaped cottages sticking to each other and half-filled in earth. Mud was used to make adobe bricks for the cottage flooring or for constructing low-level platforms. The upper section of the cottage seemed to be made of light and flammable vegetation components. Tracks of fire

suggest that the cottages caught fire repeatedly. It may be noted that surroundings of the site had driven the inhabitants to use light material available from plants growing in the swamps. The two lakes of Oteiba and Heijana were a rich source of fish for inhabitants of Tel Aswad.

Lots of mud-made idols (representing human and animal figures) were unearthed at Tel Aswad. The human idols represented female figurines with protruding breasts and hips. These discoveries formed the birth of the first artistic perception by man.

Concerning rituals practiced in Tel Aswad, discoveries suggested that man was buried upon death in a normal pit in an embryo posture, whether alone or with a child. In one of these pits a separate skull was found along with the skeleton of a body in an embryo posture with a full skeleton lying beneath, plus four separated skulls, including two belonging to children. Beads of mother-of-pearl, four sickle blades and two flint arrow heads were also discovered at these tombs. It is believed that the same tomb had been used several times as a burial place for the same family.

The archeological mission at Tel Aswad uncovered substantial evidence of development and expansion of human settlement during the period dated 7000-6500 BC. Cultivation of starch wheat at that time was expanded by cultivating new cereals, including single-grained spelt and solid wheat and barely. Pre-pottery Neolithic flint products grew further and tools diversified, while small-size tools made of cut and polished stones, like lime, agate, greenstone, etc. were made by the local inhabitants. Plenty of baked-mud figurines were also discovered, including new sets of flat and rectangle-shaped human figurines.

Tel Gharifa

It is close to Tel Aswad and Oteiba lake. Dwellings similar to those discovered at Tel Aswad were also unearthed here at the bottom layer of Tel Gharifa dating back to 6900-6300 BC, and also showing a life style similar to that of Tel Aswad (second layer). A cylindrical figurine with an incised pedestal portraying one of the house idols was uncovered at Tel Gharifa.

The upper layer of this "Tel" (dating back to 6300-6000 BC) showed a life style similar to that found at layer (1) of contemporary Tel Ramad, indicating that the role of agriculture in this area had declined in favor of

hunting due to drought during that period and ever since ended life at this site which later changed into a cemetery during the Roman-Byzantine presence in Syria.

Tel Khuzama

This archeological “Tel” is situated at the site on which the Damascus International Airport was built. Antiquities unearthed at this site date back to the second half of the 5th millennium BC. Among the relics discovered at Tel Khuzama (lavender) site were a number of multi-room dwellings of a rectangular shape constructed of adobe bricks as well as light-colored potteries covered in red paint and ornamented with notched lines similar in quantity to potteries discovered at several sites in Palestine and Jubeil.

Stone flint tools were uncommon and limited to rectangle-shaped blades used as sickles. However, there were a number of baked-mud statuettes (both human and animal figurines) in the form of small pawns.

Damascus: The Oldest Continuously Inhabited City throughout History

Tel Ramad

It is 20 km southeast of Damascus near the town of Qatana along the bank of a valley stretching between Qatana and Artouz. The site was discovered in the 1930s and was known as “Qatana site”. It was re-excavated in 1960 by Van Liere who gave it a new name “Tel Ramad” – a name derived from the composition of the soil of the site. A joint French-Syrian archeological mission carried out several excavation campaigns at this site from 1963 to 1973, uncovering three archeological layers. These are explained below starting from earliest to latest:

First layer (6250-6000 BC): It is the oldest of the three layers. Excavations revealed that inhabitants of the agrarian settlement depended for their living on cultivation of starch wheat, barely, lentils and flax - from which they extracted linseed oil. People also used as food fruits from uncultivated trees such as almonds, peanuts, azaroles and figs in addition to deer and gazelle hunting.

People at Tel Ramad used to live in very simple oval-shaped cottages half-dug in earth and constructed in adobe, while clay was used as flooring. Clay-made containers were used for storage inside the cottages, which were paved in the outer surrounding area with thin stones provided with lime-covered boards. Cottage-ware items included querns, grain grinding tools and big-size limestone-made vessels. Flint tools were discovered inside these vessels, including sickle blades, chisels and axes dating back to late Neolithic tools (pre-pottery). Various tools made of bone were also found in these cottages: punchers, awls, arrows and gins. Bone was also used to make necklaces with animal-head shapes. Also found at this layer were clay statuettes and idols imitating animal and human figures, suggesting a strong link with the worship of ancestors after death. During this period, people used to draw human figures on fleshless bones using lime-paste and red paint to highlight the skull and fill sockets of the eyes with white lime. It is believed that big mud-made statues of human figures were used as torsos for these skulls. Other items unearthed in the first layer of Tel Ramad included a bead or small globe of hammered copper suggesting the establishment of trade relations with the country exporting this metal from Minor Asia.

Second layer (6000-5500 BC): People in this period lived in single-room rectangle-shaped dwellings, using stone to build their foundations and adobe bricks to erect the walls. They prepared a mixture of baked lime and ashes to make crockery and had them hardened by drying them in the sun. The outer surface of the walls was ornamented with red-color stripes and ashes available in abundance in this layer. Tel Ramad (ashes) was therefore named after the ashes found in the soil of this layer.

Third layer (5500-5000 BC): It is distinct from the other two layers by ditches dug in between, indicating that houses became smaller in size. Some scholars believe that inhabitants of Tel Ramad in this period moved to lead a semi-nomad life depending on raising livestock such as goats, cows, sheep and pigs, although evidence showed availability of cultivation of cereals and vegetation in the same period. In this layer, however, dark-color glazed potteries were unearthed similar to the ones found in Syria's coastal cities (Ras Shamra and Jubeil).

These archeological remains are viewed as the oldest substantial antiquities found – so far – in Damascus testifying to the emergence of the earliest agricultural villages, and birth of interest in building plain rectangle-shaped dwellings and beginning of arts and developed religious faiths.

These antiquities, as a whole, indicate that Damascus region, in this period, like other regions in Bilad al-Sham, had witnessed a significant civilization turning point in human life, where man left caves for the plains and built dwellings in the open air. The residential pits made by man are seen as the developed shape of his earlier caves, while cottages represent the first stage for building dwellings and at a later stage rectangle or quadrangle-shaped houses which were furnished with storerooms and interior corridors.

In the New Stone Age, inhabitants of Damascus buried their dead inside their houses with the skull separated from torso, suggestive of their perceptions of fertility, life and death which developed in the course of time and remained longer in the faiths and beliefs of later nations of the ancient Arab world.

SYRIA: A MILLION-YEAR CULTURE

- **The Omayyad Mosque**
- **Damascus, its Khans, Houses & Hammams**
- **The Azem Palace**
- **The Khan of Asa'd Pasha**
- **Ebla**
- **Mari**
- **Ugarit**
- **Palmyra**
- **Lime Highland Cities**
- **Hama's Antiquities**

The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus

The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus is viewed as the most important of all architectural and religious buildings ever constructed throughout the Arab and Muslim history. The building of the Omayyad Mosque with its Arabian ambience housing a millennium of classical civilizations was the first symbol and illustration of Islam as depicted and exemplified in the newly-born arts of architecture and painting. It was a full-grown beginning

of an art that felt its way through cultural and literary values and principles of the new faith. The Great Omayyad Mosque was constructed at the hands of Arab artists and architects who embraced Islam and brought the originality of their skills to light, rejecting the false formation of a foreign art that had been compulsorily expressed earlier by order of the Byzantine rule.

When Damascus was liberated from the Byzantine rule in 14 Hijra / 635 AD, Muslims selected the spot where the mosque stands today to offer their prayer. This site is a sacred land that had been dedicated for worship for thousands of years. The Aramaic Temple of god Hadad was built here in early 1st millennium BC, then came the Romans and adapted it into the temple of their god, Jupiter, the god of gods. Remains of this temple as seen today show that it had originally occupied a vast land and was provided with an outer wall measuring 380m by 300m, within which the actual temple was built and later used to construct the Omayyad Mosque.

Unique Mosque

When Christianity superseded paganism, Emperor Theodosius converted the temple into a church named after Saint John the Baptist. Following the Islamic conquest, however, Muslims shared Christians the large basilica of the temple for their worship. This situation lasted 70 years where Muslims and Christians attended their worship side by side until al-Walid bin Abdul Malik ascended the Omayyad Caliphate in 86 Hijra / 705 AD. A settlement was reached after negotiations with the Christian community to relinquish half of the temple on which they built their church in exchange for appropriating new churches in different parts of Damascus as compensation. Al-Walid was therefore able to demolish Roman and Byzantine parts enclosed by the walls of the temple to erect his mosque within their boundary in a new and innovative design which could meet both the requirements of the religion of Islam and the public, and suit the grandeur of the Islamic Empire with Damascus as its capital. As a result, the new mosque was built in a unique and unprecedented design and was the most impressive and largest in the Islamic world at the time. The new mosque remained for centuries a source of inspiration to architects to build great mosques on the pattern of the Omayyad Mosque.

The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus

Construction and decoration of the Great Omayyad Mosque lasted a decade, i.e. from 705 to 715 AD. It gained remarkable accounts and descriptions by Arab and foreign historians and scholars and was seen as one of the wonders of the world. It is also believed that the first principles of Islamic art and architecture were wonderfully invested in this architectural masterpiece. The French scholar Jean Sauvaget gave a concise description of the mosque saying "it is the first architectural success in Islam". The Omayyad Mosque remained glamorous as was first built by al-Walid bin Abdul Malik for 350 years. But it was hit by earthquakes and ravaged by fires over the years, and every time the mosque was losing some of its magnificence and brilliance until it changed appearance in the course of time.

Beauty in the Eye of the Beholder

According to historians, the efforts and money spent by al-Walid for building the Great Omayyad Mosque were not limited to its decoration works, but also for its construction in a new innovative design. He made use only of some of the temple's walls and colonnades in situ. This is evident in the Greek inscriptions seen today on few stones of the two towers standing in the building of the mosque.

Historians maintain that al-Walid spent huge amounts of money on building the mosque to make it a "beauty in the eye of the beholder". It is said that he spent as much as 400 boxes containing 14000 dinars each, which consumed – it is said - seven years of Syria's revenues and that it took 18 camels to carry the notes of cost calculations but al-Walid did not look into them and ordered to have them burned, saying "... It is something we have made only for the sake of God."

Al-Jahez said: "The ancestors said there should be no people most eager to be in Paradise than the Damascenes for what they see of splendor of their mosque." In his book titled "The Animal" (Al-Hayawan), al-Jahez also said: "The Damascene people say: whenever we think of our mosque, the construction of our mihrab and the dome of our haram (prayer hall), they drive us into meditation ... opened our eyes for unique beauties we have never beheld before ... marvelous craftsmanship that we have never come across..."

Ibn Asakir, a renowned historian who visited the Omayyad Mosque in 432 Hijra described the Omayyad Mosque as "the novelty of age and rarity of all

time. By building this mosque, the Omayyads left an everlasting monument for coming generations."

The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus

Fairest of all Mosques

Ibn Jubair describes the Omayyad Mosque as "the fairest of any that the Muslims now hold and most wonderful and unfamiliar in construction and ornamentation. Its widespread reputation makes long description superfluous. But of its wonders is that no spiders ever spin their webs in the mosque, nor do any swallows ever nest there.

Both the interior and exterior of this blessed mosque were embellished with gold and finest of multi-colored mosaic. It was twice ravaged by fire, damaged and renovated but lost most of its marble and magnificence. But its qibla along with the three domes linked thereto escaped the impairment. Its mihrab is the most wonderful in Islam for its beauty and rare art, and the whole of it gleams with gold."

The Great Omayyad Mosque was not only a place of worship but also a center of cultural, political and social activities in view of its grandeur, vastness and sublimity. It was in this sacred place that the Caliph used to receive citizens and emissaries and take decisions on crucial issues.

Ibn Jubair goes on to describe how the Omayyad Mosque served as a community center where people discussed religious and public matters, saying: "The courtyard is a lively center of social life. There is always a concourse of townspeople, coming to meet and converse pleasantly every evening. You may see them coming and going from east to west ... walking and talking until the 'Isha (evening) prayer time is over, then they depart to come the following day with the same vigor. But evening may be the most eventful part of the day, where the mosque becomes an interesting gathering place as if it were the eve of 27th of the holy month of Ramadan when people spend all night long attending their worship."

The Great Omayyad Mosque was also an important educational institution, where, for example, well-known religious scholar Imam al-Ghazali secluded himself and wrote some of his books and gave lessons. His corner is still

standing today and is used by Imam of the Omayyad Mosque for religious classes.

Outline and Sections of the Mosque

The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus has a rectangular shape measuring 156m by 97m. Its north side is occupied by an open and enormous courtyard surrounded by roofed colonnaded walkways, while its south side is occupied by the prayer hall (nave). The mosque has three main gates leading to the courtyard, and thus becomes linked to three destinations of the city – east, west and north. Sections and architectural elements of the mosque are as follows:

1) Wall and Gates: The wall of the mosque is built in big-size lime stones reinforced by edge buttresses dating back to the Byzantine era, but most of its sections were renovated by successive Arab rulers.

2) Courtyard and Arcades: Having a rectangular shape measuring, the courtyard of the mosque is paved with stone that as renovated in several eras and thus gained a higher level than the original, but has been lately returned to the proper level first made during the Omayyad era according to a detailed study prepared to this effect.

3) Prayer Hall: It consists of three double-storey colonnades parallel to the qibla. The lower section consists of big round arches, while the upper part includes twofold arches similar to those arcades surrounding the courtyard. The prayer hall is roofed by hump-like (or camel's back shape) timber lead-covered roofs known as "gable roofs".

4) Minarets: The Roman temple originally had four towers, but only two of them remained standing during the construction of the Omayyad Mosque. They were converted into minarets by Muslims and a third quadrangle tower-shaped minaret, known later as the Minaret of the Bride, was erected near the north entrance of the mosque. The east-side minaret, known as the Minaret of Jesus, was erected on the temple tower, while the west-side magnificent minaret was also built on the other original tower of the temple.

Mosaic decorations of the Omayyad Mosque, which covered all its ceilings, walls, arcades, exterior upper sections of the prayer hall, and the undersides of vaults, are still a priceless and invaluable treasure of art. Themes of

mosaic compositions decorating the Great Omayyad Mosque are characterized by absence of any pictures depicting human figures and are limited to portraying natural landscapes, buildings as well as floral decorations and geometric patterns. It is believed that the mosaic panel in the west arcade portrays River Barada flowing alongside palaces and houses built along its banks, landscapes of fruitful trees, rivers, streams and scenes of various towns encircled altogether by a beautiful frame of geometric patterns.

The Great Omayyad Mosque of Damascus

New Restoration Works

As mentioned earlier, the Great Omayyad Mosque did not escape the misfortunes and calamities of time. Throughout its history, the mosque was hit by earthquakes and ravaged by fires more than ten times. In 460 Hijra / 1067 AD, a ravaging fire gutted down the prayer hall, but was restored in few years. The prayer hall also went ablaze in a raging fire in 1893 AD. It was later restored within the artistic and financial potentials available at the time of their performance but they often lacked necessary research, expertise and sophisticated technology. Unfortunately, the several restoration works were not comprehensive and did not rise up to the level of magnificence and grandeur enjoyed by this great architectural, cultural and sacred edifice. A turning point in the modern history of the Omayyad Mosque, however, was marked on 6.10.1991 when late President Hafez Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, issued Presidential Decision No. 36, providing for the formation of a Committee comprising prominent historians, archeologists and engineers assigned with the duty of repairing and renovating this significant edifice and recovering the beauty and magnificence of the mosque as it was first erected by al-Walid bin Abdul Malik. The Committee was provided with big funds and necessary technical support to perform necessary restoration works in four years' time from date of issuance of the said Decision.

It may be said that all restoration works were successfully carried out and were viewed as exceptional in the history of restoration of antiquities in Syria. These restoration works included, inter alia, the derelict western minaret, the ablution fountain facility, ceilings, gabled roofs, Dome of the Eagle, marquee of the entrance at Miskiyah district, etc. A modern lighting system was also provided to the mosque along with a decorative lighting

system to fill the building blocks of the mosque and its interior/exterior architectural components with light at night. Repair and restoration works also included frescos of Koranic verses, mosaics, flooring and marbling in the various sections of the mosque. Interior and exterior of the Mausoleum of al-Hussain witnessed complete restoration and repair.

Traditional Damascene Houses

A hidden treasure of traditional courtyard houses lying in the streets and alleyways of the old city of Damascus has been explored only by a limited number of ordinary people and scholars. The majority of these wonderful traditional houses date back to the 17th and 18th centuries and were each occupied by a tribe-like family, comprising two or three or even four generations of the same family agreeably and amicably living together and sharing the same meals and same fortunes and misfortunes.

General View of Traditional Damascus Houses

Taking a walk in the streets of the old city of Damascus immediately attracts one's attention to the way houses seem to embrace each other within a network of narrow alleyways without the least idea of what lies behind their high walls which look free of openings except for few elevated windows. However, these wooden lattice bay windows offer necessary privacy by enabling residents of the house to view the street below and covertly watch any one standing at the entrance of the house.

Examples of Damascus Traditional Houses

Traditional courtyard houses in Damascus are often spacious and sometimes reach up to 2000 sq.m in area. Some of them are remarkably large like, for example, the house of Khaled Azem in Suq Sarouja which has as many as 30 rooms. Similar houses are also found in old Damascus, including Dar (or Maktab) 'Anbar in al-Qeimariya quarter and Bait (house) Fakhri Barudi in the district of Qanawat. But most of these large houses are located in the surrounding area of the Omayyad Mosque: Bait Saqqa Amini, Bait Hashimi, Bait Taghlubi, Bait Khatib, Bait Sa'eed Quwatli, and others.

Although the houses mentioned above were built in an Islamic design, they were influenced in a way or another by Ottoman architecture as well as Persian and European style. However, all traditional courtyard houses share similar building outline and architectural appearance irrespective of their

varied areas. Besides, all such houses have an "outer" court for men, where master of the house receives his guests and colleagues to discuss business matters or spend leisure time (the corresponding section in palaces is called "salamlik"). A similar "inner" court is shared by all the family in general and women in particular is also available in the traditional house of Damascus (the corresponding section in palaces is called "haramlik").

Sections of Traditional Damascene House:

(1) Entrance; (2) gateway; (3) courtyard; (4) "liwan"; (5) summer reception hall; (6) winter reception hall.

Traditional Damascene Houses

The **entrance** is normally simple and does not attract outsiders' attention, while luxurious houses have eye-catching and lavishly decorated arched-gates.

The **gateway** which leads into the house is relatively long with few curves to provide privacy and protect the interior of the house from prying eyes. The gateway is also simple in design and free of any ornamentation and is designed only to lead to a spacious courtyard.

The **courtyard** is elegantly decorated all around with plants, roses, sweet-smelling jasmines and other climbing plants as well as citrus trees and a big central fountain. The courtyard is an essential part of the house and gains considerable attention by the family, because it is the place where they spend much of their time and can enjoy themselves. Courtyards are usually paved in alternating stripes of black and red stone, or in marble in the case of luxurious houses, like Bait Babili in the Shaghour locality. Walls facing the courtyard are elegantly covered in alternating stripes of white and black stones (Ablaq). Doors and window lintels of rooms overlooking the courtyard abound with decorations, which sometimes take the shape of crowns trimmed with interwoven ornate band. These doors and windows are set into the walls facing the courtyard in a charming paralleled distribution, whereas the walls themselves are decorated in beautiful stonework.

The "**liwan**" is a large benched hall which opens onto the courtyard and can be reached through a couple of steps. The back wall of the liwan contains a mihrab (niche) for prayer with a small alcove to the right, where a copy of the holy Quran is placed, and a similar small alcove to the left to store an

oil-lamp. The liwan plays an important role in the life of the family, because it is the place where they spend evenings and entertain visitors, particularly in summer. In certain cases, the north side of the courtyard holds another liwan which can receive the warm sunrays from the south in winter. The northern liwan can take the form of an arcade as is the one found in Dar (or Maktab) 'Anbar.

Rooms and "**qa'as**" (reception halls) of the traditional Damascene house are designed for both the summer and winter seasons, where winter halls face southward and summer halls face northward. The main **qa'a**, which overlooks the courtyard, can be used for holding parties on certain happy occasions, including weddings.

Almost all interior ceilings and walls of the rooms in the traditional Damascene house are lavishly decorated and look glorious, especially the main reception hall (qa'a), which is located above the ground floor and can be reached through a separate flight of stairs in the courtyard. The ceiling of this qa'a is finely painted in embossed patterns ('Ajami), while its walls are covered in wonderfully painted and decorated paneling similar to those found in palaces.

Hammams of Damascus

Hammams (bathhouses)

Hammams of Damascus reflection of glorious heritage of the city

Syria is reputable for its hammams (bathhouses), which were common during the Roman period, and their rich design showed the magnificence of Syrian architecture. The hammams which gained fame and popularity in former times were mainly found in Antioch, Apamea, Palmyra, Bosra and Chahba. A typical hammam in the past consisted of three main sections:

- 1) Cold section (Frigidarium)
- 2) Medium heated section (Tepidarium)
- 3) Hot steam section (Caldarium)

There were also other sections, including the changing room (apodyterium), sports arena and reading room. Note should also be made to the burner and

boiler section and mechanism of heating the water. Walls of hammams were decorated in mosaics, while the floor paved in marble.

When further emphasis was laid on cleanliness, hygiene and good health during various Islamic reigns, number of bathhouses grew bigger. Historians maintain that the hammam incorporated in the Qasr al-Hir (the Hir Palace) is the oldest bathhouse attributed to the Islamic period.

Manners and discipline of bathing gained special attention by scholars who produced several writings and books dealing with this subject. The baths of Damascus became well known in the Orient. Some of the bath building complexes appeared as architectural masterpieces under Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman rules. Boasting of their bathhouses, Damascus people elaborated on their design, décor and ornamentation: walls were covered in decorative Kashani tiles; dome edges were filled with ornamental stuccowork and the floor paved in wonderful multicolored marble. The cold section was usually provided with charming fountain in the center.

Numerous accounts of the bathhouses of Damascus were made by renowned historians since the lifetime of Ibn Asakir up to the present time, including al-Arballi and Ibn Abdul Hadi.

Bathhouse Sections

Throughout its history, the bathhouse (hammam) has maintained three main sections: al-Barrani, al-Wastani (Tepidarium or intermediate section) and al-Jawwani (Caldarium or hot steam section), as well as the burner/boiler section.

Al-Barrani (outer/cold section or rest room): It consists of a large roofed court with vaults that meet under a dome provided with a number of (skylights) windows of stained-glass interlaced in geometrical patterns. The center of this court is supplied with a big decorated pool and beautiful fountains. The walls are equipped with long benches (or divans) covered with multicolored towels to welcome the clients. It is here where they change their clothes and get ready to proceed to other sections of the bath and where they retire after bathing.

The **al-Wastani** (Tepidarium) is the intermediate section of the complex between the rest room (al-Barrani) and the steam room (al-Jawwani). It is

usually vaulted and equipped with circular apertures of glass (skylights) measuring between 10 and 15 cm in diameter, called Qamariya (moon-like), providing light without losing heat. The rectangular hall of this medium-temperature section is separated by a 100-150 cm-wide corridor leading to the fire room with two benched "iwans" on both the sides of the corridor where bathers could sit to prepare to enter the steam room or the rest room. The Wastani is also equipped with a small room or a cubicle called Maqsurah (cubicle) al-Noura for haircutting.

The **Jawwani** (Caldarium) is the hot steam room. It also consists of a large area with two "iwans" separated by a corridor leading to the fire room. Under its floor runs the hot water from the boiler towards the bathing pools, and the smoke emitted by the burner towards the main chimney. To benefit from high temperatures, bathers suffering cold diseases can sit on a platform at the far end of this corridor, which (platform) is connected to an aperture leading to the boiler.

There are basins (pools) in the corners of the two "iwans" which receive both hot and cold water pools around which the bathers gather. To cater for private bathing a number of small individual rooms (cubicles) called Maqsuras are linked to the two "iwans". The roof of al-Jawwani (hot steam) section along with the two "iwans" and the bathing cubicles are all roofed with domes and relevant Qamariyas (skylights).

The floor is paved in stripes of black and red stones along with some marble compositions, whereas upper sections of the walls are usually decorated with embossed stuccowork and stalactite (Muqarnas).

Women's Visits to Hammam

Occasions on which women visit the bathhouse are limited to happy events where they can express rejoice at certain ceremonies:

The Wedding Bath-Taking: An invitation extended by the bridegroom's mother to female members of the family of her daughter-in-law to visit the public bath together. The hostess may book the whole Hammam for the "wedding bath" occasion.

The "Ghamra" Bath-Taking: An invitation extended by the bride's mother to visit the Hammam along with female members of the family of her son-

in-law. This invitation comes in response to the "wedding bath", and usually takes place two weeks following the wedding.

Hammams of Damascus

The Confinement Bath-Taking: A birth mother should visit the bathhouse after recent delivery at odd dates between 7th and 21st day following the delivery. It is believed that breast milk produced by the mother during confinement takes the form of "first milk" (colostrum), which lacks the essential composition of milk but has high concentrations of nutrients for the newborn. However, any serious distress or panic can drain up the breastfeeding mother. Taking a bath at the aforementioned stage is, therefore, necessary to help the "colostrum" developing into whole milk.

Post-Confinement Bath-Taking:

A birth mother takes this bath after confinement, i.e. after 40 days of delivery. Visiting the bathhouse, the birth mother is seated on a platform in the fire room, where her body is masked in a special mixture of herbs and natural nutrients as a fitness treatment for excess skin after birth. She is also served meat broth and raw eggs to recover healthy physical condition.

Matchmaking at Hammams

This is one of the rituals occasionally practiced by women seeking suitable brides for their sons. Upon visiting the Hammam for this purpose, these women are given a good opportunity to have a closer look at the prospective bride - where no physical flaws or social foibles could escape notice - and select the best physically fit. Carrying the news back home, the second step lies in contacting the family of the selected girl and arrange for a matchmaking meeting.

Khans of Damascus

The geographical location of Damascus made the city a major commercial stop for trade caravans. Damascus's importance as a caravan city was evident in the trade routes from different parts of the world all converging on it. Demand was therefore high on creating rest houses for travelers and traders to stop for the night or stay for a couple of days to refresh themselves and make business. Such places were first known as "inns", "agencies" or "Qaisariyah", but were finally named as "khans" (caravansaries).

The khan (caravansary) served as a house for travelers and traders. It was provided with a large courtyard and a big fountain in the center. The khan also included a mosque and rest corners as well as a nearby coffee house. The large courtyard is encircled by shops on the ground floor, used for commerce and storage. The second floor, accessible by a staircase located to the right of the main entrance was used mainly for lodging, and has several rooms arranged along a gallery facing the courtyard.

Public and private khans were built by Sultans, Vizirs, governors and wealthy people who collected endowments for necessary maintenance works of these khans and other expenses of relevance.

A number of khans were named after those who built them, others were named after some of their guests, while certain khans held the name of a group of soldiers who used them as meeting places. A khan can also hold the name of the commodity promoted therein. Some khans served as coffee houses for strangers where they can enjoy their leisure time, but there were certain khans which acted against the nature basically set for these rest houses. "Khan al-Zinjari" at al-Oqeiba quarter in Damascus, for example, was demolished by Sultan Mousa bin al-Adel in 1237 AD and had it rebuilt as a mosque under the name of "Mosque of al-Towbah" (repentance) which is still standing today.

Khans may be categorized into two main types: road khans and khans inside the city of Damascus.

Road Khans

They were built along the roads where caravans used to stop for the night with the purpose of protection from highway robbers. These khans were provided with highly impregnable walls and well-fortified gates which were closed at night. Sentries were also posted at the wall to guard the khan against potential attacks.

Most renowned khans of this type were found along the roads leading to Hajj. A good example may be the one known as "Khan Qutaifa". It was built by Sinan Pasha who set 70 villages to offer endowments necessary for the khan expenses. This khan was so large that it was ready to accommodate a 10000-strong caravan along with their horses and camels. It also included quarters for women, supply depots and a special wing for the Pasha and a

similar one for the custodian of the khan. Dinner was offered for free every evening to all guests of the khan.

The Azem Palace

The Azem Palace in Damascus is one of Syria's most important historical palaces and a treasure of its antiquities. It was built by Asa'ad Pasha al-Azem as his own residence in 1163 Hijra / 1749 AD on the site where the Green Palace of Muawya bin Abi Sufiyan was previously erected. The palace lies in the heart of the old city of Damascus near Suk al-Buzuriya, bordering the Omayyad Mosque in the north side and the Straight Street in the south side.

The Azem Palace occupies an area of 5500 sq.m but it is believed it originally lied on a greater area. The Pasha started the construction of his palace by collecting whatever distinguished materials found at the ruins of archeological sites in the city, and employed best skillful masons, carpenters and artisans in the city to build and decorate his magnificent mansion. Al-Bideri, a barber known for the diary he kept of all events taking place in Damascus at that time, relates: "Asa'ad Pasha diligently worked day and night on building his mansion, and he procured 1000 pieces of timber for this purpose apart from the timber and other material offered by the notables of the city."

It may be noted that Azem Palace was built after the pattern of traditional courtyard houses of Damascus common during the Ottoman rule. The palace consists of three main wings, which still hold their Turkish-language nicknames: "haramlik" (the family section), "salamlik" (the visitors and guests section) and "khadamlik" (services and servants quarters). A large gate lies in the center of these three wings, which opens onto the gateway of the palace entrance.

The "haramlik", the largest of the three sections, occupies an area that exceeds two-third of the total area of the palace. The "khadamlik" section is connected to the northwestern side of the "haramlik". Buildings of the latter wing are extravagantly decorated and some of them consist of two-storey blocks. The courtyard of the "haramlik" (family quarters) abounds with decorative sweet-smelling plants, citrus and cypress trees, as well as several marble-ornate fountains.

The "salamlik" (guests and visitors wing) occupies the south side of the palace. Its entrance is connected to the "haramlik" section by a narrow passageway equipped with a wooden wheel designed for services, where food and refreshments can be easily handed via this wheel from the "haramlik" into the "salamlik" quarters. The latter consists of a courtyard with a large rectangular-shaped pool in the center. Superfluous water from this pool runs into the low-level fountains in the family quarters through special ground conduits which carry the water according to Archimedes' principle of communicating vessels.

It may be said that the Azem Palace is distinct in its charming décor and architecture from other palaces in Damascus. The interior façades overlooking the courtyards and the exterior front façade followed the architectural style of alternating stripes of white, yellow and red stone separated in between by courses of black stone. The flat exterior walls of the palace look oversimplified in design, reflecting the same style common in Damascus courtyard traditional houses built during that period. In contrast to the starkly minimalist exterior, the interior of the Azem Palace features elaborate and opulent decorations: marble mosaics, stonework and carved stone openings with stalactite (muqarnas) corners, elaborate wall wooden paneling and finely painted and decorated ceilings. The upper section of several parts of the interior façades is ornamented in mosaic compositions known as "ablaq", which is commonly found in similar luxurious houses at that time. This traditional decorative style features geometric patterns of twisted shapes of flowers, leaves and fruits, or star-dotted shapes elegantly arranged within decorative courses.

Design and decoration of upper windows of the second floor overlooking the courtyards follow the traditional tracery done with colored stained glass filling the gaps created in the stucco branching and crossing lines.

Doors of receptions halls feature arabesque designs which reflect fancy ornamental patterns of various geometric shapes as well as twisted shapes of flowers, leaves, fruits, etc which make every door distinct from the other. Some of the doors are adorned at their upper section with mother-of-pearl inlay. Small marble mosaic pieces of geometric patterns inlaid in marble slabs of various colors can be seen at different parts of the palace.

The Azem Palace

Stone stalactites (muqarnas) are used for decoration purposes and also to provide charming and smooth shift between two different levels, particularly at the bottom side of certain arches or corners inside and outside the reception halls, as well as in interior window panels. Wooden stalactite (muqarnas) decorations, on the other hand, are used to embellish warrior figures found at certain spots in the ceiling of several rooms and halls. Painted and embellished wood of tinted colors and gilded in gold or silver known as "Ajami" is the commonest style of ornamentation found in the Azem Palace. This style is mostly used in ornamentation of ceiling and wall paneling, featuring geometric and floral patterns with a course of Arabic calligraphy represented in Koranic verses, poetry and proverbs.

The Azem Palace remained residence of the Azem family until the 1920s. Curator of the Azem Palace Museum, Mr. Mohammad Qaddour Amin, says about the occupancy of this mansion: "During the French mandate in Syria, the haramlik section of the palace was occupied by the French as garrison headquarters. It was later converted into an art study center and became the head office of the Institute of Eastern Studies. Following Syria's independence, the whole place was owned by the state in 1953. When necessary restoration works of this palace were completed, it was finally turned into the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions."

The present Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions consists of various halls featuring education in traditional elementary schools, oriental musical instruments, reception hall, the bride and mother-in-law sections, the Hajj section, coffee house section, arms section, the Pasha section, hammam (bathhouse) sections, the main hall, folklore fashion section, folklore leather handicrafts, glassmaking kiln, textile and copper section.

The Khan of Asa'ad Pasha

The Khan of Asa'ad Pasha lies in the heart of the old city of Damascus, exactly in the middle of Suk al-Buzuriya, south of the Omayyad Mosque. This Suk (bazaar) was well-known for its trade activities during the different Arab rules. It also contained a plethora of shops and khans (caravansaries) which attracted commercial activities of the city. Suk al-Buzuriya is still an important commercial hub and a tourist attraction in view of its proximity to

the Omayyad Mosque, Hammam (bathhouse) of Nureddin and several other historical and archeological buildings.

The khan in question was built by governor of Damascus Asa'ad Pasha, who ruled the city from 1156 to 1170 Hijra / 1743 to 1756 AD. Construction of this famous khan began in 1156 Hijra / 1751 AD and finished in 1167 Hijra / 1753 AD. It gained widespread reputation as one of the best and most charming khans of Damascus. Several Arab and foreign historians and travelers elaborated in their account of the Asa'ad Pasha khan, its beautiful architecture and the discipline of its trade transactions. In his book titled "The Luxuriant Meadow", written in the second half of the 19th century, Damascene traveler Nu'man al-Qasatli described the khan of Asa'ad Pasha saying: "This khan is visited by tourists to see the beauty of its building ... It is strange enough that its most delicate artistry is done by stonemasons ... Many people were amazed by the elegant and magnificent gate of this khan ..."

French poet Lamartine, who visited the Khan of Asa'ad Pasha in 1833 AD, was one of many who spoke highly of its artistic architecture. In his "Voyage to the East", Lamartine described the Khan of Asa'ad Pasha as "one of the most charming khans in the East ... Its large domes are reminiscent of the dome found in St. Paul's Cathedral in Rome. The domes of this khan, like the one in St. Paul's Cathedral, rest on granite pillars (in fact they are stone pillars of alternating stripes of black and white)." The gate of the khan won the admiration of Lamartine, who described it as "a masterpiece of Islamic architecture ... It is second to none the world over in terms of its ornamentation." He also said: "Arab architecture can be seen all over the khan, although it was built only 40 years ago ... A nation with such talented architects who can design such a khan, and workers who can carry out its construction must be lively and creative."

Like other khans, the Asa'ad Pasha Khan was designed to host trade caravans. The second floor served as lodging quarters for visiting traders and travelers. The khan was built on a piece of land measuring 2500 sq.m in area. The square-shaped building of the khan consists of two storeys encircling a courtyard and a covered gateway. The front side of the khan occupies part of Suk al-Buzuriya. It contains a small mosque. The square-shaped courtyard measures 27m by 27m paved in black stone with a multi-sided fountain in the center. The courtyard is roofed by nine large domes distributed at three lines and supported by 24 stone vaults of equal size and

measure. These domes have a diameter of 8 meters and rise 22m above ground level of the khan.

Forty Years since Discovery of Ebla

Archeological information confirms that the great Kingdom of Ebla, which was discovered 40 years ago, had played a pioneering role in the history of the ancient East, laying further emphasis on Syria's key and pivotal role continuously played in the context of dialogue between cultures, as well as inter-state dialogue and its effort to preserve the civilizational and cultural heritage of humanity.

Excavations at Ebla site over the past 40 years have uncovered one of the magnificent chapters of Syria's history, where Ebla appeared as a civilization equal in importance to the civilizations of Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley. Before the discovery of Ebla, Syria was viewed as a stopover for other civilizations and cultures. But with Ebla uncovered, Syria proved to be a maker of civilizations interacting with other civilizations of the ancient world. New horizons of continued work have opened wide for researchers, historians and archeologists to search for the origins of urban civilization and early civilization in the ancient Arab region in general and Syria in particular. The discovery of Ebla and ongoing excavations have provided the previously unavailable textual evidence in the 3rd millennium BC, thus enabling scholars to discuss and search in detail the economic, social, political, commercial, international and cultural aspects of life.

Ebla has uncovered much about the history of Syria and its ancient civilizations and new chapters have opened wide to look into the early history of man in Syria along with his culture, architecture and literary development. It is no surprise, therefore, to see Ebla takes the lead in new versions of world encyclopedias, given the importance attached to it as a major kingdom dating back to the 3rd millennium BC, during which Ebla had been in the forefront of several political developments and vital activities.

The Academic American Encyclopedia has elaborated on the importance of Ebla and the vast territories that came under its rule – although it is difficult to exactly define the far end border of Ebla's rule as it stretched up to the Euphrates at Karkemish in the northeast and up to Mari (Tel Mardikh) in the southeast. The new version of Encyclopedia Britannica included details

about Ebla and excavations carried out at this site over the past few decades. The Encyclopedia Britannica also highlighted Ebla's flourishing economy and polytheism, pointing out that it was Canaanite in the first place, while its language seemed more relevant to the northern group of languages, particularly the ancient Akkadian and Amorite languages.

Forty Years since Discovery of Ebla

The World Archives – Larousse, shows an updated information about the political records of the Kingdom of Ebla dating back to 2500 BC. The findings of Ebla are viewed as "world archives" and a revolution in the facts already available about the beginning of this part of the world. Before the discovery of Ebla, it was believed that civilization had originally developed in southern Mesopotamia, then began to spread in neighboring regions. But when Ebla (Tel Mardikh) was discovered, it was found out that northern Syria had witnessed the birth of its own original culture.

The Archeological Encyclopedia says that excavations at Ebla revealed that Syria had emerged early in the dawn of history. The Encyclopedia of World History also attaches special importance to Ebla as a capital of the Canaanite culture which flourished between 2400 – 2200 BC. Ebla was a city-state populated by 260,000 people and controlled most of Syria's territories up to Palestine in the south and Mari in the middle Euphrates. Excavations at this magnificent site further revealed that Ebla was a commercial kingdom run by organized rules and governed by an elected king supported by the Senate.

The French Department of Archeology and Museums gives an elaborate account of Ebla, its distinguished architecture and the key role it played in creating the art expressionist medium during Syria's ancient period whereby this medium emanated from a technical experience and distinct stylization, showing how the formal legacy of the past moulds and controls today's experience, whether in terms of style or selection of themes.

Professor Paolo Matthiae, the man who discovered Ebla threw light on this distinct aspect at an international symposium organized by the University of Rome La Sapienza and was attended by a host of the world's prominent archeologists from universities of Paris, Damascus, Vienna, Munich, London and Baltimore to discuss the outcome of years of excavations and research at Tel Mardikh, where some 17,000 cuneiform-inscribed clay tablets were unearthed in 1975, which clarified the ambiguous history of the

region. These tablets became a "legendary discovery" on account that no tablets unearthed during numerous excavations have ever changed the history of the ancient East as done by the tablets found at Ebla. Dating back to the 3rd millennium BC, the city-state of Ebla functioned as a bridge between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean civilization on the one hand, and a natural crossing point for routes linking Mesopotamia with the Nile Valley on the other. Ebla was not a city like the ones traditionally emerged on river banks: it was an inland city which depended on terrain cultivation, particularly the cultivation of olive trees over large areas, thus changing the perception and principle of the city.

Professor Paolo Matthiae views Ebla as a growing revolution in science and knowledge especially that the world has become aware of Syria's significant civilization through the various discoveries and excavations done over the past few years. Matthiae also believes that new excavations at Ebla have brought to light the importance of the birth of civilization in Syria in the 3rd millennium BC.

Forty Years since Discovery of Ebla

Ebla had restored the order of writing from the area of Kish and was greatly influenced by the style of writing and official correspondence followed at the Akkad schools. But Ebla, at this early date of man's history, began to develop its own independent nature to become Syria's distinct feature of civilization since that date according to a socio-economic background different from that of southern Mesopotamia. Besides, the infrastructure of Ebla is Syrian in identity and nature in addition to religious aspirations linked with Bilad al-Sham. At this very particular period, distinct foundations were established and later became the starting point for successive civilizational development in Syria. The role of Ebla may be best manifested at this point and its influence is obviously seen in a history that remained unclear for ages. The results of excavations at Ebla have changed a lot of opinions and views and have been a groundbreaking discovery at the global level. The "royal archives" unearthed at the royal palace of Ebla has both introduced the world to a "new history", a new language and a new civilization. Over the past 40 years, the world's mass media, including scientific journals, symposiums and conferences, have kept Ebla and its excavations in focus. In light of the continued research and study on Ebla, the results reached by archeologists and historians of ancient civilizations may be summed as follows:

- The language of Ebla is the second oldest Semitic language after the Akkadian. Both languages were the mother of successive tongues to appear at later stages, such as the Babylonian, Assyrian, Ugaritian, Phoenician, Aramean and Arabic languages of the south. It was found out that Arabic had inherited its vocabulary from the language used by Ebla in its writings.
- The invaluable treasure found at Ebla (16000 cuneiform clay tablets) forms the oldest and largest documentary library in the history of humanity.
- People of Ebla practiced the ritual of sanctifying their dead honest kings to the level gods.
- Prior to the excavations at Ebla, the oldest diplomatic marriage in history was made between Naram-sin, son of Akkad's king, and son of King Haram. But the diplomatic marriage document uncovered at Ebla proved that matrimony between Herodote, daughter of Ebla's King and son of King Apa of Assyria was the oldest diplomatic marriage in history.
- Ebla had imported the semi-precious stones of lapis lazuli from Badakhshan (now Afghanistan), which is an evidence of the oldest overseas trade.
- Relations between Syria and ancient Egypt had been firm and friendly since the reign of Khafra, the Pharaoh who built the pyramids of Egypt. A stone-made pot with an inscription holding the name of this Pharaoh and a similar pot holding the name of Pharaoh Pepi I were both discovered at Ebla.
- The world's most ancient document of a peace treaty and diplomatic relations dating back to 2400 BC reached between the Kingdom of Ebla and the city of Aparsal, near the Tigris was also found at Ebla site.
- The clay tablets found at Ebla contained the oldest literary works known in Bilad al-Sham, including poems, hymns, legends and proverbs dating back to the early second half of the 3rd millennium BC.
- Texts of a treaty concluded between the Eblite king and the Khamazi kingdom in northern Iran. When we come to know that the distance between Ebla and Khamazi is more than a thousand kilometers, we realize the status held by Ebla in the ancient East in the 3rd millennium BC.

- Also found at Ebla were 10 agreements signed between the kingdom of Ebla and a number of city-states in the 3rd millennium BC, including an agreement between Ebla and Assyria on setting up a joint market for transactions between the two sides.

- According to barely allotments distributed amongst the people, the population of Ebla is estimated at 260.000, of whom 40.000 lived in the city and the rest in towns and villages within the "Greater Ebla".

- The prime and earliest source of living for the Elbiate kingdom and its society was agriculture. Ebla stretched over a vast area of 57 sq.km, comprising 10 villages which all produced barely, wheat, vine, olive, fig and pomegranate. Ebla's production of barely alone was huge enough to meet the requirements of Bilad al-Sham population, and part of this crop was exported to Mesopotamia. Flax was also one of the plants grown in the region, which made Ebla reputable for the production of linen.

- The second natural resource for Ebla was livestock raising. Ebla was also known for its elegant industries, especially textile industry. There were state-run factories for production of linen and wool. Other products included metal instruments. Ebla possessed ample gold which was received as price for exports or as tolls and duties collected from the people. Gold was also used as a commodity, like any other piece of goods for merchandise and was even mentioned in Ebla's archives of documents as an international trade "commodity".

- Ebla witnessed the composition of "encyclopedias" which were basically books containing the essentials of knowledge classified in categories: plants, animals, metals, geographical locations, etc. Ebla's school, or rather "academy", which dates back to the 3rd millennium BC, was a considerably advanced institution competing with other contemporary Sumerian schools in Uruk, Fara (Abu Salabikh) and Nippur. The Eblaite academy established contacts and firm ties with these Sumerian schools and also hosted "scientific conferences", where Sumerian teachers regularly visited the academy at Ebla.

- Ebla enjoyed an obviously original and distinct artistry best manifested in wood carving, manufacture of furniture items, architecture of buildings,

palaces, temples and fortresses. It may be said that relevant findings at Ebla show that Syria had long ago established its own architecture.

Discovery of Mari

On a hot day of August 1933, a shepherd was digging through a mound at Tel Hariri (Mari) – situated on the right bank of Euphrates river near the town of al-Bukamal – when he came across a craved stone. Examined by concerned experts, it was found out that this piece of carved stone is part of a bigger statue with cuneiform inscriptions. Deciphering these cuneiform writings helped us understand that Iasmah-Adad, son of the renowned King Shamshi-Adad had erected this statue. The inscriptions end by a prayer reading "God Shamash will crush any one erasing my name and replace it with his own ..".

Although the Sumerian text was incomplete, but it provided us with important information because Iasmah-Adad's father was well known among the kings of Mesopotamia during the lifetime of Hammurabi, circa 1800 BC. Most likely, the discovered statue signified Shamash, the Sun God, who ascended the mountains every morning.

A few months following the discovery of this highly significant archeological site, archeologists from France arrived in Syria to start excavations at Tel Hariri under the supervision of renowned French scholar André Parrot. Excavations, which are still underway, revealed that this site does not only hide within its multiple layers the remains of a single city, but several cities piled over each other, the most ancient of which dates back to mid-4th millennium BC. Successive generations built new houses over the collapsed walls. These buildings were later destroyed but the city revived again and was reconstructed anew. This process of destruction and reconstruction made Tel Hariri grow larger and raise level due to compilation of buildings, palaces and civil temples known at that time as "Mari".

Seventy Years

Ongoing excavations at Mari (Tel Hariri) site, which started 70 years ago, have uncovered only a small portion of the hidden archeological treasure of this site which expects further exploration by several generations of

archeologists in the future. It may be noted in this context that unearthing of a single building at this site requires the effort of several years, and the site hides a great number of houses, palaces, temples and other buildings.

The archeological mission working at this site discovered the largest building of Mari lying under the central hilltop of Tel Hariri. The unearthed building was the royal palace with all its halls and rooms, totaling 300 rooms. The remains of the palatial wall rise five meters above ground level. Excavators also discovered a myriad of daily tools and utensils lying in the rooms of the palace: vats, baking ovens, cookers, washbasins and lavatories. Also unearthed were a number of temples dedicated to gods and goddesses (Ishtar, Shamash, Dogan, Ninhur-Sag, Ishtarat and Nini-Zaza), as well as several residential areas and 700 tombs. Excavations at Mari uncovered a large set of sculptures rarely found in other historical sites of the world, represented in different-sized statues ranging between normal-size statues and statuettes placed in temples as votive offerings. Charming frescos were also among the findings discovered at Tel Hariri (Mari).

DISCOVERY OF MARI MADE ARCHEOLOGISTS AND HISTORIANS REDRAW ANCIENT HISTORY

Discovery of Mari Kingdom

Twenty-Five Thousand Tablets

The most important discovery at the site of Mari was a huge library containing some 25000 cuneiform tablets. Translations of the tablets by commissions and scholars involved in ancient cuneiform languages provided us with valuable clues and information about an ancient Semitic language known as the Akkadian language. The uncovered tablets contain state records, details about the kings of Mari, friendly/enemy cities and kingdoms, trade and daily urban/suburban life activities. They also contained details related to legal and administrative matters, personal messages dealing with state security issues. In fact all these details helped us re-write the history of the ancient Arab eastern land during the 2nd millennium BC.

Interpretations of these cuneiform-language documents, which date back to the late 3rd millennium BC and early 2nd millennium BC, revealed that the unusual wealth enjoyed by the Kingdom of Mari is basically attributed to outland trade, given its unique geographical location which made a point of crossways linking the Mediterranean, Anatolia and western Syria with

central and southern Syria, southward of Mesopotamia through the Euphrates river.

In this area of Syria's northeastern region of Jazira, donkey caravans traveled away from the Euphrates and crossed the steppe along a chain of oases of groundwater springs, passing through Palmyra to reach agricultural terrain at the city of Qatana (Tel Mishrifa at present). Supply lists found at Mari indicate that this trip would last 10 full days. The road situated southward of the earlier route gained importance only when camels were used in the first millennium BC for transportation instead of donkeys due to shortage of water in the area. The road from Assyria along River Khabur was also under the control of Mari Kingdom. This explains why the Royal Palace imposed taxes and tariffs on trade on the one hand, and exercised trade businesses on the other. The Royal Palace's relations stretched from Hazor in Palestine to Crete and Cyprus, Hatush in Anatolia and also to Delmon (Bahrain at present) in the Arab Gulf. The numerous foreign delegations visiting Mari included a great number of Elam delegations from southwestern Iran. Besides, there were traders commissioned by the Royal court to make business in several cities. Important commodities for merchandise included copper and tin, where Mari imported the former item from Cyprus and the latter from northwestern Iran, because sources of tin in the west side of the Mediterranean or western Europe were far-reached.

MARI'S ROYAL PALACE CONSISTS OF 300 ROOMS & COURTYARDS ... FINDINGS UNEARTHED AT MARI ARE RARELY FOUND IN OTHER PARTS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

Kings of Mari

Translations of the cuneiform tablets discovered at Mari have provided ample and valuable clues and information about the kings who succeeded the throne at the Royal Palace in the beginning of the second millennium BC. Information related to earlier dates, i.e. the 3rd millennium BC, is rare. The oldest texts which dealt with the kings of Mari date back to 1980 BC when Prince Iagit-Lim ruled Mari. He was at odds with Akabkar-Abu, ruler of Terqa. Kings of city-states at that time were always fighting wars against each other and often formed alliances to win the fights.

Yahdun-Lim succeeded his father Iagit-Lim in ruling Mari. The new king was able to lead his forces as far as the Mediterranean. In his writings, King Yahdun-Lim said: "Yahdun-Lim offered many royal immolations ... his

fighters swamp in the sea ... he ascended the mountains of cedars and oaks and cut these trees planted on the peak ...".

Discovery of Mari Kingdom

Timber cut from trees at the Mediterranean coastal forests was high in demand by Mesopotamia, which hardly had any forests. This timber was used in building house-roofs and making doors. Mari, therefore, gained considerable power under the reign of Yahdun-Lim. But the king himself witnessed a tragic end. An insurgency broke out in the city of Mari which claimed the life of Yahdun-Lim and a number of his family members. The only one who survived the massacre was his son, Zimri-Lim, who fled Mari and headed for Aleppo, where he was granted asylum by the court of King Yarim-Lim and his son Hammurabi, who both warmly welcomed him as a guest of their palace.

MARI DECEASED ... IT WAS STABBED TO DEATH BY HAMMURABI CIRCA 1750 BC WHEN MARI, UNLIKE GOD ISHTAR, FELL DOWN IN HADES & NEVER LEFT OUT AGAIN ...

A Stab to Death

Zimri-Lim spent 20 years in Aleppo, during which he was married to Shibtu, daughter of King Yarim-Lim who helped Zimri-Lim return to his homeland and recover the throne. Under the 20-year reign of its new King Zimri-Lim, Mari flourished and prospered. He renovated the royal palace and temples, and added a majestic look to their appearance.

Relations between King Zimri-Lim and the Babylonian King Hammurabi were good as this is clearly seen in a message addressed to Zimri-Lim from Hammurabi which reads as follows: "... Send me a number of your troops to enable me attain my objective, and in return, I shall send thee any troops to help you attain thy goal ...".

Hammurabi expanded the border of his Babylonian state northward and confrontation with Mari became inevitable. Hammurabi invaded Mari in two military campaigns, the first of which was launched after 32 years on the throne, followed by a second campaign during his 34th year in power. Mari's wall was destroyed and fire ravaged the majestic palace of Zimri-Lim, whose own fate and his family's remained unknown. Consequently, Mari vanished ... it was stabbed to death by Hammurabi circa 1750 BC and the

city fell down in "Hades" and, unlike god Ishtar, never left out again ... How do we interpret the fate of this glorious city? André Parrot, scholar and excavator of Mari, explains:

"Mari became a no-man's-land where there was once a great city. Its people were either killed or held captive. The dynasty of Zimri-Lim vanished without leaving any trace behind, and no one anymore claimed the throne of their ancestors, and no one ever dared to recover the throne ... Dead silence ... Mari became a dead city. We can't find in the ancient world of the East the least mention of any further dynasties in Mari ..."

Giving free reign to his limitless ambitions, Hammurabi the King of Babylon felt that the world laid subdued to his mighty power. This was like an avalanche which crashed down the side of a mountain. The remains of Mari as seen today can only be an evidence of its glorious history and its great contribution to human heritage in the late 3rd and early 2nd millenniums BC. Until today, we still stand amazed by the rich and opulent royal cuneiform records of Mari, which provide unparalleled plethora of information and details which addressed all aspects of life. Mari would have remained a stage of shadows beyond perception without the scribes who recorded each and every detail of Mari 4000 years ago, when the Kingdom of Mari was one of the brilliant beacons of the ancient world.

A RECORD OF 23000 CUNEIFORM TABLETS GIVES NEW LOOK & PERCEPTION TO A CIVILIZATION THAT FLOURISHED IN THE 2ND MILLENNIUM BC.

Kingdom of Ugarit ... a Great Discovery 75 Years since the Great Discovery

EXCAVATIONS AT UGARIT UNCOVERED THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF A CANAANITE KINGDOM, WHICH ONCE COVERED THE WHOLE AREA OF LATTAKIA TODAY

Before 1929 Ugarit was a name seldom mentioned in only few ancient archives of kingdoms and cities in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and Anatolia. But this was wholly changed when the plough of a Syrian farmer called Mahmoud Manlla al-Zeer hit a tombstone in a district known today as "Mina al-Beidha". This was the start of a long process of academic research at one of the world's richest archaeological sites of ancient history.

Excavations at Ugarit uncovered the contributions made by a Canaanite kingdom, which once covered the whole area of Lattakia today. It was a home for a great civilization of brilliant culture and creative achievements particularly its revolutionary "alphabet", construction, epics, legends and works of literature.

Ugarit first emerged in the 7th millennium BC as a small village where man settled away from nomad life and started to benefit from available natural sources for living and began cultivation of wild seeds, primitive agriculture and domestication of animals. Ugarit developed in the process of time, benefiting from its fertile soil, geographical location on the Mediterranean and creative human activities until it became a trade center and one of the most renowned Canaanite kingdoms in the ancient East, particularly during the first half of the 2nd millennium BC.

Thanks to its strategic geographical location, Ugarit played a key role as a stopover linking Syria's inland regions with the Mediterranean coast, thus attracting various foreign minorities to settle on its land where they can enhance trade and economic relations with the Ugaritians. The Kingdom of Ugarit became a gate wide open to both East and West and a vital commercial port on the Mediterranean trading agricultural crops, raw materials as well as commodities produced in Cyprus, Crete, Greece, the east kingdoms in Yamhad (Aleppo), Mari (Tel Hariri), Ebla (Tel Mardikh) and Mesopotamia, as well as from cities in southern Lebanon, Palestine and the Nile Valley, in addition to the Hittite kingdoms in Anatolia in the north.

Ugarit's border stretched from Mount Safan (Saffoun = 'Akra' at present) in the north to al-Sinn River in the south, and from the coast on the Mediterranean in the west to the chain of Syrian coast mountains in the east.

Kingdom of Ugarit ... a Great Discovery 75 Years since the Great Discovery

Ugarit was well known for its agricultural products (timber, oil, wine, cereals, etc.), also for its handicrafts (foundry of copper, lead, tin and bronze), goldsmithery, silversmithery, sculptures, production of purple dyes, wool and purple-dyed textiles.

The highly valuable discoveries at Ugarit are represented in its magnificent architecture of palaces and temples, and the remains of other wonderful

constructions, tools, statues, ornaments, jewelry, frescos and elegant drawings painted on potteries and copperware. Tablets unearthed at Ugarit were written in eight different languages have provided us with valuable clues and important information to study all aspects of life in ancient Syria which made Ugarit in the eye of the world a kingdom of civilization and human creativity.

The Ugaritic thinking was characterized by the following:

- History-long involvement of the Syrian people in agricultural, social, ethical and diplomatic activities.
- The Ugaritian think-tanks' knowledge of a cultural heritage passed on by successive generations.
- Intellectual and cultural open-mindedness to other civilizations.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE CLAY TABLETS UNCOVERED AT UGARIT SHOW THAT ITS PEOPLE WERE THE FIRST IN THE WORLD TO CHANGE LANGUAGE FROM PICTOGRAMS INTO ALPHABET

Kingdom of Ugarit ... a Great Discovery 75 Years since the Great Discovery

Most importantly, the clay tablets uncovered at Ugarit show that its people were the first in the world to change language from pictograms into alphabet and from syllabus into character. The Ugaritians were amongst the founders of the most important turning point of human history. The language of the alphabet was the medium for recording laws, decisions, treaties, agreements, documents, legal and economic texts, poems, hymns, encyclopedias, dictionaries and all other details of life, including magic and legends.

The Ugaritians used the alphabet for writing religious texts and certain messages, while their communications with Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and Asia Minor were done in the Akkadian cuneiform characters, which were commonly legible in the 2nd millennium BC. Ugaritian epics and legends were seen as a sacerdotal tradition passed on by successive generations of temple priest: legends of gods and goddesses and heroic epics of kings. Ugarit's epics in general were based on the interference of gods and goddesses while the legends were used as a background for the epic

narration. Such texts were found at the temple library of the god of gods and they constitute the most important source of information about the ancient Arab Canaanite religion, the perceptions of which may be defined in two essential principles:

- (1) Creation of the universe by a creating god;
- (2) Birth and fertility and other natural phenomena, like thunder, rain, storms, etc.

The most famous epics so far discovered in Ugarit include: The Myth of Baal-Aliyan (birth of god), the psalm of Ningal (moon festivities), the legend of Daniel, the legend of Keret ...

Ugaritic writings included translation of certain poems suitable for adaptation into stage performance and songs. These writings showed that sacrifice offering was accompanied by singing and music performance which included a number of musical instruments: flute, pipe, cymbal, drum, etc. Remains of statuettes representing these instruments were also unearthed at Ugarit. Another discovery was a clay tablet with verses on the one side dedicated to the moon goddess Ningal, while the reverse side contain musical notation for the psalm which dates back to the 14th century BC. A thorough study suggested that these musical notes were arranged in seven modes (or keys) of the musical scale, which are the same keys ascribed to Pythagoras of Greece in 500 BC, i.e. the Ugaritic hymn and its musical scale are older than Pythagoras's seven-tone scale by at least 900 years.

Excavations at Ugarit revealed that it established firm trade and economic relations with several Amorite and Canaanite kingdoms and cities which benefited from Ugarit's strategic geographical location at the major trade routes of Asian countries across the Arabian desert with countries in Europe and North Africa through the Mediterranean. This strategic location contributed to Ugarit's development in the fields of economy, agriculture, trade and diplomacy, thus became a hub for international trade. Ugarit's relations with other countries and states at that time stretched from Crete, Asia Minor, Greece Egypt to Mesopotamia. The antiquities of Ugarit show that Egyptian, Hittite, Akkadian, Greek and Cypriot groups were jointly working with the Ugaritians, Amorites, inhabitants of Canaanite cities along the Syrian coast and central part of the country, which made Ugarit a point of convergence for many civilizations, cultures and languages.

Ugarit's civilizational, commercial, economic and intellectual glorious prosperity in the ancient world made it an object of envy, ill-will and greed for fleets in the high seas in the second decade of the 12th century BC (1185 or 1180 BC). This was one of other reasons that led Ugarit to a tragic end and horrible collapse: spread of plague, starvation, internal political turmoil and continued confrontations with enemies of different nationalities.

An unsent message prepared by Ugarit's last king "Ammurapi" recounts the last unhappy developments in the kingdom "... seven enemy ships came into sight ... all cities surrendered ... the troops were far away from the kingdom ... and he was left alone to face the enemy .." This message marked the tragic end of the city-kingdom of Ugarit, the end of a brilliant Arab-Canaanite capital which granted humanity in the 2nd millennium BC the greatest and most important achievement of knowledge, science and literature in the history of the ancient world.

The majestic monuments of Ugarit fell into ruin, but its civilization, art, literature and cultural contributions remain a viable and unforgettable evidence of our ancestors who invented the miraculous alphabet on the land of Ugarit and was offered as a gift to all humanity. The Diamond Jubilee marked by the Ministry of Culture rejoicing the start of excavations at Ugarit can only be seen as a tribute to the glorious history and splendid civilization of Ugarit and its exceptional achievements. Ugarit is an integral part of our history and deep-rooted in our Arab civilization and reflection of our cultural, intellectual and mythological heritage.

On the Road of Urbanization in Palmyra

- The religious edifice was given priority because it is the "home of everlasting eternity"
- Temple of Bel (Babylonian in origin), the most ancient of all temples
- Monuments of Palmyra still standing in the Colonnaded Street
- Palmyrene architecture: mixture of Hellenistic and Roman styles with clearly featured Syrian architecture

- Magnificent & majestic remains from the ancient world still standing today in Palmyra are second to none, neither in Greece nor Italy

I believe there is no archeological city in the East so charming as Palmyra is. The "Bride of the Desert", Palmyra, is distinct for its vast area and well-preserved antiquities still standing in majesty as evidence of its glorious history and splendid architecture.

This ancient charming city had once been a spot of attraction to leaders, knights, adventurers, scholars, poets & philosophers from different parts of the ancient world.

Palmyra was also a major station and stopover on the Silk Road. The shadow of its Syrian queen Zenobia overwhelms the city. Zenobia, who was about to conquer the ancient world in the 2nd century AD, was intelligent, educated and eloquent. She was exceptionally skillful in running her city affairs and always led her armies towards victory. Aware of the Arabs' great power when they unite in the face of enemies, Zenobia established a mighty state capable of facing the challenges of foreign forces.

Palmyra's Architecture

Palmyra is the Greek name for the city, which is a translation of its original Aramaic name "Tadmor" (palm tree). Palmyra is distinct from other archeological sites in its monumental remains which are still standing to testify to its majesty and artistic creativity. A historian described the architecture of Palmyra during its golden age as a pyramid with a base consisting of faith, on which the building firmly rests in beautiful architecture featuring charming designs of the city as a whole.

It may be noted in this context that the Palmyrene faith comprised the religions commonly embraced throughout Bilad al-Sham, Mesopotamia and the Arab Peninsula. It may be also interesting to know that excavations at Palmyra have not found any temple dedicated to Greek or Roman deities, because Palmyrenes worshiped their own gods in huge stone-built temples erected around the city to protect it from evil powers. The Palmyrene temples were given priority over civil buildings of the city, based on their belief that temples were the "House of Everlasting Eternity". Construction of

the city of Palmyra started in the second half of the 1st century BC and was completed in the mid-second century AD.

The Babylonian Temple of Bel

Palmyra's largest temple was dedicated to the Babylonian-origin god Bel in association with the sun and moon gods, Yarhibol and Aglibol as well as the god of Efqa spring. The Temple of Bel sits at east side of Palmyra adjacent to the palm oasis. Elegantly engineered, this temple has a magnificent portico and a vast court with a pool in the center for purification. The building of the temple also includes an altar for offering sacrifices. It contains a hall for ritual ceremonies and banquets and an inner sanctum with two niches facing southward and northward of the sanctum, as well as three towers which can be climbed to offer incense as religious services.

The completion of the Temple of Bel's construction was an important architectural development in the mid-second century AD when it made the Corinthian column-capitals common in all buildings in Syria and an architectural model for all religious buildings at both the local and regional levels.

On the Road of Urbanization in Palmyra

In fact the classical Corinthian capital superseded the ornamental Ionic, Tuscan and Nabatean styles and all other Corinthian capitals, where the classical Corinthian capital mentioned above became the standard style followed in ornamentation of Roman buildings situated in Asian, European and African buildings. It may be, therefore, said that Syria is credited for the spread of this ornamental style of ancient architecture and copying it over the centuries up to the present time.

Temple of Allat

The architectural influence of Palmyra's Temple of Bel was clearly seen on all sections of other temples in the city, including ornamentation, niches, cellas (inner sanctums), etc. Buildings of temples were surrounded by arcades where worshipers could gather under these roofed passageways. The temples expanded their activities and became involved in organizing ceremonial processions of religious nature. The best example may be seen in the temple of the Arab-origin goddess "Allat", which was erected in the west

side of Palmyra. This temple was first constructed in the late BC period and its cella was renovated and restored during 148-188 AD. Its niche was provided with a marquee to protect goddess Allat, while an elegant gate was added to the entrance along with galleries supported by Corinthian columns. Another temple dedicated to the Phoenician god Bel-Hamon was added to Palmyra's temples in 89 AD on top of Jebel Muntar to the far south side of the city, in addition to the Temple of Baal-Shemin, which stood for god Hadad, the deity of fertility, storm and rain, which was widely worshiped in several parts of Syria. The Temple of Baal-Shemin was built by "al-Ma'azeen" tribe (who also built the Temple of Allat) in northern Palmyra in the early first century AD. The cella of Baal-Shemin temple was similar to that of the Temple of Allat, while the trapezoid-shaped court of the temple was built in 67 AD along with a new cella (inner sanctum) in 130-131 AD. A round niche with vine-leave ornamentation was later added along with an elegant hall behind the cella for ceremonial banquets and other rituals.

Temple of Nebu

The Temple of Nebu, the deity of fortune and wisdom, was built in 80-81 AD to the west side of the Temple of Bel. Like the Temple of Bel, the Temple of Nebu had a similar trapezoid shape, while the court is surrounded from the south, east and west sides by colonnades provided at their lower torsos with props for mounting statues. The Temple of Nebu sits on a podium facing southward.

The attention accorded by Palmyrenes to temples also drove them to attach similar importance to stone residential buildings, including the construction of roads and streets, the most famous of which is the Colonnaded Street. This 21m-wide and 2300m-long street follows a direction from the south northward and flanked by porticoes. Inscriptions found on these colonnades show that the Palmyrene street had two functions: a business function clearly seen in the 20 shops lined up east of the Forum; the other function was of religious nature as revealed in the writings dedicated to the sun-god Shamash and the deity "Allat". Scholars, therefore, believe that caravans from Bilad al-Sham used to organize religious processions to visit the Temple of Allat and prayed for blessing and protection of goddess Allat before proceeding on their trips beyond the Syrian steppe.

Expanding their residential areas in this city, Palmyrenes dug canals from the spring of Efqa eastward. They also built the Senate House at the north

side of Agora, while in the north side of the city itself they built the famous Palmyrene bathhouses with all relevant sections: Cold section (Frigidarium); medium heated section (Tepidarium); hot steam section (Caldarium) and changing room (apodyterium).

On the Road of Urbanization in Palmyra

Expecting further discoveries ...

Although excavations at Palmyra over the past many years uncovered several archeological monuments of great importance, we still expect to make further discoveries in the years to come. Archeologists have so far been able to identify certain landmark locations stated in historical records, including: courthouses, the music hall (Odeon), the stadium, race-drome, public sports and fights arena, etc.

The Palmyrene architecture was a mixture of Hellenistic and Roman architecture with clear Syrian influence. Nevertheless, Palmyra acted more freely and independently in designing its public, religious and civil buildings and became an architectural model followed by other cities in Bilad al-Sham.

On the other hand, Palmyrene engineers dealt with their patterns in perspective in terms of building and ornamental elements, which gave the Palmyrene architecture its unique style. When traveler Folney visited Palmyra in the 18th century AD and saw the city's magnificent remains said: "These magnificent and majestic remains from the ancient world still standing today in Palmyra are second to none, neither in Greece nor Italy."

Cities of the Limestone Hills of North Syria

Remains of the "dead cities" included in the Governorate of Idleb are reminiscent of the magnificent culture and beautiful architectural designs once featured these charming cities of late antiquity.

Distributed over an estimated 700 archeological sites, these "dead cities" are situated over white limestone hills, which made them known as "cities of the limestone massif", which stretch 140 km southward at 20-40 km wide (with

the two cities of Korsh “Nabi Huri” and Apamea in the center), bordering Hama, Aleppo and Izaz road in the east, and River Efrin Valley and the Orontes River (al-Assi) in the west. This region may be divided into three areas:

- 1) The north area: It includes Jebel (Mount) Sama’an.
- 2) The middle area: Mount Barisha, North Mountain, el-Dweila and el-Wastani.
- 3) The southern area: Jebel (Mount) al-Zawya, which consists of two masses separated by a valley, where al-Bara city sits.

Settlements in these areas emerged in the early centuries AD and reached their heyday, including a remarkable building activity – with the spread of Christianity between the 4th and 6th centuries AD. Many travelers, scholars and archeologists conducted thorough research and studies about these sites and cities and produced valuable publications, the most important of which was “The Archeological Villages in North Syria” by Russian scholar George Tchalenko (1905-1978). The book consists of three parts dealing with studies conducted on Qalaat Samaan (Citadel of St. Simeon), el-Bara, Rwieha, Jebel Sheikh Barakat, Berj Haidar, al-Atareb, Nabi Huri "Korsh", Ein Dara, Termanin, Deir Hassan, Serjila, Kafr Lana and others.

Commissioned by the French Institute of Near Eastern Archeology, Tchalenko made several drawings of the archeological remains in that region and prepared a set of studies of relevance, but only one complete and comprehensive study was published under the title “Syrian Pulpit Churches”. Studies of similar importance were also carried out by George Tate and Jean-Pierre Sodini from prime university of Paris. Moreover, excavation groups of different specializations worked with variable methodology on all architectural, ecological, social and economic aspects of the limestone hills and “dead cities”.

Dahes

The village of Dahes in Jebel (mount) Barisha is the richest among other villages in the area with its antiquities which represent different historical periods, especially the 5th century AD. Dahes witnessed a trade boom best reflected in its architecture: a marketplace provided with charming galleries, beautiful ornamentation and wonderful buildings and houses which remained occupied by their inhabitants until early 10th century AD.

Excavations at the Dahes site uncovered a Roman hall "Basilica" dating back to the 2nd century AD. Meanwhile, activities of excavation and restoration workshops started at the 12000 sq.m-area complex of Mar Sam'an (Saint Simeon) Cathedral built in 471-476 AD around a pole where Saint Simeon (Sam'an) believed to live and preach on its top for 42 years. The complex was provided with a fence in the 6th century AD and was linked to the village of Deir Sam'an by a sacred road flanked by shops and intersected in the middle by a triumph arch. The entrance leads to a square equipped with large water reservoirs, while an inn sits on the east side built by local artisans. A vaulted passageway next to the eastern inn was used by pilgrims to converge on the main square which was surrounded from east and west by religious buildings. A large gate in the north side leads to four Basilicas arranged in the shape of a cross with an octagon at the center, where the base of this pillar is still seen. The Basilica design, on the other hand, shows sloping northward while the wall holding its outer niche was decorated in multi-storey pillars.

The monastery and its pertinent church were located at the southeastern corner. The complex was fortified after several modifications introduced to the structure of the complex itself in the second half of the 10th century AD.

Cities of the Limestone Hills of North Syria

Geometric Decorations

Religious and residential buildings in the limestone hills and the "dead cities" are remarkably featured by their decorations which provide historical clues about their artisans. These decorations, however, were carried out in several patterns, the most important of which may be listed as follows:

- Patterns inspired from classical shapes which were ornamented in certain friezes, while the other form is represented in individual round shapes. The period extending from mid-fourth century AD to early seventh century AD witnessed the construction of many churches unequally distributed in that region, i.e. a village had one church while the other had two or three churches of the same design and appearance, where façades are clearly featured by opulent ornamentation.

- Application of decorations in the 4th century AD was limited to lintels, arch rings and column capitals. But in the early 5th century AD, Syrian roover architect "Qeiris" left his own artistic imprint on the churches he had built in a number of villages on Jebel Barisha (this is clearly seen in the inscriptions found on these churches). Qeiris had developed the classical floral ornamentation by adding decorative acanthus-leaf friezes, imaginary figures, intersected leaves, double volutes, etc. Qeiris's innovative patterns superseded other designs of Syrian architecture by more than two centuries.

Convergence of artisans and architects from different parts of Bilad al-Sham on this region made architecture, ornamentation and interior design of buildings in the limestone hills gain momentum. As a result, façades of buildings featured distinct patterns which framed windows and vaults. Geometric patterns gradually replaced floral designs and ornamental vine-branches reappeared in the 6th century AD in embossed triangle-shaped leafs, whereas the acanthus branches disappeared, leaving behind veins of the acanthus leafs. Well-known churches built in the first half of the 6th century AD include cathedrals of Qalb-Lozeh, the Eastern Cathedral in Baqirha (built in 546 AD), Cita, Babista, Virgin Mary Cathedral at Sheikh Suleiman.

Ornamentation in the second half of the 6th century featured mixture of multi-trend decorations. This architectural tendency is best illustrated in the eastern church of Behiu, Kafr Kila, Kherbet Tezin and the Trinity Church at Dar-Qita. This diversity and opulence in ornamentation reflect the growing prosperity of that region which witnessed partial cultural unity open to regional and local features as well as foreign influence.

Population & Economic Growth

Several researches and studies on the limestone hills and the "dead cities" revealed that the region had witnessed two successive stages of population and economic growth. The first stage appeared in the 1st century AD, developed in the 2nd century AD and came to an end in mid-third century AD when bubonic plague developed into an epidemic in the region. The second stage started between 340 and 350 AD and lasted variably according to areas in question. Nevertheless, the whole region witnessed quantitative growth represented in the increase of residential areas, houses and population, followed by a qualitative development in the 5th century AD illustrated in adaptation of luxurious construction techniques and diversification of

ornamentation. This luxury is ascribed to increase of agricultural crops which led to trade activity with adjacent cities and regions such as Antioch, Lattakia, Slouqiya, Aleppo, Qansarin, etc.

Population growth in mid-sixth century AD came to a halt due to overpopulation which made production of required crops insufficient and consequently led to extensive migration, deterioration of social life, economic stagnation and finally brought the region into oblivion. We hope that special attention may be attached to this beautiful region to breathe new life in these "dead cities" to regain their charming and brilliant historical monuments. Cultural and religious tourism can serve as a vital tool to reinvigorate the limestone hills in north Syria.

Antiquities of Hama

Citadel of Hama

A Danish archeological mission headed by professor H. Envolt conducted an excavation campaign at the Citadel of Hama, which is situated on the west bank of the Orontes River (al-Assi), from 1932 to 1938. Excavation work at this site uncovered 13 civilizational layers classified from (A) to (M), representing different historical periods and starting from the Neolithic period (6th millennium BC) and ending at the Islamic periods (exactly at the Mamluk era).

The most important of the 13 layers at this citadel is layer No. 3, which represents the 4th millennium BC with relevant findings: painted and decorated potteries; a limestone bust with a head featured by red-color painted lips and two deep eye-sockets, while the head is covered with a conic-shaped hat. This statue is on display at present in the National Museum of Hama.

Layer (E), which represents the Aramaic era, is located in the south side of the Citadel of Hama. This layer includes the remains of a huge gate flanked by two towers, each adorned with a basalt portal relief depicting a lion.

The Grand Mosque of Hama

Located at al-Madina quarter, the Grand Mosque of Hama is the oldest religious monument in the city. The site on which the mosque sits shows three major civilizations different in both language and faith: Roman,

Byzantine and Islamic civilizations. The mosque was originally a Roman temple, converted by the Byzantines into a cathedral and finally into a mosque during the Islamic rule.

The most important architectural element from the Roman temple that is still standing in today's mosque is the eastern façade which is distinct in its charming carved-stone floral decorations.

Remains of the church, on the other hand, can be seen in the west side of today's Grand Mosque of Hama, which still holds the main entrance with its beautiful arch. When Abu Obeida al-Jarrah (one of the ten Companions of Prophet Mohammad PBUH) entered Hama in 17 Hijra/638 AD, he converted the church into a mosque by changing the north side of its building and made the gate open to the courtyard of the mosque. The Dome of the Treasure was later added to the courtyard during the Abbasid rule. Two minarets were also added to the mosque, where the southern minaret dates back to the Zengi rule with an inscription showing that it was built by Imad al-Deen Zengi in 529 Hijra. The second minaret (the northern minaret) features charming ornamentation and beautiful stalactites (muqarnas) that make this minaret look as one of the most wonderful minarets in Islamic architecture.

The west side of the mosque contains an ebony-carved sarcophagus dating back to 678 Hijra/1249 AD, which covers the tombs of King al-Mansour II and his son, King al-Muzaffar III. This corner also contains a splendidly decorated wooden Minbar (pulpit).

Mosaics of Hama's First Cathedral

A mosaic flooring of a church was uncovered at the southwestern side of Hama Citadel. A three-line Greek inscription found at this site revealed that the church was built in the 5th century AD (415 AD) in the multi-decorative Basilica style. Mosaics at the west side of the cathedral are viewed as the most charming ornamentation of the Basilica with large star-like patterns comprising different ornamentation. Each star-shaped pattern consists of an octagon with square, pentagonal or hexagonal figures stemming from the eight sides of the major octagon, including various geometric decorations within these figures, which altogether depict sublime artistry and creativity.

The mosaic-work also includes different shapes of the cross where some of them portray the cross by combining the two Greek letters (X) and (P) which

are the initials of "Christ" in the Greek language. Another mosaic composition of the cross consists of two intersected lines. The mosaic pieces used as ornamentation in the Cathedral of Hama feature natural colors and are beautifully arranged in hues, tints and three-dimensional formation.

Al-Nouri Mosque of Hama

Situated at the most beautiful archeological site of the city on the west bank of the Orontes, and exactly at the north side of Al Taifour quarter, the Nouri Mosque of Hama was built in 558 Hijra/1163 AD by Nour al-Din Zengi on the site of an old monastery (Qazma Monastery). The main gate of the mosque is located at the north side of the building and can be reached through 14 steps. Three historical inscriptions can be seen on the north façade. The main inscription consists of two lines carved in Arabic calligraphy, giving date of construction as 558 Hijra, and name of builder as Governor Nour al-Din Mahmoud Zengi bin Aqsanqar; the second Greek-language inscription highlights the grandeur of the city and the glory of its heroes in the face of the domineering Romans; the third one, inscribed in Arabic, reads that the mosque was a center for educational seminars.

Like other mosques, the Nouri Mosque of Hama consists of a courtyard surrounded by arcades. A major Iwan facing qibla (the direction in which all Muslims turn their faces in prayers and that direction is towards the Ka'aba in Mecca) contains the prayer hall (nave) and a charming wooden minbar (pulpit). The northwestern minaret of the mosque is distinct in its quadrangle shape and decorative stalactites (muqarnas) which adorn the upper section of the minaret.

Bimaristan (hospital) al-Nouri (also built by Nour al-Din Zengi in 560 Hijra/1164 AD) is another historical building which lies at the south side of this mosque.

Hama's Mosque of Abu al-Feda

It lies on north bank of the Orontes River (al-Assi), north of Hama Citadel. It was built by Prince of Hama, Imad al-Din Ismael Abu al-Fida, in 727 Hijra/1326 AD. The dome of its mihrab (niche) is highly ornamented in mosaics and mother-of-pearl. A braid-like marble column in the shape of interlaced serpents stands in the center of the two eastern windows in the prayer hall, which is why sometimes called by the people as the "Serpents' Mosque". Mausoleum of Prince Abu al-Feda (d. 732 Hijra/1331 AD) lies in the north side of the courtyard.

Antiquities of Hama

The Norias (Waterwheels) of Hama

Hama is well known for its Norias (waterwheels), which emit pleasant clamour while carrying water from the Orontes River to drop it into ducts and canals that lead to houses, mosques, fields, hammams (bathhouses), khans (caravansaries), etc. It is believed that Arameans first came with the idea of the "waterwheel" in the 8th century BC, which represented the golden age for the Aramaic Kingdom of Hama. However, the oldest historical reference to the "waterwheel" was represented on a mosaic panel dating back to the 5th century AD unearthed at Apamea, and is now on display at the National Museum of Hama.

Hama has several waterwheels along the Orontes, stretching from the Rastan town to the village of al-Asaharneh. There are 17 surviving Norias with different names, but the most famous of these Norias existing in the city include the Big Bushriya Noria and the Small Bushriya Noria, which were both named after Sheikh Bushr, who is buried under a dome next to these two waterwheels. The other two important waterwheels in the city are the twin Ottoman Norias, situated to the south of the Bushriya Norias. A pleasant coffee house was built by the Municipality of Hama on the riverside to enable tourists to enjoy the enchanting scenery of Hama's Norias.

The largest of Hama's waterwheels (al-Mohammadiya Noria) is found in the Bab al-Nahr quarter. It measures 21 meters in diameter. The channel of this waterwheel comprises 15 stone-built arches. A two-line inscription lies on the eastern side of the channel's 13th arch, recording the name of Hama kingdom sponsor who built its stone base in 763 Hijra/1316 AD.

The second largest waterwheel (the Ma'mouriya Noria) is adjacent to Hama's Museum of Popular Traditions. It measures 20m in diameter and has 120 buckets. A four-line inscription on the south side of the stone base of the Ma'mouriya Noria records the name of its maker as Prince Balbak, who built it in 857 Hijra/1453 AD during the Mamluk rule in Hama.

A smaller waterwheel located to the west of the Ma'mouriya Noria is known as the Mouayadia Noria and was built during the Ottoman rule. Another waterwheel (the Ottoman Noria) can also be seen in the north side of the same area. Hama has as many as 17 norias, the most important of which

include Ja'bariya Noria and the Central Sahyounia Noria, while the outskirts of the city contain over 100 waterwheels situated in the east, south and west sides of Hama.

The Tiafour Quarter

This quarter lies southeast of Hama's Citadel on the west bank of the Orontes river and stretches from Hama's gate in the south to the Bridge of Kilani in the north. This quarter is a typical model of the old city of Hama. Like similar quarters in Hama's old city, the Taifour quarter hosts a number of historical houses – which have been all recorded as historical buildings of the city. These traditional courtyard houses seem to embrace each other within a network of narrow alleyways and occupy the greater part of the neighborhood. The exterior border of the Taifour quarter constitutes a fortified wall, behind which lie the main parts: borders, alleyways, vaults and monuments.

Museums

There are two museums in Hama: Museum of Popular Traditions, which has been housed in a historical building, and a newly-built museum (inaugurated in 1999), which contains findings unearthed at archeological sites of Hama.

Antiquities of Hama

Museum of Popular Traditions

It has been housed in an historical palace (the Azem Palace). It is viewed as the most charming architectural monument from the Ottoman period. This palace, which was built by governor Asa'ad Pasha al-Azem in 1153 Hijra/1740 AD, consists of two sections:

- The Southern Section (haramlik), i.e. the family section, consists of a two-storey building. The ground floor is accessible by a passageway and leads to a large courtyard with an octagonal-shaped fountain in the center, which receives water from the Ma'mouriya and Ja'bariya norias.

The frescoed exterior wall of the beautiful liwan, which opens onto the courtyard, portrays different scenes, including windows overlooking a meadow, elegant columns and wonderful capitals as well as a poem highlighting the construction of the pool and its metal-lion-shaped fountains.

The upper floor can be reached by roofed stone staircase that leads to a roofless court with an octagonal fountain in the center. The open court is surrounded by a set of rooms, the most attractive of which is the main reception hall (the golden qa'a) preceded by a large marble and granite colonnaded walkway.

- The Northern Section (salamlik), i.e. male guests and visitors section, was built by Nasouh Pasha al-Azem in 1195 Hijra/1780 AD. It also consists of a two-storey building, where the ground floor contains an oblong courtyard paved in colored marble with an octagonal fountain in the center.

The upper floor contains a number of rooms with a wooden-roofed walkway in the front supported by stone and wood pillars. The building has an "hammam" similar to bathhouses with its relevant sections built by Mouayad Pasha al-Azem, son of Nasouh Pasha, in 1246 Hijra/1830 AD. The former completed the construction of the palace by adding a stable in the south side of the haramlik's ground floor. Mouayad Pasha had also built a wing on top of the stable, corresponding to the "golden qa'a" which is also located in the south side of haramlik section.

Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums purchased this exquisite palace from the Azem family in 1956 and turned it into the Museum of Popular Traditions in 2002.

National Museum of Hama

Inaugurated in 1999, this museum contains the archeological findings unearthed in Hama. The antiquities are displayed in five halls and each one of them represents a certain historical period:

Hall (A): Contains finds of prehistoric and Neolithic periods as well as potteries dating back to the 4th and 2nd millenniums BC.

Hall (B): Contains antiquities dating back to the 1st millennium BC.

Hall (C): Contains monuments of classical Roman and Greek periods.

Hall (D): Contains antiquities of Islamic periods.

Besides, the museum includes three wonderful gardens displaying historical stonework from different eras: mosaics, capitals, columns, etc. The most

charming of these three gardens is the western garden which contains historical mosaic masterpieces.

Hammams (bathhouses)

Several hammams (bathhouses) were built in Hama, some of which are still standing, while others were duly recorded and demolished. The architectural monuments of these hammams represent living example of traditional social life of time immemorial. They also bring to light the attention accorded by Syrians on hygiene and cleanliness.

These hammams adopted a wonderful architectural technique which protects bathers from health hazards emanating from sharp changes in temperature. A typical hammam maintains three sections with gradual rising temperature: al-Barrani (outer/cold section or rest room), al-Wastani (Tepidarium or intermediate section) and al-Jawwani (Caldarium or hot steam section).

The most famous of Hama's hammams include:

The Sultan Hammam:

Located to the north of Nour al-Din Al-Shahid Mosque, the Sultan Hammam was built by King al-Mansour Mohammad son of King al-Muzaffar Taqiyydin Omar (d. 617 Hijra/1220 AD).

The Obeisi Hammam:

It lies at the north side of Orontes. It is an endowment by King of Hama, al-Muzaffar Taqiyydin Omar s/o of Shahinshah s/o Ayyub (d. 587 Hijra/1731 AD).

The As'adiya Hammam:

Built by Asa'ad Pasha Azem in the Souk al-Tawil in 1144 Hijra/1731 AD.

The Darwishiya Hammam:

Located at Murabet locality; the Ottoman Hammam at the Bashura locality; the North Halak Hammam at the Souk Mansouriya (Souk al-Taweel), which is the oldest of Hama's bathhouses.

The Mouayadiya Hammam was built by governor of Hama, Ahmed Mouayad Pasha al-Azem, and is now annexed to Hama's Museum of Popular Traditions. It displays plaster models demonstrating ways of bathing in these traditional bathhouses.

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

- **Antiquities from Syria**
- **Directorate General of Antiquities & Museums**
- **The Mosaics Museum**
- **Historical Amphitheaters in South Syria**
- **Jableh's Amphitheater**
- **Saladin's Citadel**

Historical Museum of Damascus

It is one of the most charming historical houses of Damascus which was built 200 years ago and was the property of former Syrian Prime Minister, the late Khaled Azem, and is now possessed by the Ministry of Culture as the Historical Museum of Damascus.

Restoration works at the Historical Museum of Damascus started back in 1970 by a restoration committee comprising top technicians and experts who completed their mission in 1983. Located at the old Suq Sarouja, the museum is viewed as one of the masterpieces of traditional Damascene houses with its various sections and distinguished décor which form an integrated composition and texture of creativity, skill and artistic taste.

Detailed description of this historical building can be better explored by visitors who will certainly find out by themselves how the restoration works carried out by skillful hands have regained the beauty and magnificence of this palace, including its ceilings, floorings, fountains, doors, wood paneling, stonework, stucco and other ornamental elements which altogether breathe new life in this wonderful architectural monument.

Credit goes in the first place to the "unknown soldiers" who remade and restored the palace through strenuous efforts and successfully and even amazingly regained the originality of this palace as it once stood 200 years ago. We can seize the opportunity to cherish the memory of those artists

who diligently worked on restoring this palace, especially those who left their artistic imprint before they passed away: late Khaled Rahmoun, Bashir Khayyat, Majed Kheir, late Kamel Agha, late Muheddin Shalabi, Mohammad Awadh, Abdullah al-Ahmar, Mazhar al-Sheikh Oghli, Yousef Badran and late Ihsan Mahayri.

Al-Rasafa

It lies 30 km south of the city of Raqqa. Studies about prehistoric life have shown that the Euphrates Basin had greatly contributed to evolution and development of the ancient man and made the region gain distinct historical importance. The oldest reference to the city of Rasafa was made in an Assyrian document dating back to the 19th century BC when this city was known as "Rasappa".

During the Hellenistic (Greco-Roman) period, the Euphrates Basin regained its original significance, where Rasafa became a chain of forts along the Arab-Raqqian border protecting the country from the Euphratesene invasions and later from the Sassanid attacks. Rasafa later became one of the key cities of the Palmyrene civilization which stretched from Libya in the west to the Arab Gulf in the east.

The spiritual importance of Rasafa won world attention when a Roman soldier called Sergius was sentenced to death by the pagan Romans in Rasafa in 305 AD because he refused to disbelieve in Christianity. A big church named after St. Sergius (the Sergiopolis Cathedral) was built to commemorate this man who sacrificed his life in defense of Christianity. The Sergiopolis Cathedral was the largest and most enchanting of all other churches in the East, and even became a sacred destination for pilgrims.

The Arab-Ghassanid population of this region embraced Christianity in the 4th century AD and considered themselves the heirs of the Arab Nabateans. Their power grew bigger in the course of time until they became one of the largest and strongest tribes in the Syria steppe, thus prompting the Byzantines to assign them with the duty of defending the steppe and realizing security therein. The Ghassanids, therefore, constructed various buildings in their city of Rasafa and built a wall to fortify the city and provided it with huge water reservoirs to meet the demand of its growing population, visiting pilgrims as well as the city's trade and economic activities and strategic defense position.

During the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565 AD) and his Membej-origin wife Theodora, Rasafa maintained its considerable importance. At that time, Ghassanid King al-Harith II (529-569 AD) became a brilliant name for repelling the Persian and Sassanid attacks on the eastern border of the Byzantine Empire, thus prompting Emperor Justinian himself to invite the Ghassanid King al-Harith II in 563 to visit his court. Historians recount how this Arab king received a warm and honoring welcome, especially when appeared in his traditional Arabian costume and virile features which won him the admiration and respect of his hosts. Credit also went to King al-Harith II for renovating the wall of Rasafa and its great Cathedral and other important buildings which are still standing today.

Historians also gave detailed account of the events which took place in Rasafa and the treasures and gifts presented to Bishop of Antioch. The archeological monuments of Rasafa stretching over a distance of three kilometers outside the wall of the city had been buried in earth over the centuries. Historical sources make direct reference to the Arab-Ghassanid contribution in building Rasafa and increasing the power of the city. When Arab Muslims emerged as a new power in the Arab Peninsula, Rasafa became a preferred summer resort for the Omayyads who made the city a center for their cultural and sports activity, particularly hunting. It is worth mentioning that Caliph Hisham bin Abdul Malik moved from "Qasr al-Hir al-Sharqi" (the Eastern Hir Palace) to Rasafa (724-748 AD), where he contributed to development of the city's constructions and built two palaces – excavations have recently led to the discovery of one of them – to the extent that the city became known as "Rasafat Hisham" (Rasafa of Hisham). The city became a mecca for visiting celebrities, including notable classical Arab poets Jarir and Farazdaq.

Arab geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, who visited Rasafa in 1222 AD, described its buildings as marvelous works of architecture of all time. Rasafa lost its brilliance and glory when its population fled the city and headed for Salamiya and Hama to evade the ferocious Mogul invasion which wrecked havoc on Baghdad and other cities in the region in 1259 AD.

Since 1952 local and German archeological expeditions have been conducting excavation and restoration works in Rasafa. Besides the historical buildings, reservoirs and mosaic works uncovered by the

excavation teams, a treasure of silver and gold cups and incensories with Syriac inscriptions were unearthed in 1982.

Kora

This ceramic statue, which was discovered at the region of Homs in central Syria, is today displayed at the National Museum of Damascus. It measures 12.5 x 9cm and dates back to the 1st century AD. It is a vase made of green ceramics coated with enamel and has the shape of a bust portraying the mythological "Kora", daughter of Demeter, goddess of the Earth. Here, Kora's face looks extremely beautiful with curled hair encircling her face hanging down in plaits on her shoulders.

Al-Rasatan Sarcophagus

This fantastic marble sarcophagus, which dates back to mid-third century AD, was unearthed near the town of al-Rastan in 1979. The sarcophagus features a battle between two warring sides, Greeks and Trojans. This was paraphrased by archeologists through the symbols found on the Greek war ships and events of the Trojan War as recounted by renowned Greek poet, Homer. The battle broke out in Troy in 1184 BC in a Turkish town known today as "Hisarlik".

The Greeks were represented by Agamemnon, Aulis and Achilles, while the Trojans were represented by Hector and his son Priamus.

Interpretation of the symbols of the legend showed that the Greek side in this wonderful sculpture had sought the help of the sea god Poseidon, while the Trojans were supported by female warriors led by Penthesilea. The Orontes river regions were represented in other legendary figures. Victory was finally won by the Greeks, the legend said. The other side of the sarcophagus contains the mythological phoenixes which have the body of lion and head and wings of eagle (symbols of power). Such legendary creatures were used in ancient times to protect tombs and cemeteries.

However, there is no inscription suggesting who was buried in this coffin, but the marble sculpture which contains the historical epic was certainly

borrowed from the Aegean Sea. The sculpture itself, it was found out, was performed by our local artists who were influenced by the Hellenic culture.

Goddess of Victory

This wonderful black basalt-carved statue dates back to the 1st century AD. The statue, which was unearthed in Syria's southern Governorate of Sweida, represents the goddess of victory standing on a quadrangle pedestal which features a Greek-language inscription. Here, the goddess of victory appears wearing a pair of sandals and a military uniform which consists of a dress fluttering backward and a short pleated garment tightened with a belt under her breasts, while the head of the Medusa (the Pharaoh) lies in between. The posture of her right hand suggests that it originally grabbed a spear. The hair of the victory goddess appears, here, curled and swept back with a helmet on top of her head. This work of art clearly shows that ancient Syrian artists had the ability, skill and creativity to make such delicate sculptures in hard materials, such as basalt. Although the statue features classical standards, the style of sculpture – compared to other statues performed in the same historical period – does not leave room to any doubt about the indigenous Syrian performance of this masterpiece. The 151cm-high statue of goddess of victory is now kept for display at the National Museum of Damascus.

Mothers Always Held in High Esteem

Mother in Syria has been held in high esteem since time immemorial, where she has always enjoyed the highest value in Syria's ancient civilizations. Then Christianity came to further honor her status on account of Virgin Mary. And Islam finally crowned the status of mother with a set of divine directives, exalting her and even revering her as part of religious duties.

Aleppo Citadel

The history of Aleppo Citadel is as old as Aleppo itself. This citadel received adequate account by historians over the centuries, lauding its construction, the genius of its defense architecture and its well-fortification and invulnerability which remained steadfast against numerous hostilities. But it was defeated only once as a result of a trick as reported by folk tales.

History of Aleppo Citadel

In his book about the Citadel of Aleppo, Shauki Sha'th says that Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander the Great's commanders and founder of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria, who divided Bilad al-Sham after the latter's death, was the one who built the Citadel of Aleppo (in the Hellenistic architectural design and not its present form). Seleucus Nicator built the citadel on a hill overlooking the city of Aleppo. Archeological findings unearthed at the citadel itself indicate that the site had been inhabited long before the citadel was built.

The citadel as it appears today was built by King al-Zahir Ghazi son of Saladin Ayyubi, who set up a huge workshop inside the castle itself and built sections of its wall and defensive towers and fortified the citadel's invulnerability to become a unique structure in terms of beautiful architecture and strong defenses.

Genius in defense capability ... unique architectural design

The citadel is surrounded by a moat which can be filled with water in time of sieges to act as a defensive barrier, disabling enemy troops from breaking into the citadel and hamper their advance. If they managed to cross the water moat, they will face a slick-stone fence difficult to climb encircling the whole citadel, thus gives the chance to defenders to hunt infiltrators and drive them back.

The citadel contains a set of buildings, including two mosques, a big hammam (similar to bathhouses), a marketplace, houses, ammunition depots, food and supplies storehouses and as many as 44 defensive towers and turrets. It also contains the Grand Court which looks like a fortified tower. However, the genius of the citadel's architecture is best manifested in its network of underground web-like tunnels which lead to residential areas in old Aleppo and even outside the city itself. If the citadel fell under siege, these tunnels would rescue the whole people of Aleppo. This defensive technique was basically invented to protect the people in the wake of attacks launched by the Moguls and Crusaders.

The history of Aleppo Citadel is recorded on the façades and gates of its buildings. Some of these buildings date back to the "Mirdasi" era (named after Governor of Aleppo, Saleh bin Mirdas) and the Nouri era (named after Nour al-Din Zengi). Other sections of the citadel were built during the

Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman rule. But the most outstanding of its buildings were built during the Ayyubid and Mamluk eras.

Since 1970, the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums has been conducting excavations at the Aleppo Citadel, but the old layer of the hill on which the citadel sits has not been explored as of yet. Nevertheless, studies suggest that this hill had once been an important site which played a vital role in the history of Aleppo and the region. Should exploration of the history of the hill bore fruit, the results will certainly be of considerable importance to both the city and the region as well.

Madrassa Zahiriyya

Madrassa (religious school) Zahiriyya was named after Mamluk ruler al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baybars al-Bunduqdari, Sultan of Egypt and Syria who came up with the idea of building this religious school besides the Madrasa Adiliyya already standing north of the Omayyad Mosque. But Baybars did not live long to see his idea materialized on the ground when he died in Damascus in 676 Hijra/1277 AD, and the school was later built by his son, King al-Saeed Abu al-Ma'ali, who also passed away in Damascus and was buried next to his father in a mausoleum inside the Madrasa Zahiriyya itself.

Madrassa Zahiriyya may be one of the most wonderful historical buildings still standing today. It was provided with an elevated dome, highly ornamented in colored-glass mosaic-work like the one found in the Omayyad Mosque. Madrasa Zahiriyya is also distinct in its stonework and marvelous mihrab (niche) which is viewed by historians one of the most beautiful mihrabs in Damascus.

It may be noted in this context that Sultan Baybars was a brilliant name in the Mamluk dynasty. His bravery became part of the folk tales recounting his victory over the moguls in "Jalout Battle" which drove them out of Damascus. Sultan Baybars spent most of his life fighting and defeating the crusaders. Many forts, castles and cities were named after Baybars to honor his glorious victories.

Madrassa Zahiriyya was turned into a public library when at the near end of the Ottoman rule, Midhat Pasha, governor of Damascus, ordered to have books and rare manuscripts be kept at this library which became known as the "Public Library". Sheikh Taher al-Jazairi led the campaign of collecting

the manuscripts. The valuable collection of these manuscripts at both Madrasa Zahiriyya and Madrasa Adiliyya laid the ground for establishing the first Arabic Language Complex in 1919 and the first museum at the hands and efforts of renowned Damascene intellectual, Mohammad Kurd Ali.

Palmyra's Lion of Allat

This huge 350cm-high orthostat was discovered in 1977 at Palmyra's Temple of Allat. This relief represents the lion of the Arabian goddess Allat. Here, the lion appears leaning on its forelegs with the head rising up in the air, while its open mouth shows its teeth. The lion looks vigilant with its wide open eyes, watching worshipers coming into the temple to seek the protection of goddess Allat. The general appearance and posture of this lion brings comfort and peace of mind to worshipers. The orthostat also portrays how an ibex held by this large lion sits peacefully and safe. Director of Palmyra's Antiquities Department, Mr. Khaled al-Asa'ad, describes the Lion of Allat as a living example of how horrible power can serve the peace and safety of man. The ibex sits calm between the legs of a huge and fierce lion, thus showing the people that those who enter the temple shall be as safe as the ibex is, and protected by the mighty power of goddess Allat as embodied in this lion. This is an earthly and heavenly belief embraced by Arab societies to curb the might of the powerful over the weak.

A Palmyrene inscription on the lion's left foreleg reads "Goddess Allat shall bless the one who sheds no blood at the Temple". These words reflect the symbolic meaning of this orthostat in the deep-rooted Arab culture. The relief of the Lion of Allat, which dates back to the 1st century BC, is second to none. Its simple and clear features reflect the style of the Palmyrene sculptor in an inherent realistic objective.

Bosra Amphitheater

The Bosra Amphitheater is one of the marvelous architectural monuments in Central Asia and the ancient world. This well-preserved historical building with almost all relevant sections have withstood natural disasters over the centuries, reviving its function as a theater used today for holding festivals and other events. The Bosra Amphitheater is unique in its standard

architectural measurements and dimensions, particularly the acoustic system of sound amplification which goes in harmony with the height and depth of the building itself.

It is interesting to know that this theater, which was built in the 2nd century AD in Bosra (also known as Bosra al-Sham) remained in a good condition under debris for centuries before it was discovered and unearthed immediately after Syria's independence in 1947 in the context of a large-scale excavation project which brought to light the hidden treasure of the Bosra Amphitheater.

It is one of the world's few amphitheaters whose auditoriums rest on hills which help in speedy evacuation of the theater that accommodates over 15000-strong audience through its many exists. It may be recalled that the Bosra Amphitheater accommodated an audience of 30,000 people in a gala night performance by renowned Arab singer "Fairouz" in 1985.

It is worth mentioning that Bosra Amphitheater was changed during Islamic eras into a fortress which played an important historical role following the Arab conquest up to the Middle Ages, i.e. the Crusades.

Jerf al-Ahmar's Bird

This important sculpture was discovered at Jerf al-Ahmar site near the Euphrates river, east of Aleppo. It is distinct in terms of making and modeling, particularly when we realize that it dates back to the 10th millennium BC, i.e. at the threshold of the Neolithic period. What makes this statuette a unique work of art is that its surface portrays an owl, but when turned to the reverse side it appears as a serpent head.

This composition clearly suggests the importance of the archeological site of Jerf al-Ahmar with regard to early artistic and religious features of development of human thoughts.

Venus of Syria

Unearthed in Syria's central city of Homs, this statue depicts Venus, goddess of love and beauty, wearing a dress and a gown. Eros, god of love, sits on

her left shoulder and an apple in her hand, while her right arm is raised holding her shoe to defend herself against recurrent harassment by Pan, god of shepherds and flocks. Her son, Eros, tries to drive Pan back. This statue was found broken into seven pieces. It was re-shaped and restored but the feet of Venus are missing.

Scholars maintain that the numerous replicas of this statue in Syria and the Levant indicate to the popularity of this legend as modeled by the Syrian sculptor in a noticeable pose of local symbols in the 2nd century AD which do not bear resemblance to mother statue of Venus in ancient Rome modeled by renowned sculptor Archelaus during the reign of Julius Caesar.

Qasr al-Hir al-Sharqi

Remains of Qasr (palace) al-Hir al-Sharqi lie in the Syrian steppe between Palmyra and Rasafa (at a distance of 100 km from Palmyra and 15 km away from the village of Taiba). The site contains buildings ascribed by most archeologists to the Omayyad rule, exactly the reign of Caliph Hisham bin Abdul Malik (690-743 AD). The site consists of a large palace, or most likely a small town, encircled by a wall. This opinion is supported by the several residential units, mosque, olive presses, etc. found at the site. The wall of the town has four gates and several streets which meet at the town center. A large palatial residence similar in design to other Omayyad palaces found in Bilad al-Sham. Relics of an hammam (bathhouse) were also uncovered outside the palace. Water was carried through a channel from "al-Kom" spring (30 km north-west of the palace) to this hammam and neighboring fields and farms. Historical sources suggest that Qasr al-Hir al-Sharqi was rebuilt during the Abbasid period in the 10th century AD. The wall of the palace is built in carved stone and bricks, and is also supported by semi-round towers. Qasr al-Hir al-Sharqi stands today to testify to Caliph Hisham bin Abdul Malik's interest, or rather fondness in architecture and construction of palaces, which served as a Court of his rule as well as recreation resorts for his hobby of hunting and other cultural activities. Notable classical Arab poets, including Farazdaq and Jarir, were among the frequent visitors of the Caliph and composed many poems in praise of Hisham bin Abdul Malik.

Damascus Citadel

It is one of two citadels in Syria built on ground level (the other is Bosra Citadel), while other castles and citadels were built on hills or mountains. The Damascus Citadel, built eight centuries ago, is one of the Ayyubid citadels which remained well preserved up to the present time. The citadel was used earlier by the Atabegs, who ruled Damascus before the Ayyubids took over power in Egypt and Syria. Until the reign of Nour al-Din Zengi, the Atabegs kept the citadel in a good condition and maintained its fortification. The citadel is believed to have been built on an early military spot during the Omayyad rule.

When Saladin al-Ayyubi entered Damascus in 1174 AD, he took the citadel as his court and military headquarters. Historians say that Saladin used to burn the midnight oil at a special tower of the citadel listening to recitation of verses from the Holy Koran by the guard staying the night on watch. Saladin spent his days in Damascus at the citadel, which was the Muslim world's center for cultural, religious, military and political traditions.

After Saladin's death, al-Malik al-Adil ascended the throne and launched a large-scale campaign to renovate and improve the citadel and reinforce its defenses. It was a long-term process which lasted 12 years to make the Damascus Citadel go hand in hand with modern military techniques of the time. Four Sultans who successively ruled Damascus followed in the footsteps of al-Malik al-Adil in improving the citadel. Al-Malik al-Adil had also expanded the old border of the Seljuk citadel by advancing its wall on all sides forward until it took a rectangular shape measuring 220m x 160m, while its gates were reinforced and became a center for running the state affairs, including a postal department, coinage and ordnance factory. The sections of the Damascus Citadel also contained a prison, a marketplace, an hammam (bathhouse) and a number of mosques. A palace was later built at the western side of the citadel to become the center for governors of Damascus until the moguls invaded the city in 1260 AD.

The Damascus Citadel is viewed as an important model of military buildings in the Ayyubid era, especially its multi-storey towers, where every tower has a big vaulted hall, while upper floors were used as wards for soldiers. The Antiquities and Museums Department has been conducting restoration works for the Damascus Citadel, while a joint archeological mission has been involved in a large-scale excavation campaign aimed at uncovering further clues of the history of the Damascus Citadel.

Qal'at Ja'bar

Qal'at (citadel) Ja'bar stands on a limestone hill, four kilometers off the Euphrates. However, after the creation of the Assad Lake and the Euphrates Dam in 1974, the castle became surrounded all around with water and appeared as an islet in the middle of the newly-created lake.

Located 50 km off Raqqa and 15 km off al-Thawra city, Qal'at Ja'bar is encircled by two walls comprising 34 defensive towers and turrets, standing either in four-sided or semi-round shapes. A round minaret built in an Abbasid style also stands inside the castle.

Qal'at Ja'bar was built by Ja'bar bin Sabiq al-Qusheiri, also known as Sabiq al-Din (11th century AD). In his biographical dictionary "Wafayat al-Ayan", historian Ibn Khallikan says that when Dawsar, valet of King of Hira, al-Nu'man bin al-Munther, was left by his master (al-Nu'man) at the outskirts of Sham, he built this castle and was named "al-Dawsariya Castle" after Dawsar. However, in his book titled "Qal'at Ja'bar", archeologist Abdul Razzaq Zarzour (who conducted several studies and investigations over this castle for two decades) says that findings unearthed around the wall of the citadel in 1970 showed that the history of Qal'at Ja'bar dates back to an early period other than the one mentioned in several historical writings. Relics of Byzantine potteries and coins dating back to the 6th century AD were uncovered at the site. The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums participated in the international campaign for saving the Euphrates antiquities and monuments by restoring several parts of the Qal'at Ja'bar's wall and towers. Strenuous efforts by the Antiquities Department for restoration of Qal'at Ja'bar are still underway. The said Department was able to produce bricks in the same old specifications in special ovens built for this purpose at the site of the citadel itself (this unique citadel was built in baked-clay bricks). Restoration works for Qal'at Ja'bar have not stopped since the commencement of the international campaign for preservation of archeological monuments at the Euphrates Basin.

The Worshipper

This statue was discovered at the site of Tel Khweira. It represents a long-bearded man during a religious service with his arms held up to his chest and hands joined together, while his combed hair shows a center parting. He wears a fringed loincloth which covers the lower part of his body from waist to beneath the knees. A deep spirit of faith can be seen in his expressionistic upright posture, features, arms and hands, especially when we come to know that this alabaster-carved statue, which is displayed at the National Museum of Damascus, dates back to the 3rd millennium BC.

Story of a Cuneiform Tablet

This cuneiform tablet dating back to the 13th century BC was discovered at the archives of the Royal Palace in Ugarit. Interpretation of the writing inscribed on this tablet took a long time. It was sealed at the center by Hittite King Tudhalya IV. The document deals with the divorce of King Ammistamru II of Ugarit from his wife, daughter of Benteshina, King of Amurru. The document also addressed recovery of dowry and arrangements for succession of throne in Ugarit.

Translation of the cuneiform text inscribed around the Royal Seal reads as follows: "Sealing of the supreme king – King Hatti: Ammistamru, King of Ugarit married daughter of Benteshina, King of Amurru; she sought to cause him distress and illness of his head; Ammistamru, King of Ugarit, divorced Benteshina's daughter for ever."

The text also includes certain arrangements for recovery of dowry and other arrangements for succession of the throne as well as measures against the divorced queen's children should they thought of returning with her to her homeland.

The text concludes by emphasizing that the dismissed queen shall not have the right to make any claims against her children or brothers-in-law because they all belong to Ammistamru, King of Ugarit. However, if she makes claims, this tablet will defeat her.

Reading of this important document gives scholars a better opportunity to be familiar with a significant code of conduct related to socio-political relations, arrangements for succession of the throne, religious icons and

names of gods and goddesses featured in drawings and symbols of the Royal Sealing.

Story of the Damascene "Qa'a" at National Museum of Damascus

When Damascus came under bombardment of French warplanes and artillery fire during the sweeping people's uprising against the French occupation in 1925, houses at the "Sidi Amoud" locality, near Suq (bazaar) Hamidiya, which were both residence and center for heroes of Syria's national movement, were damaged by the French attacks. The house of great Syrian poet Jamil Mardam Bek's grandfather was among the many beautiful traditional houses damaged in the French shelling.

Few sections of the this house were ravaged by fire, but fortunately the highly decorated wood paneling and other ornamental marble-work – common in similar old traditional Damascus houses – escaped the devastation. Following Syria's independence in 1947, Jamil Mardam Bek planned to restore the house of his grandfather, but found out that it was a sizeable project that might be longer than his lifetime. He, therefore, decided to present it as a gift to the National Museum of Damascus, a place which condenses human history with its best intellectual, cultural and religious creativity.

Restoration work and remaking of the decorated wood paneling, doors and marble-work and all other elements of ornamentation and Arabic calligraphy decorations involved continuous efforts by the late "Abu Suleiman al-Khayyat", a gifted restorer and artist, and his sons from 1958 to 1963. The "qa'a" (main reception hall at the Damascene traditional house) of Bait Mardam Bek finally regained its original charming elegance and became a model for Syrian folkloric art of the 18th century. An intelligent and skilful artist and restorer, the late "al-Khayyat" redesigned this "qa'a" on a geometric basis because it was impossible to relocate it according to the original design at a larger area within the premises of the National Museum. The rebuilt "qa'a" became a marvelous work of art, hosting various historical and cultural seminars.

The remake of this "qa'a" drew world attention to the importance of decorative texture and calligraphy in building traditional Damascene houses.

The elegance of its ornamentation captures the imagination of visitors of the National Museum.

Al-Khayyat, master of restorers, has established a unique school of décor art and set forth the principles of an art that came close to extinction. He led later generation of students to become prominent artists capable of preserving an important element of Syria's heritage.

Temple of Bel

During excavations carried out by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums at the Temple of Bel in Palmyra over the past few decades under the supervision of Dr. Adnan al-Bunni, relics of another temple dating back to the Hellenistic period were discovered under the Temple of Bel seen today. Under that older temple, archeological remains dating back to the 2nd millennium BC were also unearthed at a depth of six meters, throwing more light on this sacred spot.

Construction of the temple seen today dates back to the 1st century AD and was exactly inaugurated in 32 AD but was destroyed in the wake of the war fought between Romans and Palmyrenes led by Queen Zenobia in 272-273 AD. It is believed that this temple was basically dedicated to god "Bel" and was also a complex for Palmyrene gods and goddesses.

The Temple of Bel is the largest and most wonderful of all other temples in the East. It consists of an enclosed quadrangle-shaped building measuring 210m x 205m with the cella in the middle of the temple.

Classical standards of architecture can be easily seen in the building and cella of this temple. Geometric and floral ornamentation and sections of the temple's wall constitute a wonderful composition of Eastern epic elements distinct in their Palmyrene art which derived its essentials from selected world arts.

This temple remained dedicated to god Bel until the end of 3rd century AD, then converted into a church during the Byzantine period and continued to be a place of worship for Christians up to the early 7th century AD. It was later turned into an Islamic fort, where the cella was changed into a mosque.

This situation lasted until 1929 when local inhabitants living amid Palmyra's monuments were relocated in their modern city of today.

Thousands of Years Ago ...

This figurine was discovered near the city of Raqq at an archeological site called "Tel Sabi Abiyadh". The statuette symbolizes the mother goddess in an exceptional aesthetic style. We can see how the breasts pop out in this bust and are closely joined to the arms, while the waist is narrow and the hips are wide. The head of the statue is missing – a small hole across the shoulders indicates that the head was once there. Remains of black and red paint on this 6.2cm-high figurine also suggest that it was coated with colored paint. Archeologists were able to determine that it dates back to the 6th millennium BC, a period that defines an early stage of art talents of primitive man. This figurine was shaped in clay and is now kept at the Raqqa Museum.

Jupiter

This rare 9cm-high statuette was discovered in southern Syria (Horan). It represents Jupiter, the supreme god in Roman mythology who held the senior political role in the Roman nation because he epitomized unity and territorial integrity of the vast Roman Empire. Jupiter also led Roman armies towards victory and protected the law and statute of the Empire. Here, his hands seem to have had held objects, but are now missing. Nevertheless, historical sources indicate that the "eagle" was Jupiter's messenger and "lightning" his scepter. The posture of the hands in this figurine seem to have had carried these two missing symbols.

This august bronze-made statuette dates back to the 2nd century AD. Like other statues of Jupiter, he sits on a throne with the feet resting on a pedestal. The edge of cloak (himation) is rolled up to his left upper arm. Features of his bearded face express power and sobriety. This wonderful statue of Jupiter is today kept at the National Museum of Damascus.

Nemesis

This hollow clay-made statuette dating back to the 1st century AD was discovered in Syria's occupied Golan Heights before 1967. It signifies all symbols of power of Nemesis, goddess of punishment and revenge as she appears here wrapped in her garment from head to toe, holding the tablet of statutes in her right hand, and a disc representing the "wheel of time" in the left hand. Both minimalism and elegance characterize this clay statuette which has resisted natural forces over the past 2000 years. It is kept at the National Museum of Damascus.

Two Female Musicians

The woman (right) in this hollow clay statuette plays the double-flute (which is a musical instrument still used today in most of Syria's rural areas), and she is accompanied by another female drummer (left). Both musicians stand on a high pedestal, wearing long garments touching the ground with under-waist belts. Their combed hair shows a center parting and is also adorned with garland.

Such clay figurines were commonly found in several parts of Syria, particularly in north Syria, which is believed to be the source of this statuette in the Hellenistic period. These statues signify the Syrian people's fondness of music and singing in ancient times, where such music was part of religious services or form of worship rituals exercised in temples. In its early spiritual revelations, music formed a religious realm for seclusion and purity of the soul, and a medium of expression of joy and distress.

This figurine, measuring 14.6cm in height and 9.4cm in width, dates back to the 1st century AD and is today kept at the National Museum of Damascus.

Picture from Mari

This picture was unearthed during excavations at the site of Mari (Tel Hariri) near al-Bukamal city along the Euphrates. The picture portrays six persons, four of whom tied up and are believed to be captives. The picture consists of two sections decorated in triangular and square -shaped mother-of-pearl patterns. Despite the plain and primitive style of composing the human figures in this picture, it still captures the imagination on account of two main points: being one of the earliest art forms which employed more

than one element and material in its composition (mother-of-pearl, ivory, colored limestone and black marble); and most importantly is the style used in combining such materials – which seem similar in formation to mosaic art in Syria in later historical periods, especially when we come to know that this wonderful picture dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. It is now kept at the National Museum of Damascus.

Bone-made Votive Figurine

This bone figurine reflects the interest of its sculptor in realistic and natural details shown in this man who holds a votive offering in his hands while standing in a ritual posture. He wears a loincloth with a drooping front knot. His head is covered with a short cloth. Seemingly, this figurine had caught fire but it remained in a good condition. Dating back to mid-second millennium BC, this statuette was discovered during excavations lately carried out at Ebla Kingdom site. It is interesting to know that this exceptional figurine maintains identical dimensions (size of head as compared to body) common in other Syrian statues shaped in certain historical and cultural periods.

Bat Zabaii or Zenobia ... beyond Legends

The victories won by King Odenath of Palmyra (commonly known as Odenathus) over the Persian Sassanids were greatly appreciated by the Roman Empire, which gave him the title of "Reformer of the East" in view of his ability to drive back enemies of the Empire on its eastern boundaries. But King Odenathus was soon assassinated along with his elder son in the city of Homs under mysterious circumstances believed to be plotted by the Romans for fear of his potential ambitions to create his own eastern empire. King Odenathus left behind three children, the elder of whom was called Vaballathus (Latin from the Arabic as Wahb-allath, which means 'gift of the Goddess'). Vaballathus, not old enough to rule as king, his mother succeeded his father and ruled Palmyra on his behalf. She immediately embarked on her greater project of uniting the east and west. She started by annexing Syria, Egypt and Asia Minor. She bestowed upon herself and her son, the honorific titles of Augusta and Augustus circa 270 AD. She independently issued coins struck in Antioch and Alexandria, bearing her name and her son's name as well as their portraits. But Emperor Aurelian

and his armies arrived in Syria to get rid of Zenobia. The two sides fought two battles near Antioch and Homs. The Palmyrenes were defeated and entrenched themselves along with Queen Zenobia in their capital and fiercely defended the city against the Romans until Queen Zenobia (Bat Zabaii) was held captive by Aurelian while she was trying to seek support of the Persian Sassanids. The Palmyrenes surrendered in autumn of 272 AD. An uprising, however, broke out in the city and the Roman garrison was terminated and the charming city was sacked and its landmark monuments damaged.

There are different stories about the destiny of Queen Zenobia, but spiteful and hateful Aurelian tried to eliminate anything reminiscent of Queen Zenobia, whose victories shook the mightiest military power of the ancient world. Aurelian pulled down all statues of Zenobia and withdrew all coins struck in her name. As a result, all Zenobia's statues disappeared, except for only two of her coins that were accidentally discovered in Antioch. One of these two coins is kept at the Louver Museum in Paris, and the other at the National Museum of Damascus. It was found out that the discovered coins were struck in lead and bore a profile of crowned Zenobia. The crown has a shape similar to the wall of her city, encircled by a Greek inscription reading "Zenobia Queen".

Clay Statuette

This hollow clay statuette portrays a cavalier riding his horse. He wears a special hood and carries a shield on his right hand. The horse stands with a foreleg lifted off a rectangular pedestal, which is seen as gesture of mobility.

Dating back to the 2nd century BC (the Greek period), this 20cm-high statuette was discovered in north Syria and is kept today at the National Museum of Damascus.

Rasafa Potteries

This fascinating pottery vase dates back to the 13th century AD. It represents an exceptional type of multicolored pottery, widely known in the ancient city of Rasafa. But compared with other uncovered relics of potteries, this technique of coated pottery belongs to the workshops found in the city of

Raqqa. This vase is distinct in its elegant composition, where the lower wide part shows two peacocks displaying their tail feathers delicately painted in black, blue and red colors. The ornamental band at the neck of the vase features six flying birds colored in red and blue and encircled by delicate decorations.

Monastery of Saidnaya

Saidnaya is an old town, 28 km northeast of Damascus, which lies at a mountain foot on a semicircular area and rises 1400m above sea level. Remains of columns dating back to the Roman period were uncovered in this town. Etymology of Saidnaya is controversial, but it is certainly Aramaic in origin. It is also believed that its ancient name was derived from "Saidon", god of hunting in Phoenician mythology. A pagan temple for worship of this Phoenician god was built on the same site where the Monastery of Saidnaya – which is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin – stands today. Etymologists also believe that "Saidnaya" is a Syriac word in origin which means "Our Lady".

Over the centuries, Saidnaya was well known for its vineyards which produced the finest wine in the ancient world. Saidnaya has long ago gained a world reputation, particularly by Christians, as a sacred spot visited by pilgrims from different parts of the world. The churches and chapels of Saidnaya and its great monastery, including its icons and unique library (which was lost in the 19th century), have always been a mecca for Christian as well as Muslim visitors.

The Monastery of Saidnaya is also known as "Saidnaya Fort" because the convent looks like a fortified castle seated on the mountain cap. Historians have different opinions about the exact date of constructing the Monastery of Saidnaya amid different stories of its origin, where legends have been mixed with historical facts. However, all such accounts are more or less featured by interpretations and conjectures, but not based on concrete evidence. The Monastery of Saidnaya has no distinct design in terms of architecture due to the earthquakes and other natural factors which changed its appearance over the years, and the building became a mixture of interlaced structures amid colonnaded passageways and arcades standing on a rocky highland. It may be said that the architectural style of this monastery follows the shape and grooves of rocks. Nevertheless, visitors of the

Monastery of Saidnaya will be enchanted by the beauty of the calm town and the accounts given about creation of Christianity in Syria.

Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums

Special attention is attached to archeology in Syria for a variety of reasons. Observers of cultural activities in the country will be greatly impressed by the amazing results of excavations carried out by efforts of some 70 archeological missions, including local, foreign and joint teams. The work of these missions covers different sites across the country, comprising various historical periods starting with the Old Stone Age (Paleolithic period, i.e. half million years ago) and ending up in recent history. Rescue campaigns of antiquities at the Khabur Basin can be seen as a landmark in the area of archeological excavations. Important cities and settlements have been discovered in the region. The creation of Archeology Intermediate Institute has greatly contributed to produce competent teams to be involved in both excavation and restoration activity.

Excavation activity goes in line with extensive restoration work aimed at preserving and reviving Syria's heritage. More than 100 historical buildings throughout the country are now under restoration.

Besides the archeological maps of Syria, Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums also prepared similar maps for archeological "Tels" (hills) and sites recorded in every Syrian city. These maps are always updated in light of the continued research and studies conducted by competent scholars and experts.

In the context of international efforts made to this effect, the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Bosra and Palmyra have been all included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. A special committee was also formed to recover stolen antiquities and protection of cultural property.

Museums in Syria count as many as 37, featuring rich contents and beautiful buildings which house these museums. Besides their principal function of preservation and display of heritage, Syria's museums offer cultural and education services of considerable importance.

It may also be noted that Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums regularly publishes the worldwide known "Archeological Yearbook" magazine as well as a series of books, in-depth studies, booklets and brochures of relevance.

We have been able to reach millions of people through our international exhibitions, including the "Archeological Treasures Exhibition", "Palmyra's Antiquities Exhibition", "Syria: Past and Present", "Ebla: Origin of Urbanization", "From Prophets to Caliphs", etc. In fact Syria and its antiquities have been accorded exceptional coverage by world printed and electronic media. Numerous publications and reference books revolving around history of Syria were also issued at the cost of various European countries, the USA and Japan.

In addition, an international forum is held on annual basis in every Governorate of the country dealing with their respective antiquities, including symposiums on Aleppo, Silk Road, Palmyra, Sweida, Idleb, Lattakia, etc.

The imparting and dissemination of information about the history of Syria at the global level realized by archeological fora, symposiums and exhibitions is highly appreciated for the communication established with the world through intellectual and scientific means which bring to light the great civilizational role played by Syria since time immemorial. Almost all archeological events held abroad always seize the opportunity to invite our competent scholars in appreciation of their competence and great contributions to archeology in Syria and abroad.

The Mosaics Museum

Mosaic panels and compositions found in Syria are generally displayed at the museums which house these works of art for better preservation and display reasons. But mosaic panels found in Shahba (also known as Philippopolis), 90 km southeast of Damascus, may be distinct in that they remained in situ. These mosaics compositions were found in the flooring of a mansion comprising 28 rooms, which apparently belonged to one of the city notables. Four of these mosaic panels remained in situ: the "Thetis Mosaic", "Marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne", "Four Seasons", the legendary poet and musician "Orpheus" and the wonderful mosaic panel of

"Aphrodite and Ares". Three mosaic panels: "Musical Triplet", "Four Seasons" and "Bachus" were brought from a neighboring house.

Visitors of Shahba Mosaics Museum can see the statue head of Emperor Philip the Arab carved in white marble and placed on a plinth. It was unearthed in late 1970 during excavations at Shahba Bathhouses. Another plinth of a statue representing wife of Emperor Philip the Arab was also discovered at the same site.

Documents at the Archives Department of Sweida City show that some colored mosaic pieces were discovered 40 years ago at ruins southeast of Shahba Bathhouses along the water canal in the north. The ruins were originally an orchard of pomegranate and fig trees. Notified about this discovery, the Antiquities and Museums Department advised further exploration at the said site. Foundations of basalt-built walls ranging between 70cm and 200cm were discovered there. Four colored mosaic panels dating back to Emperor Philip the Arab were also unearthed at a palatial residence in the same area. First reactions provided for shifting these four mosaic panels to the National Museum of Damascus (as usually done). But officials were convinced to leave the discovery in situ and build a structure or small museum to preserve these wonderful mosaic compositions. Finally, however, the authorities constructed a simple building of plain modern design to house these works of art.

Technicians found out a solution to display the mosaic panels in a proper way by erecting a building at a distance of two meters off the historical discovery.

There is a plan to convert the area opposite the museum (previously sections annexed to the grand bathhouse) into a folk art and popular traditions market to serve as a heritage gate for the city. Other plans also include restoration work for the wall, bathhouses, amphitheater and temple.

Historical Amphitheaters in South Syria

South Syria is the country's richest area with antiquities and historical monuments which testify to the great architecture and development of art in that region. This architectural heritage was crowned by building several amphitheaters found in cities and villages of the region. Eleven of the fifty

historical theaters discovered in Syria lie in the southern part of the country: Shahba, Qanawat, Shaqqa, Dar'a, Sweida, Bosra, Sahr, Tyre, etc.

When the Romans entered Syria in 64 BC they found an advanced civilization and flourishing cities. Their attitude towards inhabitants of the region, therefore, differed from that commonly followed in other parts of the Roman Empire. Besides, the Romans formed an alliance of several cities in southern Bilad al-Sham known as the "Decapolis", giving member-cities a self-rule system including coins struck by their own. This Roman policy was reflected positively on these cities which greatly improved their architecture and structure, coming in harmony with the older buildings already standing there. The city of Bosra (also known as Bosra al-Sham) may be the best example of how cities were planned in an organized system comprising a city center, garrison, temples, city halls, palaces, marketplace, Forum, Senate House, streets and high arches designed to mark crossroads, as well as equestrian arena.

Amphitheater Designing:

During the Roman period, architects attached great importance to link amphitheaters with the general structure of the city on the one hand, and with other major buildings which functioned as entertainment-like centers on the other. In Bosra, for example, we can clearly see how the amphitheater is linked to the equestrian arena, the bathhouses, side-street and the round structure of the amphitheater (excavations at the latter are still underway, but its general structure indicates that it is a round-shape amphitheater). An agreement can be clearly seen between the city planning of Bosra and Pompeii in ancient Italy.

Historical Amphitheaters in South Syria

In the old town of Dar'a city, the amphitheater is adjacent to the main street which goes eastward, occupying the northern part of the building behind the platform in the form of a colonnaded passageway linking the amphitheater with the street. Such planning seems to be in agreement with Palmyra's amphitheater and the one found in the Italian city of Ostia. In Shahba, the amphitheater lies in the city center which is crowded with public buildings. A link between the mausoleum of Emperor Philip the Arab and the front square can be seen with an elevated platform with a round proscenium. Evidently, this was a public square visited by people to watch spectacles performed on the platform which acted as a theater but without auditoriums.

Performances on this platform were likely different from stage performances. In the city of Qanawat (Sweida Province), the link between the theater was made with the temple. At the site of Sahr, in the "al-Lajat" area, a similar link is also found between the theater and the temple. We may conclude that amphitheatres enjoyed independent structures along with a common link to neighboring buildings which functioned as theaters in certain features.

It is interesting to see that the majority of amphitheatres in south Syria run both north and south, where the platform (stage) is always in the north direction – except in theaters where topography dominates this direction, like the Qanawat amphitheater where the stage stands westward close to the valley where audience seats lie on the eastern mountain foot. Direction of Sahr's amphitheater is linked to the temple (east-west) where the platform (stage) is in the west side parallel to the temple's cella, while audience seats are parallel to the portico of the temple which runs eastward.

Size and Seating Capacity of Amphitheatres:

The size and seating capacity of amphitheatres were proportionate to the size of cities where they were built, their population density and administrative importance. The amphitheater of Sahr has a diameter of 20 meters; Shahba's amphitheater 42 meters; Qanawat's is 46 meters; Dar'a's 62 meters; and Bosra's amphitheater 102 meters. All these amphitheatres, excluding Bosra's, are viewed as small in size although their measurements are similar to other theaters found in other parts of Syria. On the other hand, the Bosra amphitheater is almost equal in size to Greek and Roman amphitheatres. The seating capacity of the Bosra Amphitheater is 15000, while Shahba's seats up to 2500 spectators; Dar'a's amphitheater 5000 and Qanawat's 4000.

Inner sections and number of levels varied from one amphitheater to the other. There are single-level amphitheatres (like the ones in Sahr and Qanawat), or two-level amphitheatres (such as Shahba's and Dar'a's amphitheatres), or three-level theaters like the well-known Bosra Amphitheater. Difference is also found in terms of architecture, particularly the grounds of the amphitheater, and design (whether Greek or Roman)). The grounds of the Bosra Amphitheater, for example, are based on a completely level land – similar in design to Roman amphitheatres – such as the amphitheatres of Palmyra, Jableh, Rome, etc. The grounds of the amphitheater lie on a natural downhill while the upper sections are supported by piers, such as the amphitheatres of Shahba and Dar'a. Other

amphitheatres are completely built on a leveled and flat piece of land, like the Qanawat amphitheater.

A common factor among these historical amphitheatres in south Syria, however, is that they were all built in basalt due to profuse availability of this hard stone in the region. These amphitheatres feature colossal buildings and exceptionally thick and hard walls and piers, making them withstand the vicissitude of time.

Different Structure and Shapes:

Amphitheatres in south Syria generally consist of "auditoriums" as a seating space where people can watch a performance on a "platform" (equivalent to "stage" of today), or on the raised area of the "orchestra". The amphitheater reached this design in the course of time. Early amphitheatres were basically made of wood erected in public squares only during performances. This form developed in the course of time when it started to be built on a specific piece of land which goes in harmony with the general planning of the city. Two new forms known as the "Greek amphitheater" and "Roman amphitheater" later appeared. The auditorium of the Greek amphitheater rests on a downhill in contrast with the Roman amphitheater which is wholly built on a level and flat ground.

Amphitheatres also differed in terms of structure: semi-circular amphitheatres with straight platform; obtuse amphitheatres; elliptical. All such designs, however, had a single function: "stage performance". Round-shaped amphitheatres appeared later with a function identical with previous models. This was followed by another form: enclosed round or oval amphitheatres designed for different purposes other than stage performances. A similar form known as "stadium" designed for track-and-field games appeared at a later stage. The smallest type of theaters was known as the "Odeon" (music hall), which is a small theater, often roofed, used for smaller entertainment venues such as poetry readings, debates, lectures and concerts in the first place. Similar amphitheatres can be found in Qanawat and Sahr.

Historical Amphitheatres in South Syria

The Equestrian Arena

The equestrian arena consists of a large rectangular-shaped auditorium – similar form can be seen at the racecourse in Bosra, measuring 440m by 134m and seats up to 35000 spectators. This equestrian arena stretches

north-south and lies south of Bosra Citadel. Another racecourse lies in the eastern part of Dar'a, but has not been fully excavated as of yet. It is interesting to know that such theaters are distinct in the way they facilitate the movement of the audience inside and outside the theater building through the availability of many passageways, corridors, stairs and gates which altogether helped entry and exit of spectators in a short time.

Syria's opulence of various large amphitheaters, particularly in the southern part of the country, is an evidence of the people's deep-rooted cultural awareness and interest in watching stage performances and concerts as well as sports activity. Syria's theaters had always played a social, religious and political role where they served as venues for holding meetings and get-togethers of interest to all classes of the society.

Jableh's Historical Amphitheater

Amphitheaters were probably the most distinct feature of Syria's architecture during the classical period, where architects built theaters to adorn and beautify major cities in the country. Jableh's Amphitheater ranks amongst the most widely known of these historical amphitheaters in Syria.

The amphitheater in Jableh was built in huge-size masonry on a level and flat piece of land in early 2nd century AD in the city center, 30 km south of Lattakia. This semi-circular amphitheater measures 90 meters in diameter. It has 35 tiers of stone seats supported on vaults with spaces and entries in between to facilitate movement, entry and exit of spectators – like today's theaters. The amphitheater of Jableh has a seating capacity of 8000. A stone platform, which lies in the northeastern side, had been once surrounded with marble pillars resting on stone bases, while the capitals were carved in the Corinthian style – remains of which can still be seen today.

Historical studies indicate that the Jableh Amphitheater dates back to the 2nd century AD (the Roman period). Many Arab and foreign travelers visited this edifice and left impressive account about it in their writings, including a statement by renowned scholar Ernest Renan: "It is the most beautiful of all Roman monuments along the Phoenician coast." Today, the Jableh Amphitheater is viewed as one of the world's important historical amphitheaters, and second important one in Syria. Restoration work lately

conducted by the Antiquities and Museums Department for this amphitheater has added more charm to this historical monument.

Qala'at Salahuddin (Saladin's Castle)

Saladin's Castle may be the most important of all castles and fortresses along the Syrian coast. The castle, which lies 35 km east of Lattakia near the town of al-Heffa, was built on a rocky hill on a coastal mountain-cap at a height of 450m. The building of this castle stretches lengthwise in an isosceles triangle-shape, the base of which faces the east while the head faces the west. Its area reaches up to five hectares. It is flanked by two deep valleys which provide fortitude and impregnability to the castle. The eastern side of the castle is fortified by a ditch carved in solid rock with a 27m-high stone obelisk in the center, attaching the castle with its surroundings by means of a mobile wooden bridge installed in peacetime and dismantled in wartime.

Foreign travelers and scholars described Saladin's Castle as the most charming model of military architecture in Syria. It was also identified as one of the most marvelous monuments that remained from the Middle Ages.

Historical studies indicate that Saladin's Castle was first mentioned in the 4th century BC – or perhaps earlier. However, the exact date may be only determined through further archeological exploration of this site.

Studies also indicate that this castle belonged to Emir of Aleppo, Seif al-Dawla al-Hamadani, but was taken over by Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimisces in 975 AD, then fell in the hands of the Franks in 1108, and was finally liberated by Saladin in 1188 AD.

In view of the importance attached to this historical monument, a series of restoration works were carried out over the past few years by local and foreign teams.

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

- **Directorates of Culture in Syria's Governorates (Provinces)**

Directorate of Culture in Damascus

The Arab Cultural Center in Damascus was established along with the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance back in 1958 during the Union between Syria and Egypt.

Since its inception, the Arab Cultural Center in Damascus has played a leading role in the country's cultural and educational activity by hosting various cultural events, including conferences, symposiums, forums, lectures, film and video screenings as well as plastic and applied arts galleries. Other important events regularly held at the Arab Cultural Center include the Arabic Calligraphy Exhibition, the Photography Exhibition, the Book Exhibition, etc. These activities have witnessed considerable development in terms of quantity and quality when a number of modern cultural centers were also set up in different Damascus localities, including Mezzeh, Adawi, Barzeh, Jobar and Yarmouk. Similar centers were also founded in both quarters of Kafarsouseh and Midan in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Besides the Plastic and Applied Arts Centers of Adham Ismael and Walid Izzat, other popular cultural institutions were also established. These institutes and centers have produced thousands of graduates who learnt arts, crafts and careers associated with folk culture, living languages and computer science.

These cultural and educational institutions have provided the chance for myriads of creative think-tanks, intellectuals, writers, poets, painters, sculptors, artists and lecturers to introduce their creative works. Development of such activities has been able to address various issues of interest to the people at the political, economic, social, literary and scientific levels.

Directorate of Culture in Damascus

Hundreds of men of letters and think-tanks from various fields of knowledge were hosted by these cultural centers: renowned writers and poets, like Nizar Qabbani, Abdullah Bardoni, Najib Jamal al-Din, Mohammad Hariri, Omar Farra and many other novelists and authors.

Among the activities held at the cultural centers in Damascus, reference should be made to the get-together of "Writer and Event", lectures and

presentations by the "Syrian Cosmic Society", forums of "Economic Tuesday", "Musical Listening Club", "Cine Club" and hundred other activities held jointly with popular organizations and vocational unions.

Moreover, popular cultural institutes offer services at minimum cost to the public by holding three major courses on annual basis covering the following professions and skills: typewriting, calligraphy, first aid, nursing, accounting, electricity, ornamentation, embroidery, tricot, tailoring, fashion designing, hairdressing, artificial flower making, ceramics, computer science, living languages: English, French, German, etc.

Similarly, "Adham Ismael Center for Plastic Arts" and "Ahmad Walid Izzat Center for Applied Arts" both offer teaching services to the public in the areas of painting, sculpture, carving, engraving, pottery, etc.

The Damascus cultural centers play a leading role in imparting knowledge through their rich libraries, children libraries and centers for sale of books published by the Ministry of Culture, which holds treasures of culture and rare reference books uniquely maintained by the Ministry.

Directorate of Culture in Aleppo

Aleppo has four cultural centers, namely, "Aziziyah Center", "The National Library", "Firdos (paradise) Center" and "Sakhour Center", as well as "Plastic Arts Center", "Arts Gallery", "Applied Arts Center" and popular cultural centers ("Port Saeed", "Aliya Bint al-Mihdi", "Sakhour", "Firdos", "al-Kindi" and the Language Lab at Kindi Institute).

Other cultural projects also include the cultural center at Bab al-Faraj quarter, the President Library, and the cultural center at Hanano quarter. Meanwhile, Aleppo countryside holds as many as 18 cultural centers, namely, "Ein al-Arab", al-Bab", Manbij", "Jarablus", al-Safira", "Effrin", "Atareb", "Darat Ezza", "Nubol", Tel Rifa't", "Mare", "Deir Hafer", "Jandiris", "al-Ra'ii", "Tadef" and "al-Waha".

The President Library:

It was built in al-Kuttab Square, bordered from the east by the President Square, and the City Hall Palace in the north. The 11-storey building of the

President Library includes two entrances and two basements at a total area of 20.000 sq.m.

Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside

The Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside may be the most important of all Syria's cultural departments due to the big number of cultural centers (they count as many as 130, i.e. one-third of total number of Syria's cultural centers) associated with this department due to the large area of the Damascus Countryside Governorate, its highly populated districts and proximity to the capital, Damascus. Internal migration to this province from various cities and parts of the country seeking job opportunities may be another factor which led to diversification of cultures and traditions of that area in addition to its original heritage inherited by communities of the region over the centuries. As such, the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside is involved in an essential role to lead the population of its different districts to a "pleasant trip to the land of culture, education and knowledge" represented in the annual Festival of Culture, Arts and Heritage. Through this function, common traditions of the province uncover the hidden heritage and age-old folk arts and traditions passed on by the successive generations. The rich history of the region, which dates back to time immemorial as evidenced in the findings discovered at its archeological sites, is yet another feature added to this annual mega event. The Festival of Culture, Arts and Heritage also tries to redirect the attention of the erudite, who have been enchanted by the lights of the capital, back to their home towns and cities. This effort is best materialized by holding literary and cultural gala nights and concerts. And the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside spares no effort to encourage and develop young and promising talents in the diverse fields, providing necessary facilitations to uplift these talented and gifted generations. In this context, the Directorate of Culture set up the core for a theatrical troupe and shouldered the responsibility of training its members. Likewise, an orchestra comprising all talents of singing and music performance was formed to further enrich the activities initiated by the Directorate of Culture, whose limitless services also include the following aspects of education and knowledge:

1) Internet Cafés:

To support the process of development and modernization, the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside has contributed to increase the number of

fully equipped Internet Cafés which offer 12-hour daily services in the districts of Duma, Darayya and Qatana.

2) Popular Cultural Institutes:

Keen on introducing the popular culture of its province, the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside has increased popular cultural institutes to amount up to 16 which offer relevant courses on a regular basis attended annually by approximately 2000 students to learn various fields of knowledge including: computer programming and maintenance, foreign languages (English and French), healthcare, first aid, hairdressing, tailoring, fashion designing, music, tricot, etc.

3) Libraries:

Libraries form the lifeblood of the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside and its pertinent centers. A special attention is accorded by the Culture Department to furnish its libraries with reference books, scientific publications and encyclopedias and place them under the disposal of visitors whether inside or outside the libraries.

On the other hand, most of children's libraries have been provided with CD films and documentaries covering scientific and entertainment screenings and programs.

4) Children's Club:

The Club holds special educational/entertainment courses aimed at teaching children how to properly handle and utilize computers in line with the informatics development. Other courses held by the Children's Club include languages, calligraphy, music and handicrafts. These courses gain great interest in summer time as part of the students' summer holiday activities.

5) Investment Projects:

The Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside always follows up necessary completion works for furnishing unfinished buildings of cultural centers. The Directorate of Culture has also prepared plans for constructing cultural centers in several districts which require such vital projects.

6) Video Censorship:

The Directorate of Culture undertakes follow-up procedures for licensing CD and video shops as well as the censorship of the material promoted by these shops, including necessary action and measures against any violation

of the enforced rules and regulations governing the circulation of CD's and videotapes.

7) Duma's Culture Palace:

The Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside shoulders numerous responsibilities which entail strenuous efforts to properly perform the duties and assignments set forth by the Directorate: follow up requirements and correspondence forwarded by cultural centers; distribute books published by the Ministry of Culture to various cultural centers; follow up activities of cultural centers; follow up investment projects and other preparations for holding the annual Festival, etc.

The head office of the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside lies at Duma's Culture Palace, which was built in 1967 in the city center. The outer side of the Palace is covered in white stone with decorations of mosaic panels. The building is also provided with two cylindrical towers, making its façade look like the monumental edifice of Qasr (palace) al-Hir. The building comprises six sections: libraries, popular cultural institute, theater, internet café, exhibitions hall, administration and documentation and archives department.

In view of the above, the Directorate of Culture in Damascus Countryside may be compared to a beehive producing the cream of knowledge and education for the benefit of the people.

Directorate of Culture in Homs

The Governorate of Homs is distinctive in view of its geographical location and wide area stretching over 44000 sq.km, i.e. one-fourth of total area of Syria. It is also the third largest Syrian city in terms of population (second is Aleppo and first is Damascus). Homs enjoys a variable climate due to its varied topographical relief: evergreen mountainous area, beautiful terrain crossed by the Orontes river - which runs from the south to the north, a marginal land extending between urban areas and the steppe, as well as a large part of the steppe itself. Such diversity of topographical relief and climate and its location in central Syria gave Homs a special importance among other Syria's Governorates. Besides, Homs is viewed as the "cultural capital" of Syria, given its numerous cultural activities and organizations of

relevance (both public and private), at a time when the Cultural Directorate of Homs is involved in unique activities held the year round.

The Directorate of Culture in Homs supervises the work and activity of 40 cultural centers throughout the Governorate, in addition to 10 centers established in towns associated with Homs itself. Note should also be made to the "Popular Cultural Institute of Homs" and "Subhi Shu'eib Center for Plastic Arts".

Cultural activities follow a general annual plan set forth by the Directorate of Culture of Homs, which sometimes changes the arrangement of these activities under certain circumstances. The activities, however, are basically distributed among the various cultural centers in Homs as per the following:

1- Activities of Homs Cultural Center:

Located at the city center, the Homs Cultural Center is distinct in the extensive activities of all sections associated with the Center. The Library, for example, which receives an average of 500 visitors on a daily basis and contains a collection of over 70.000 books, is regarded as one of the best and most important libraries in the country. The Center's Theater hosts a number of cultural, social and economic activities in addition to its basic stage performances, concerts and film festivals and events, including "Short Films", "French Cinema Week", etc. which are organized and held in collaboration with foreign cultural centers based in the country on the one hand, and with the General Film Establishment on the other.

Besides, the Popular Cultural Institute attracts many people interested in attending various courses (languages, computing, computer and electronics maintenance, tailoring, Arabic calligraphy, nursing, etc.)

The "Cultural Week for Arabic Poetry" is another function aimed at promoting and consolidating traditional folk poetry, and part of an aspiring plan to set down this literary form in writing.

Many other cultural functions are also held on national occasions. A monthly cultural bulletin titled "Homs Cultural Bulletin" is issued to cover the various cultural activities, and to publish works by creative intellectuals and think-tanks of Homs.

2- Palmyra Cultural Center:

This cultural edifice launched activities in 2000. It is located in the archeological city of Palmyra, which is a great tourist attraction spot. The Center is best known for its contributions to all cultural activities and festivals held in Palmyra, including festivals organized by the Ministry of Culture. The Palmyra Cultural Center follows a cultural plan all year round as well as weekly variety activities. The Popular Cultural Institute of Palmyra Center offers different learning courses attended by an average of 200 students on a regular basis. The "Zenobia Cultural and Poetry Festival" is a landmark function organized by the Palmyra Cultural Center every year.

3- Al-Qasir Cultural Center:

Various important activities held by the al-Qasir Cultural Center include the following:

1) A cultural week on the Palestinian Intifada (uprising) held in December every year. A competition organized by the Center under the title "April Poetry Competition", as well as "Qadish Cultural Festival" (held in October) and "al-Qasir Poetry Festival" (July).

Directorate of Culture in Homs

2) The Center participates in other activities and functions in an effort to firm up communication between the Center and the community, and also to honor excelling students in the region. A superb Popular Cultural Institute associated with the Center records remarkable attendance by inhabitants of the region.

Tel Kalakh Cultural Center

Located in Tel Kalakh (a town in the vicinity of Homs), this cultural center organizes the following activities: "Cultural Variety Week" (in July); "Cultural Festival of Poetry" (in November). A big and rich library is also included in the Tel Kalakh Cultural Center.

"Subhi Shu'eib Center for Plastic Arts":

This center produces a number of plastic artists. Students at this center are taught by selected artists and teachers in Homs. Art galleries are normally organized by graduates of the "Subhi Shu'eib Center" which produces two batches of graduates annually.

This center also supervises a weekly variety activity all year round (lectures, seminars, poetry get-togethers, exhibitions, stage performances and concerts). Other cultural activities organized by this center include the following (date-wise):

(March):

- 1- The "Short Story" event.
- 2- "Theater Festival" held on the occasion of World Theater Day.

(April):

Cultural Economic Week:

This function introduces best economists and highlights latest developments of relevance. Many other activities are also held in cooperation with other functions and events in the city such as the "Song and Music Festival", which is held in collaboration with the Artists Union.

(July): Deek al-Jin Cultural Week.

(September): The "Song and Country Music Festival" (Homs Cultural Festival in cooperation with Homs City Council.)

(October):

Marking Arab Child's Day:

A distinguished city-wide activity comprising a carnival, film screenings, gala nights, literary get-togethers and many other functions held in collaboration with the Baath Vanguard Organization.

(November):

The "Homs Theater Festival" which has been held in cooperation with the Artists Union for the past two decades odd. This nationwide event features prominent shows, performances, seminars and an audience of elites.

The "Tishreen (October) Poetry Forum" which is held in cooperation with the Arab Writers Union to mark the anniversary of October liberation war.

Newly Established Centers

These centers carry out a plan prepared by the Directorate of Culture in an effort to join urban and suburban cultures together, where a number of seminars, lectures, gatherings and exhibitions are regularly held to

materialize this plan on the ground. Furthermore, new Internet Cafés have been created in both Palmyra and al-Qasir to support the development and modernization process initiated by the Culture Department.

Directorate of Culture in Homs also plans the creation of popular cultural institutes core in rural areas, given the importance of such institutes in the labor market, amid many ideas and proposals aimed at developing the performance of these centers. Emphasis, therefore, should be laid on the role played by culture in expanding social awareness and development.

Al-Rastan Cultural Center

Besides its periodic and weekly activity as well as its participation in various functions held in the town of al-Rastan (a town located in the vicinity of Homs), this Cultural Center holds a distinguished event under the title of "Al-Rastan Poetry Festival" in April every year.

National Museum of Lattakia

Khan al-Dukhan

This 300-year-old historical building was selected in 1986 to be the National Museum in Lattakia. This charming venue contains the substance of human mind who settled in this spot thousands of years ago and offered humanity finest civilizational gifts which drew worldwide attention and admiration.

The Lattakia National Museum lies in the city center, separated from the beach in the west side by the enchanting park of "al-Minshiya". The area of the museum along with its wide garden reaches up to 119754 sq.m. The two-storey building of the museum, which occupies the southeastern part of the garden, overlooks a large courtyard surrounded by arcades formed in heavy stone-carved piers which support beautiful vaults. Six spacious halls line up immediately behind the south arcade, displaying archeological collections uncovered in Lattakia.

Hall (1):

It contains six display cabinet units including a collection of finds discovered at Ugarit: potteries, statuettes, tablets, alabaster pots, stone mills, etc.

Hall (2):

This hall is designed to display antiquities unearthed at the archeological site of Ibn Hani which was contemporary to Ugarit city. The collection is placed in six display cabinets.

Hall (3):

It contains a collection of classical antiquities (Greek, Roman and Byzantine) discovered at archeological sites in Lattakia.

Hall (4):

Containing six display cabinet units, this hall is allocated to Islamic monuments including wonderful ceramics which flourished in production during the Islamic period.

Hall (5):

This hall is assigned to modern art, displaying 30 paintings by plastic art painters portraying surroundings of the Syrian coast and its beautiful landscapes. The hall also contains a collection of plaster, wood and stone carvings and statues.

The Museum Garden:

This 10,000 sq.m.-area garden functions as an open-air museum, displaying stone and marble monuments dating back to the classical age and Islamic periods. The sculptures include statues of human figures, gravestones and votive monuments with old inscriptions. The garden also contains a display collection of columns, pillars, capitals, cornice, etc. which represent the ancient architectural texture of the city. These collections are distributed elegantly under the shade of giant trees, which altogether captivate the attention of visitors and leave an unforgettable impression.

Directorate of Culture in Hama

Hama and its districts enjoy a rich cultural heritage with its various works of art and literature which produced plentitude of books on history, geography, proverbs, folk tales, etc. The rich cultural heritage of Hama also brings to light prominent names of scholars, writers and authors such as King of Hama Abi al-Fida, Ibn Hijja al-Hamawi, Ibn Nabata al-Hamawi and renowned geographer Yaqut al-Hamawi. Hama enjoys a wealth of archeological sites: Apamea, al-Madiq Citadel and many other important

sites and it may be most known for its norias (waterwheels). Hama's cultural centers of today have played an essential role in disseminating and imparting knowledge and education whether in the city of Hama or its districts. The various cultural activities include, inter alia, the following:

Hama's Cultural Center:

Established back in 1951 and known as the "National Library of Hama", the Cultural Center of Hama organizes several important activities and functions. The library of the Center contains myriads of reference books covering all fields of knowledge, politics, literature, history, science, etc. The Center diversifies its activities to include lectures, seminars, forums, festivals, film screenings, theatrical performances, concerts etc.

The Center attracted a long list of intellectuals and think-tanks to its grounds from Syria, the Arab world and foreign countries, but we will mention a few of them:

- Foreign intellectuals: Jean Gulmer, Christian Lochure, Jacques Perje, Jean Renais, George Muton, Joe Jira ...
- Arab intellectuals: Mohammad Mohdi Shamsuddin, Mohammad Nasrullah, Amin Iskandar, Mousa Abu Marzouk Mohammad Daood (Moroccan historian), Qistantine Zreik, Naser Qandeel ...
- Syrian intellectuals: Ali Okla Irsan, Omar Abu Rishah, Badruddin Hamed, Omar Yahya, Abdul Salam Ojeili, Midhat Akkash, Amin Naffouri, Subhi Qahhaleh, Najah Attar, Ahmad Samman, Tayyeb Tizini, Radhwan Qudhmani ...

The Cultural Center of Hama organizes several periodic festivals and other functions on certain occasions:

1- Poetry festivals held on national occasions (March 8 Revolution, the Corrective Movement), where prominent poets at the local (Hama) and nationwide level take part in these festivals.

2- Hama Spring Festival, which is held in April every year in continuation of the celebrations that have been held in the city thousands of years ago. The Cultural Center of Hama organizes poetry gala nights in collaboration with the Writers Union to mark this occasion.

Several other lectures and seminars are also organized by the Cultural Center to highlight the glorious history of the city of Hama in all its age-old social and human traditions. Other functions are also held during this economic and tourist event, including book and document exhibition, painting and photography galleries as well as feature and documentary film screenings.

Music and Theater:

The Cultural Center of Hama has organized an annual music festival for Hama's traditional songs (featuring composition and performance). The success achieved by this function has carried its shows to other cities across the country and to foreign cultural centers based in Damascus (the Russian and German cultural centers).

On the other hand, a theatrical festival has been held in Hama over the past two decades with the participation of the Artists Union, troupes from other Syrian cities and Arab countries. This festival is a landmark event in the history of theater in Syria in general and Hama in particular, encouraging local troupes to improve and upgrade their performance. Artists from other Syrian cities (Artists Union troupe, cultural centers and popular organizations) participate in Hama's Spring Theater Festival along with similar participation by folkloric troupes in evening performances and shows.

Honoring Creative Men-of-Letters:

The Directorate of Culture in Hama has honored the following writers and poets: Midhat Akkash, Wajih Baroudi, Abdul Razzak al-Asfar, Suhail Othman, Walid Qinbaz ... and other outstanding names in Hama.

Directorate of Culture in Hama

Assad Culture House of Hama

The Corrective Movement in Syria has offered the country many outstanding public and private cultural services including the establishment of the Assad Culture House in Hama. This wonderful edifice was erected on a 22,000 sq.m-land, including a floor-building area of 8000 sq.m. The theater hall of this Opera House has a seating capacity of 700 and a stage stretching over an area of 240 sq.m. This theater hall is fully equipped with an advanced control system of acoustics, lighting and air-conditioning. The building includes reading halls, a popular cultural institute and a plastic arts

center with a surrounding of gardens, alleyways and parking areas. The Assad Culture House launched its cultural and art activities in 2003.

Popular Cultural Institutes:

These institutes play an important role in offering scientific, musical and vocational education courses to those interested in learning music, foreign languages, nursing, tailoring, hairdressing, Arabic calligraphy, computer science, etc. Graduates who attended such educational courses count in thousands.

Suhail al-Ahdab Center for Plastic Arts

Since its creation, this center has provided technical and educational services for sculpture and photography, which produced large number of prominent artists at the local and nationwide level.

Cultural Centers in Governorate of Hama

An important network of cultural centers covers different districts associated with the Governorate (province) of Hama. There are 10 centers available in cities of Hama, in addition to the centers in the city of Hama itself. These centers comprise Misyaf, Salamiya, Moharda, Soran, Taibt-ul-Imam, Halfaya and Kafr Zeita.

- Cultural centers based in towns associated with Hama: Horr Binafseh, Wadi al-Oyoun, Salhab, Sabboura, al-Sa'n, al-Hamra, Ein Halakim, al-Madiq Citadel, Barri al-Sharqi, Kafr Bihm.
- Other cultural centers based in villages associated with Hama: al-Aziziyah, Dier Shamil, Nabl al-Khatib, Aqareb, Qamhana, Bashnin, al-Homeiri, Bisin, Mouardes, Masoud, Khirbet Aref, al-Rabi'a, Sheihat Hama, Khanfis.

The aforementioned centers are, therefore, distributed throughout the Governorate of Hama where the cultural centers of al-Sa'n and Masoud, for example, lie 80 km west of the steppe, whereas Wadi al-Oyoun is 70 km-distant from Hama's center, and Nabl al-Khatib is 100 km.

Several Arab and foreign poets and writers had delivered lectures at these centers, which at the same time organizes symposiums and art shows, theater performances and concerts as well as art and book exhibitions which greatly contribute to the country's literary, intellectual and art activity.

Directorate of Culture in Dara'

Educational Course Centers (computer courses):

An educational center for computer courses was established to accommodate 12 PC units provided with an internet facility and equipped with state-of-the-art technologies. Associated with the Popular Cultural Institute, these computer courses (held 3 times a year) witnessed considerable participation by the public.

In the framework of the National Program for Elimination of Illiteracy, IT courses were also initiated for civil servants (60 courses were held at an average of 32 participants each).

It seems that demand for courses held by the Popular Cultural Institute is growing remarkably due to the quality education provided by these courses against "token" fees compared with high-cost courses organized by private institutes (the Ministry of Culture took into consideration registration at the Institute by different strata of the society).

Libraries associated with the Directorate of Culture in Dara'

Priority is given by the Directorate of Culture in Dara' to books in general and expansion of its libraries in terms of number of books in particular. It may be noted that value of books purchased to enrich the collections maintained by all libraries associated with the Directorate of Culture in Dara' reaches up to SP one million a year. Special attention is also accorded by the Directorate of Culture in Dara' to provide all necessary facilities required by readers.

Library of the Arab Cultural Center in Dara'

It is the major source of knowledge required by students of all academic stages (schools, intermediate institutes and universities) and other cultured categories in the province. The said library contains a rich collection of various reference books, important publications and rare manuscripts. Activity at the library gains momentum during preparation of seminar papers by students over a period extending two and a half months in every academic term.

The library of the Cultural Center of Dara' contains 25,000 books which have been archived in a computerized system to facilitate search by readers.

The library is, therefore, considered a source of general information rather than special fields of knowledge.

Book Exhibitions

The Directorate of Culture in Dara' has taken several steps to highlight the importance of book exhibitions:

- 1- A permanent gallery was set up at the offices of the Directorate of Culture in Dara', where sale of books is available at a discount ranging between 40 and 60%.
- 2- Permanent galleries were also set up in the cultural centers of Bosra, Nawa, Izra', Sanamen, Tafas and Ghazala.
- 3- Similar exhibitions were organized in cooperation with the education authorities in the Governorate (Directorate of Education, popular organizations, etc.).

Children's Club

A Children's Club was created in 2003 at the Arab Cultural Center of Dara'. The Club receives children visitors only during the following periods:

- a) Mid-academic term holiday (free of charge, i.e. no registration fees required).
- b) Summer holiday: Low subscription fees amounting only to SP 200 per child.

The Club provides diverse games of interest to children, such as chess, mechanic toys, shapes games, etc. as well as children's film screenings.

Folk Art Troupe

Based on its keenness to preserve heritage of Dara', the Cultural Department formed a folk art troupe (accompanied by a musical band). Since its inception a quarter of a century ago, this troupe participated in local festivals (Bosra International Festival and Damascus International Fair) and other festivals abroad (Jordan).

Theater and Cinema Hall

A special hall at the Arab Cultural Center of Dara' designed for film screening and stage performance was placed into operation in 1978 with a

seating capacity of 623, including 418 seats at the ground floor and 205 at the upper floor (gallery).

Modern film projectors were procured by the Directorate of Culture in Dara' for newly built branch centers. The said Cultural Department introduced a new kind of film screening in the open (parks, public areas, camps ...).

Plastic Arts Center

This center was established on 22/7/1981 to develop talents of young generations and qualify them to produce their own works of art. Special effort is also made by the center to upgrade these talents through training, lectures, exhibitions and reference books dealing with art and related criticism with the purpose of providing an opportunity to new artists to begin production of their works of art.

Students at the center follow four courses (six months each) before graduation. The courses provide morning and evening classes in photography, painting, sculpture and carving. Annual holidays are not included in this system, enabling students to continue their study uninterruptedly. Students who complete four successive courses and pass the final examinations shall be eligible to obtain a graduation certificate qualifying them as members of the plastic arts community.

Over 2000 students graduated from this center since its creation - some of them were able to acquire admission in the Fine Arts College and intermediate institutes. A new 170-sq.m hall equipped with necessary lighting systems and other accessories was added to the center. Another 100-sq.m hall for sculpture was added to the building of the Plastic Arts Center.

* Some of the cultural centers in districts associated with the province of Dara' organize social activities (inbound and outbound trips) for members of the center.

* Every center has a minimum of 50 members.

* The Cultural Department carried out an investment plan for construction and furnishing of new and modern cultural centers in all districts of the Governorate of Dara'.

Directorate of Culture in Dara'

By end of 2004, the Directorate of Culture in Dara' comprised 26 cultural centers, in addition to the major centers found in Dara' itself (the Cultural Center of Dara' is distinct in its beautiful modern building). Similar modern centers (10 centers) are also under construction in districts associated with the province of Dara'.

The Arab Cultural Center in Dara'

The center was built in 1976 and was restored and enlarged in 1997 to become a distinguished 3-storey building in addition to a large basement.

- ✓ First Floor: It includes Administration, offices, lobby, theater and cinema hall, library, book exhibition hall, Administration of Popular Cultural Institute.
- ✓ Second Floor: It contains Elimination of Illiteracy Bureau, accounting section, exhibition hall, courses organized by the Popular Cultural Institute.
- ✓ Third Floor: It hosts the Plastic Arts Center, including Administration, offices, painting and sculpture training hall measuring 15m by 12m, and a special hall for children's activities.
- ✓ Basement: The west side of this basement is associated with the main library, while its east side includes a storeroom, archives and toilets.
- ✓ VIP Lounge: This spacious lounge (100 sq.m.) is provided with an air-conditioning system and loudspeakers. It is designed to receive VIP officials and other prominent visitors. The lounge has a door that opens to the theater hall.

Cultural Centers in Towns

New and modern cultural centers have been built in the following towns: Bosra, Jasem, Nawa, Tafas, Da'el, Inkhel, Sheikh Miskin and al-Hirak.

Cultural Activities in Districts/Towns

Various functions are organized by the Cultural Department of Dara' at the 11 centers based in districts and towns of the Province of Dara':

- ✓ 200 lectures on political, economic, medical, scientific subjects.
- ✓ 100 symposiums dealing with agriculture, environment and health.
- ✓ 100 gala nights dealing with poetry, prose fiction and story writing.
- ✓ 100 seminars.
- ✓ 60 book and art exhibitions

Twelve branch centers organize the following activities every year:

- ✓ 140 lectures
- ✓ 70 symposiums
- ✓ 70 gala nights
- ✓ 70 seminars
- ✓ 30 exhibitions

Internet Service Centers

The Directorate of Culture in Dara' has opened an internet service center for the public at low charges. This modern-designed center was equipped with 13 PC units and is open in morning and evening time shifts at an average of six hours a day.

Setting up of similar centers by the Directorate of Culture in Dara' is also underway.

Popular Cultural Institutes

These institutes spread out over the province as follows:

Institute	Offered courses
Popular Cultural Institute in Dara'	Computer, hairdressing, typewriting, English language
Popular Cultural Institute in Izra'	Computer, hairdressing, typewriting, English language
Popular Cultural Institute in Sanamen	Computer, typewriting
Popular Cultural Institute in Bosra	Computer, English language
Popular Cultural Institute in Nawa	Computer
Popular Cultural Institute in Tafas	Computer
Popular Cultural Institute in al-Shajara	Computer
Popular Cultural Institute in Jasem	Computer

Directorate of Culture in Sweida

It has 16 cultural centers distributed over districts, towns and villages of the Governorate (province) of Sweida according to density of population and distance from the center of the Governorate itself. The Directorate of Culture in Sweida comprises the following departments/sections:

The Cultural Center of Sweida

1) Administrative Section (Administration – Document Control Department – Personnel Affairs Department - Cultural Activities Department – Accountancy ...)

2) Library: It contains over 40,000 books, including reference books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, etc. covering all fields of knowledge. The library also includes a reading hall for adults and another hall for scholars and a book exhibition hall.

The newly built "Children's Library", on the other hand, contains some 3000 books as well as magazines, periodicals and comics, like the Arabic-language comics "Osama".

3) Theater and Exhibition Halls: The theater provides different cultural activities and performances (morning/evening) within the monthly program of cultural activities launched by the Directorate of Culture in Sweida.

There are four exhibition halls which host various art galleries on a regular basis. A conference hall acting as an auxiliary hall when the theater is reserved for a certain performance is also available to host symposiums, seminars, and literary get-togethers.

4) Popular Cultural Institute: The Institute promotes popular, vocational and language education by offering regular courses of relevance all year round. Number of participants in such courses reaches up to 600 distributed over various courses and sections, including:

- Computer courses.
- Language courses (French and English)
- Vocational courses (tailoring, hairdressing, artificial flower making, typewriting, etc.)

Besides promotion of popular culture and education, the mentioned courses can qualify job seekers to work in various fields.

- Music courses for teaching lute and violin performance.

5) Plastic Arts Center: It is one of many centers available across the country which aim to develop the artistic talents of participants – irrespective of their age, gender or education level - by organizing a two-year course in each of the following disciplines: painting, sculpture, photography, etc.

Thanks to the Plastic Arts Center, many of its graduates joined the Fine Arts College in Damascus and later became prominent and well known artists in

the Province of Sweida, reflective of the quality teaching they received earlier at the Plastic Arts Center.

6) The Mazra'a Literary Festival and the "Mazra'a Award for Literary and Artistic Creativity" are two functions supervised by Sweida's Cultural Department.

7) Branch Centers Department: It is a newly established department assigned with the duty of supervising the work of the 15 branch cultural centers, as well as catering for their requirements of furniture, stationery and other items necessary for these branch cultural centers.

Monthly cultural programs based on the annual plan prepared by the Ministry of Culture are worked out in coordination between this Department and associated branch centers to promote meaningful education, revive heritage and encourage literary production by professional and new writers.

The branch cultural centers are located in different areas and belong in terms of venue to municipalities, excluding 4 centers which were newly built in 2004 in Qarya, Mazra'a, Mushannaf and Shaqqa. Other centers will be built according to an annual plan prepared for this purpose at an average of three centers a year.

The Arab Cultural Center in Salkhad

This center was established under Decision No. 236, dated 21/5/1961. It was the first station of culture for the district of Salkhad, particularly that the center introduced new and diverse cultural material, including film screening at a time when there was no movie theater in the whole district of Salkhad. It was also the place where lectures were delivered and symposiums held in a town that was short of printed and electronic media. In its nascent stage, the center used rented houses for its offices, but with the birth of the Corrective Movement which gave priority to education and culture, the Arab Cultural Center in Salkhad gained a big and new building in the town center. The new premises comprised a theater hall and a conference hall with a seating capacity of 175 fully equipped with modern sound and lighting systems.

Other sections of the Salkhad's center include two libraries (for both adults and children), reading halls, and a popular cultural institute which offers courses covering various fields of knowledge, particularly computer and IT education.

It is worth mentioning that the center enthusiastically covers 125% of the plan set forth by the Ministry of Culture. It also hosts almost all activities prepared by the various popular organizations in the area. The Salkhad Cultural Center is run by a team of 15 workers and is open to the public at morning and evening time. The building of the center is a landmark of the district in terms of architecture and activity.

Directorate of Culture in Quneitra

Cultural activity in the Governorate (province) of Quneitra kicked off in 1974 after liberation of the city. The Arab Cultural Center of Quneitra was first set up temporarily at a building in Masaken Barza district and was moved later in 1986 to its present complex in Quneitra itself. Soon, however, other branch centers originated by the principal Cultural Center of Quneitra amounted to 11 centers by end 2003, in addition to four libraries, a plastic arts center and a popular cultural institute.

(1) The Arab Cultural Center of Quneitra (al-Baath City)

The center has quickly developed to include a conference hall (April 7 Hall) with a seating capacity of 250, hosting various activities such as lectures, symposiums, literary and art get-togethers and gala nights, film and video screenings as well as meetings and conferences by popular organizations, celebrations and central mass rallies.

Associated with the Arab Cultural Center of Quneitra, the Popular Cultural Institute organizes training courses covering various areas, including computer courses, elimination of illiteracy, etc. Graduates of such courses are issued certificates by the Institute duly attested by the Ministry of Culture, qualifying their holders to work in both the public and private sectors.

A valuable library is another section of the Arab Cultural Center of Quneitra. The library contains a collection of more than 11,000 books, references, children's books, various periodicals and publications available for use by students, scholars and visitors.

The center includes a permanent gallery for books published by the Ministry of Culture. The books are available at a discount ranging between 40 and 60%.

A hall designed for book exhibitions and other art galleries is also available at the center.

New offices for the Directorate of Culture of Quneitra were built next to the Arab Cultural Center in 2001.

Another big building was erected next to the Cultural Center, hosting a theater hall which can seat up to 500 people as well as a number of halls designed for exhibitions and conference rooms.

A new air-conditioned Internet Café facility fully equipped with modern computer sets was built in Quneitra city by the Ministry of Culture.

(2) The Arab Culture Center in Feeq (Barza) City

Built in 1988, this center contains six sections, including a conference hall with a seating capacity of 150; a library with a collection of 8000 books; permanent gallery for sale of books at specified discounts. The center was provided with a computer unit, TV set and video recorder.

By end of 2003, a two-storey annexe was created next to the older building of the center. The annexe was provided with an auditorium which can seat up to 150 people.

(3) The Arab Cultural Center in the town of Bteiha

Established in 1995 and based in the basement of a public school building, the Arab Cultural Center of Bteiha consists of six rooms, a theater hall, a 150-seat conference room and a developing library. The center is visited by many of the country's prominent writers. A folk art troupe was also affiliated with the center. A typical 1000-sq.m. building for this cultural center was erected by end of 2004.

(4) The Arab Cultural Center in Dar'a Complex

It was established in 1996 and was provided with a developing library. Many intellectuals from different parts of the country have lectured in the Arab Cultural Center in Dar'a Complex.

(5) Cultural Centers in the villages of Hadar, Jbata al-Khashab, Jaba, Mashara, Nab' al-Sakhr, Quseiba & Bariqa

Libraries in villages associated with the Governorate (province) of Quneitra, namely, Hadar, Jbata al-Khashab, Jaba, Mashara, Nab' al-Sakhr, Quseiba and Bariqa, were converted into cultural centers in 1997 in the framework of reconstruction of villages liberated in the 1973 war. New developing libraries were later incorporated in the newly established cultural centers. An annexe was added to the cultural center in Hadar, including a number of halls and a theater with a seating capacity of 1500, equipped with necessary furniture and related accessories. Similar annexes for extra activities were also added to centers in Jaba, Mashara and Nab' al-Sakhr.

(6) Plastic Arts Center

Established in 1982, the Plastic Arts Center has produced hundreds of students who attended painting and sculpture courses held on a biannual basis – some of Quneitra's renowned plastic artists had studied at this center. It may be noted that the head office of Quneitra's Fine Arts Branch lies next to the Plastic Arts Center.

(7) Cultural Station of Artouz

It was opened at Quneitra's complex in the town of Artouz in 1987. Besides its increasingly growing library, the center offers computer courses on a regular basis.

(8) Cultural Station of Sweisa

Created in 2001 at the Golan Center for Rural Welfare, the Cultural Station of Sweisa was provided with a 240-seat theater hall, a radio station and a developing library. Several courses are also organized by the center.

(9) al-Mzeirib Cultural Station

It was inaugurated in 2003.

(10) al-Yaduda Cultural Station

It was also opened in 2003.

Creation of Golan Award for Literary Creativity

This award was created in 2000 under a decision by Quneitra Governorate Council as proposed by the Directorate of Culture of Quneitra. The Golan Award for Literary Creativity aims to encourage literary creativity and composition in three genres (poetry, short story and drama). It is granted alternately every year, in addition to another annual award for best selling book in the province. Total value of these awards amounts to SP 60.000. The

Directorate of Culture organized a number of events including the Poetry Festival Competition in 2000, Short Story Festival Competition in 2001, Drama Festival Competition in 2002 and Poetry Competition in 2003. Distribution of awards is performed under supervision of jury committees of Arab Writers Union.

Creation of Folk Art Troupe

Established in 2002, this folk art troupe was provided with necessary costume. It participated in the 27th Regional Vanguard Festival in April 2002.

Publications projecting Quneitra

The Directorate of Culture in Quneitra issued a number of publications including:

- Cultural Golan, 1986 (500 copies)
- Quneitra's Illustrated Cultural Bulletin, 1987 (500 copies)
- Golan Historical Symposium - published by the Ministry of Culture, 1988 (500 copies)
- Syrian Arab Golan, a book covering the history, geography and archeology of the Golan, 1997 (500 copies)
- Governorate of Quneitra, an information bulletin issued on the occasion of the 27th Baath Vanguard Festival, 2002 (1000 copies)

Directorate of Culture in Idleb

There are 20 cultural centers associated with the Directorate of Culture of Idleb located at all districts and towns belonging to the Governorate of Idleb: Idleb, Salqin, Ma'arrat Masrin, Arminaz, Harem, Kafr Jakharim, Jisr al-Shoghour, Bensh, Taftanaz, al-Fo'a, Dana, Saraqeb, Tel Merdikh, Ma'r Debsi, Ma'rat al-No'man, Kafr Nubul, Khan Sheikhoun, Ariha, Abu al-Zohour & Sarmin.

These centers organize various cultural activities and functions, including symposiums, lectures, literary get-togethers and gala nights, national theater performances, book and art exhibitions, etc.

A mega cultural event of importance at the national level is the Ebla Literary Festival, organized by the Arab Cultural Center of Idleb on a regular basis.

Other functions widely known in the country's cultural activity include "Abi al-Fida al-Ma'arri Festival, organized by the Arab Cultural Center of Ma'rat al-No'man, and Okaz Poetry Competition, organized by the Arab Cultural Center in Saraqeb.

Directorate of Culture in Raqqa

Established on 1/4/1997, the Directorate of Culture in Raqqa now comprises 40 branch cultural centers in addition to the Assad House for Culture in both cities of Raqqa and al-Thawra. The Directorate of Culture in Raqqa follows up and controls the work of all branch cultural centers located in cities, towns and villages associated with Raqqa.

Cultural centers of importance in Raqqa include:

The Assad House for Culture in Raqqa

Consisting of a large complex including a three-storey building amounting in area up to 2500 sq.m. with a 20.000-sq.m. garden, the Assad House for Culture launched activities in early 2000. The complex holds a number of halls for various cultural activities. The ground floor contains a popular heritage hall and a panorama hall displaying historical costumes in Raqqa worn by men and women on certain occasions and everyday life. This museum also displays ancient tools and equipment used in agriculture such as ploughs, sickles, scythes and wheelbarrows as well as historical irrigation tools, cosmetics used by women in Raqqa in the past, etc.

A separate wing, on the other hand, contains printed material published by Raqqa's writers. They are chronologically arranged to serve as reference matter for scholars and interested researchers.

The first floor of this distinguished cultural complex includes a small conference room with seating capacity of 200, which can be used for local functions, seminars and other activities. An enclosed area designed for exhibitions lies opposite the conference room. The former includes plastic arts, photography and book exhibition sections. The same floor also contains the Children Education section, comprising a library and a reading hall equipped with necessary CD and TV sets. The section receives visiting children from 9 AM to 7 PM.

A wing for Popular Cultural Institute situated in the first floor holds training sections for various activities: computers, hairdressing, tailoring, nursing, foreign languages, Arabic calligraphy and music. These courses are offered by the Institute to 15+-year-old applicants at low registration fees. Graduation certificates are issued by the Ministry of Culture to participants who completed their respective courses. The Institute graduates an average of 1000 students a year in the disciplines mentioned above.

A bookshop for sale of books published by the Ministry of Culture at a 40% discount is also available in the first floor, which hosts the Cultural Functions Departments, Branch Centers Affairs Department and Adult Literacy and Cultural Development Department.

The main auditorium lies in the second floor. Equipped with 500 seats and advanced acoustic system, the auditorium has a big-size stage for theater and art performances and seminars.

A VIP lounge can be seen next to the theater hall. Walls of the VIP lounge feature pictures of various archeological sites, tourist attractions and great achievements carried out in the Governorate of Raqqa during the Corrective Movement which is enthusiastically in motion under the sagacious leadership of President Bashar Assad.

The largest section in the 2nd floor is occupied by the main library which contains a collection of 40.000 books distributed in two large halls, in addition to a hall with a collection of local, Arab and international periodicals. Two more reading halls are linked to the main library.

A separate hall provided with an internet facility and related equipment supplied by the Ministry of Culture lies in the 2nd floor. Another separate hall is designed to host a plastic arts center, which receives students interested in painting, sculpture and carving. An art exhibition displaying works of these students is organized by the Plastic arts Center on an annual basis.

Administration offices are also found in the same floor, comprising Deputy Director Cultural Administration, Document Control Department, Accountancy Department, etc.

Cultural Activity

The cultural activity is the basis of work of any cultural center. Accordingly, the cultural department prepares a quarterly cultural plan, covering all aspects of cultural activities: lectures, get-togethers, gala nights, seminars, symposiums, art shows, book and plastic arts galleries. Cultural functions are organized in cooperation between the Directorate of Culture and other popular institutions, vocational unions and literary associations.

The Assad House for Culture in al-Thawra City

It is a civilizational edifice similar to the Assad House for Culture in Raqqa in terms of architecture, area and distribution of sections. Administratively, it belongs to the Directorate of Culture of Raqqa, which, at the same time, supervises its administrative and cultural activity. The distinguished cultural, art, and theatrical activities of the Assad House for Culture are performed according to a quarterly plan prepared by the Directorate of Culture itself.

Directorate of Culture in Raqqa

Branch Cultural Centers in the Governorate of Raqqa

There are 38 newly established cultural centers, excluding the Arab Cultural Center in Tel Abiyadh which was set up back in 1974. These centers are associated with the Directorate of Culture of Raqqa. In spite of its limited staff of five members only, the Arab Cultural center in Tel Abiyadh, however, plays a vital cultural role covering areas bordering Turkey.

The branch cultural centers are located in towns and villages associated with the Governorate of Raqqa as follows: Jarniyah, Mansoura, Karama, Sabkha, Ma'dan, Ein Eissa, Slouk, Debsi Afnan, Debsi Faraj, Safsafa, Hamadaniya, Shamra, Ghirnata, Mighalla Kabira, al-Rahbi, al-Hama, Jdaydat Kahbour, al-Ya'rubiya, al-Nasira, Ghassaniya, al-Adnaniya, al-Assadiya, Ya'rub, Tishreen, Hulu A'bd, Tel Hamam, Sharkarak, Khirbat al-Faras, Hawi al-Hawa, Sweidiya Kabira and Khneiz.

All these centers perform their various cultural activities by staff members appointed by the Directorate of Culture of Raqqa.

In their nascent stage, all such centers took a room or two for their offices in Municipality of Baath Party Group buildings. Now, however, the majority of these branch cultural centers have their own separate buildings.

Cultural Overview of Raqqa

The Governorate of Raqqa is a culturally active province in view of its several cultural centers. Earlier, the Governorate of Raqqa was known as the “Short Story Capital”, which began organizing literary competitions and cultural festivals two decades ago. A summary of such activities is as follows:

Al-Battani Short Story Competition

It was first organized in 1989 to honor the commemoration of renowned Raqqa-origin astronomer “al-Battani”, whose work had enriched Arabic libraries.

This competition has provided Arabic literature with new talents who have made a remarkable appearance on the Arabic literary scene. Held on an annual basis, the “al-Battani” Short Story Competition provides the opportunity for participation by men-of-letters from Syria and other Arab countries. Financial awards granted at this important event value SP 60.000.

Poetry Competition of Rabi’a of Raqqa

It is an annual poetry competition created in 1989. It is held on 21st of March every year on the occasion of World Poetry Day. The competition was named after Raqqa’s renowned Abbasid poet Rabi’a bin Thabit bin Laja’ al-Eizar who composed the best of his work in descriptive and romantic poems.

Abdul Hamid al-Kateb Competition for Arabic Calligraphy

This Arabic calligraphy competition was initiated in 2000 and was named after calligrapher Abdul Hamid al-Kateb, who was born in the village of Hamarat adjacent to Raqqa. Participants in this important competition come from different parts of Arab and Islamic countries in addition to local participation. The event is held on an annual basis in a literary festival held to this effect at the Assad House for Culture in Raqqa and also at the Arab Cultural Center in al-Naser, the hometown of Abdul Hamid al-Kateb.

Creative Children’s Competition

This competition aims to encourage participation by children in all areas of creativity: painting, poetry, story-writing and short story. Results of the competition are announced in April every year.

Similar functions for adults are also organized by some of the branch cultural centers and the Assad House for Culture in the city of al-Thawra,

covering various literary and art domains: poetry, short story and plastic arts. These competitions are normally held in the Arab Cultural Centers in Tel Abiyadh and Dibsī Afnan.

Sawt al-Rafīqa (Voice of Rafīqa)

It is a monthly cultural bulletin issued by the Directorate of Culture in Raqqa (first issue of this bulletin was published in 1/7/1997). It was basically aimed to form the core of a cultural magazine addressed to the public, carrying the news of local writers, poets and intellectuals as well as similar think-tanks nationwide.

The monthly “Voice of Rafīqa” bulletin deals with Arab academic and cultural topics, following up cultural achievements in the province of Raqqa. It may be noted that this bulletin has brought to light new and promising literary talents who greatly interact and contribute to Arab cultural issues of today. The bulletin is still published in Raqqa on a monthly basis.

Directorate of Culture in Deir Ezzor

The Governorate of Deir Ezzor witnessed remarkable development through dissemination of education and culture by its respective cultural centers which increasingly spread out in cities and town associated with the Governorate (province) of Deir Ezzor. Before the Corrective Movement in 1970, number of cultural centers in Deir Ezzor was limited to a single center established in 1960 in an old public building. But under the Corrective Movement, the center was provided with a big modern building and a theater, which was added at a later stage.

In 1971, three more cultural centers were established in al-Bukamal, al-Mayadin and al-Basira respectively. In 1980 two new cultural centers were also built in al-Mayadin and al-Basira. These two centers were provided with two modern theaters as well as two libraries, two exhibition halls and a number of administrative offices.

In 1997, ten new cultural centers were set up in the following cities and towns: Hujain, al-Qoriya, Zobia, Mohasan, Khisham, al-Jala, al-Sor, al-Kisra, al-Betin and al-Ishara. Fully equipped with necessary furniture, acoustic systems, reference books, etc. all these centers commenced cultural activities in 1998, including literary get-togethers, gala nights, festivals.

Libraries associated with the mentioned cultural centers are daily visited by considerable number of readers of different ages and education levels.

In 2003, six cultural centers were set up in the city of Sbeikhan and the towns of Ghranij, Abu Hamam, el-Buleel, al-Shmeitiya and al-Shehil. These newly established centers were supplied with necessary furniture, equipment and books. In 2003, several cultural and literary functions were organized by these centers, attracting the attention of local inhabitants and guiding their skills and potentials.

A new cultural center was founded in the city of al-Sha'fa under a decision by Governor Deir Ezzor. The center was based in two apartments allocated by the City Hall and was also provided with necessary equipment to launch its activity in 2004.

Other plans have been also prepared to establish new cultural centers in all towns and community centers associated with the Governorate of Deir Ezzor which is deep-rooted in history and a 10,000 years old civilization.

As part of the development and modernization process launched by President Bashar Assad, the Cultural Center of Deir Ezzor was renovated in 1997, where both the theater hall and library were modernized. A picture house, three multi-purpose halls, art gallery, internet facility, academic and training halls for the Popular Cultural Institute, offices for the Directorate of Culture and Elimination of Illiteracy Center were all added to the complex of the Deir Ezzor Cultural Center. An open-air hall was later added to the roof of the center.

Foundation of a branch national theater in the eastern part of Dier Ezzor was discussed by the National Theater Administration, Ministry of Culture, in an effort to invigorate the art of theatrical performances in Deir Ezzor. A theatrical troupe led by stage director, Abdul Hamid Azzawi, was also formed to start its performances on the stage of the new theater. Four popular cultural institutes established in the 1990s in Deir Ezzor, al-Mayadin, al-Boukamal and al-Basira, offering necessary education and training courses in the English language, computer software and hardware, tailoring, hairdressing, nursing, Arabic calligraphy, etc.

The process of disseminating education and knowledge in other centers is expected to be in motion in line with the ongoing development in our country.

Moreover, a plastic arts center was created in the 1980s and was named after the late renowned artist "Ismael Hosni". The center offers regular courses in painting, sculpture and various genres of plastic arts, irrespective of age or education level of participants.

An internet facility was also provided to a special hall at the Cultural Center of Deir Ezzor in early 2004 with computer units, necessary equipment and air-conditioning units supplied by the Ministry of Culture. A similar Internet Café was established earlier in 2003 at the cultural center in al-Mayadin.

Directorate of Culture in Deir Ezzor

Present Cultural Projects

Raising new buildings for cultural centers in the Governorate of Deir Ezzor commensurate with the development process witnessed in the province itself in particular and the country in general started in 2003, including the following:

Project for building cultural center in city of Hajin

This project was started in the second half of 2002. In 2003, completion works for this building was undertaken by the Military Housing Establishment. The project includes a 300-seat theater hall, a large library, a screening hall, exhibitions and galleries hall, a popular cultural institute, an internet facility center and administrative offices. The building became ready at a cost amounting to SP. 20 million and was placed into operation in 2005.

Project for building a cultural center in al-Bukamal

Construction of a large cultural center in al-Bukamal began in 2003 on a 4000-sq.m. piece of land at an estimated cost of SP. 24 million. The project includes a theater hall with a seating capacity of 350, exhibitions and galleries hall, a library, a popular cultural institute, an internet facility center and administrative offices. The building was placed into operation in 2005.

The Culture House Project in Deir Ezzor

It is the most important of all other cultural projects in the Governorate of Deir Ezzor, where an area of 10000 sq.m. was allocated to this edifice located near the Furat Cham Hotel. In 2003, the Engineers Union branch in Deir Ezzor was given the task of preparing relevant outlines and studies. This huge project includes a theater hall with a seating capacity of 1000 and several multi-purpose halls used for art exhibitions, lectures, conferences, seminars, symposiums, festivals, etc. A movie theater, cafeteria, a major library containing a collection of thousands of books, a children's library, a puppet theater, open-air theaters, etc. were all made available in this huge five-storey cultural edifice at a floor-building area of 20 hectares and a cost of SP. 264 million as estimated by the State Planning Commission.

Directorate of Culture in Tartous

Major cultural centers in the Governorate of Tartous are situated in the following cities and towns associated with the Governorate itself: Tartous, Drekish, Safita, Banyas, Sheikh Badr.

Besides, there are eight newly cultural centers established between 1998 and 2003, namely, the Arab Cultural Center in Brimanat al-Mashayekh, the Arab Cultural Center in Mashta el-Helou, the Arab Cultural Center in Dweir Raslan, the Arab Cultural Center in Arwad, the Arab Cultural Center in Khirbit al-Mi'za, the Arab Cultural Center in al-Hamidiya and the Arab Cultural Center in al-Safsafa.

The Arab Cultural Center in Tartous

The first floor of the Arab Cultural Center building in Tartous consists of a lobby, theater hall, reception lounge, five offices for administration and staff members, children's library, three storerooms and two stage dressing rooms. The second floor contains public library, reading hall and five rooms allocated to the Popular Cultural Institute. The building is surrounded by a beautiful garden planted with trees.

The Plastic Arts Center, on the other hand, organizes two biennial courses with four classes each, teaching students oil/water color painting and drawing. Students are eligible to obtain a graduation certificate after attending four consecutive classes.

The Popular Cultural Institute

The Institute organizes qualitative courses for students interested in the following subjects:

- A three-stage computer course (beginners, advanced and Photoshop application).
- Computer course (repair and maintenance)
- Arabic-language typewriting course
- Typewriter repair course
- Electricity course (automobiles & wiring)
- Healthcare course (hospitalization and nursing)
- Foreign languages course (English, French, German and Russian)
- Arabic calligraphy course
- Accountancy course
- Tailoring/dressmaking course
- Embroidery, music, artificial flower making, hairdressing, ornamentation, ceramics
- Electronics (principles of electronics, color/black and white TV)

Remarkable participation in such courses, which are held three times a year, however, comprises the following areas: computers, foreign languages, hairdressing, dressmaking and fashion designing.

Directorate of Culture in Tartous

The Arab Cultural Center in Safita

The Arab Cultural Center in Safita was founded back in 1961 to cover the various cultural domains, particularly literature, arts and science. The center originally aimed to provide the country with required erudite cadres, and raise the people up to the appropriate civilizational level. The harmony of social thinking, it may be said, has given momentum to the cultural rise of the Arab Cultural Center of Safita.

In view of the cultural importance of Safita, the Ministry of Culture built an outstanding edifice which was placed in operation in 1999. The area of the building exceeds 7500 sq.m. and was designed to include a theater hall, two exhibition halls, a popular cultural institute, public library, reading hall, children's library and a bookshop for sale of publications issued by the Ministry of Culture, as well as administration and personnel offices.

1- The library contains a collection of 21900 books, registering an average of 1200 books on loan a month. All data and information of relevance to the library were fed into a computerized system to facilitate book search by readers.

2- The theater hall is air-conditioned, equipped with advanced acoustic system and can seat up to 400 people. It offers distinguished performances for both adult and children audiences.

3- The children's library contains a collection of 5975 books which meet the needs of our children.

4- The popular cultural institute offers courses in computers, hairdressing, dressmaking/tailoring, typewriting, etc. The institute graduates an average of 500 students a year.

5- The reading hall is air-conditioned and can accommodate 500 persons.

6- The bookshop is earmarked for sale of publications issued by the Ministry of Culture at a permanent discount of 40%.

The Arab Cultural Center in Sheikh Badr

Established back in 1976, the Arab Cultural Center in Sheikh Badr plays an important educational role in imparting knowledge by offering books on loan to the public. The center has a rich library which contains a collection of 4500 books covering various cultural and scientific subjects. Other activities by the center include holding of lectures, symposiums, gala nights and poetry get-togethers with the participation of many poets, writers and intellectuals from the Governorate of Tartous and elsewhere. The associated popular cultural institute offers several courses in computer science, English language, dressmaking and hairdressing.

The Arab Cultural Center in Drekish

Founded on 1/12/1975 and moved to its new premises in 1995, the Arab Cultural Center in Drekish consists of the sections listed below:

1- A theater hall with a seating capacity of 400

2- Exhibitions and galleries' hall

3- Public library

4- Children's library

5- Reading hall

6- Popular Cultural Institute

7- Administration

(i) The public library (contains a collection of 13215 books).

(ii) The children's library (contains a collection of 4133 books)

(iii) The Popular Cultural Institute offers three courses a year for some 500 students: computers (beginners and advanced), typewriting, hairdressing, dressmaking and tailoring and English language.

Major activities by the center includes the "Silk and Water Festival" as well as other functions held in collaboration with the City Council and popular organizations. The events included in the mentioned festival comprise a book exhibition, heritage galleries, gala night honoring excelling students, and lectures covering tourist, art and social subjects.

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

- **Applied Arts Institute**
- **Elimination of Illiteracy Directorate**
- **Adults' Literacy Directorate**
- **Translation & Authorship Directorate**
- **Copyright Directorate**
- **Children Education Directorate**
- **Arab Heritage Revival Directorate**
- **Cultural Publications**

Applied Arts Institute

The Institute was founded on 19/9/1987. It is administratively associated with the Ministry of Culture – Fine Arts Directorate – while in terms of curriculum, teaching plans and regulations governing examinations, it is associated with the Ministry of Higher Education – the Higher Council of Intermediate Institutes.

It is the only institute in Syria which follows an academic method of teaching (80% of the curricula is in the form of practical classes and 20% theoretical classes). Prerequisites for admission in this Institute include high-school certificate and an admission test. Graduates of the Institute are granted a degree of "assistant licentiate" certificate. The Applied Arts Institute prepares cadres of artists eligible to provide their expertise to

various practical fields within the framework of applied arts which can be beneficial to both public and private sector institutions.

The Applied Arts Institute consists of four Departments, namely:

1- Arabic Calligraphy Department, which teaches the art of calligraphy, restoration of manuscripts, application of ornamentation and advertising.

2- Photography Department, which offers classes for learning filming, color/black and white photography and editing.

3- Sculpture Department, which offers classes in clay modeling, wood/stone carving and the art of making shapes using metals (cast iron and bronze).

4- Ceramics Department, which teaches its students the art and techniques of shaping and making ceramics, as well as techniques of baking clay until hard and the ovens used for this purpose (gas, electric and firewood ovens).

Since its inception, the Applied Arts Institute has produced numerous qualified artists who have made remarkable appearance in contemporary art in Syria. Many of the Institute's graduates won international awards in various competitions abroad, such as the International Arabic Calligraphy Competition held in Turkey in 2000, where one of the Applied Arts Institute's graduates won the Golden Award. Other graduates were also among the UNESCO Award for a photography competition in environmental subjects. Basel al-Sa'di, a graduate of the Sculpture Department, Applied Arts Institute, won the first award in the Mahaba Festival held in Syria in 2003.

It may be said that the Institute has successfully filled vacancies in great demand by public sector institutions. The Applied Arts Institute has established a firm ground and good reputation in cultural and art circles at both local and regional levels. In 2003, the Institute invited a number of foreign artists and experts to provide our students with state-of-the-art techniques applied for making and baking ceramics. Renowned Syrian filmmakers were also hosted by the Institute to share their expertise with students of Photography Department.

Strategy of the Applied Arts Institute

The Applied Arts Institute basically aims to:

1) Invest and prepare artistic talents to be qualified for brilliant appearance on the Arab and international levels; develop art resources with a view of attaching our contemporary societies to their glorious history of arts;

- 2) Promote and project the aesthetics of indigenous arts and crafts in the form of living heritage in tribute to the genius of ancestors who paved the way for generation of artists of today.
- 3) Pass on original skills and expertise to present generations and encourage younger ones with special emphasis on values of originality of indigenous arts by following new techniques, using modern tools and methods to assimilate their values and principles on the one hand, and to deal with them as a source of inspiration for creating new models and patterns and employing contemporary subjects in line with the spirit of today on the other.
- 4) Invest such skills for art communication between Arab and foreign states.
- 5) Exchange technical and professional expertise between the Applied Arts Institute and similar institutions with friendly countries through holding regular workshops to share each other's expertise and art productions.
- 6) Revive old crafts to better develop and modernize them to pass them on to future generations in an effort to preserve this heritage of skills.

Elimination of Illiteracy Directorate

Elimination of illiteracy is a hot topic today worldwide. Whenever we speak of any public educational process, we are confronted by illiteracy that is challenging world societies. We have been long aware of this serious problem and we, therefore, formed a council involving the various government institutions and popular organizations for elimination of illiteracy. Efforts have been intensified over the past few years by adopting a policy listing elementary education as imperative on the one hand, and increase of classes designed to eliminate illiteracy on the other. Imperative elementary education is associated with the Ministry of Education, while elimination of illiteracy is addressed by the Ministry of Culture. We have been able over the past few years to free a good number of people from illiteracy. We have started follow-up classes, publication of assistance books and prepared teachers for the purpose of elimination of illiteracy by organizing several training courses to this effect nationwide. New books have been also published for basic stages, and preparation of related publications is underway by experienced staff.

Moreover, the Ministry of Culture successfully carried out a number of projects in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO). The projects included elimination of women's illiteracy, women's urban education (in Damascus Countryside Governorate) and incorporation of population concepts into elimination of illiteracy curricula, as well as the project of setting up two major centers in Bosra and al-Rastan for educating women in rural areas and providing them with vocational training in association with the UN Development Program.

The Ministry conducted several studies and prepared relevant plans for elimination of illiteracy and organized many Arab and foreign symposiums and seminars in this regard and consequently gained important experience.

Illiteracy is a world concern. An annual date has therefore been set to address this serious problem and many countries expressed readiness to make strenuous efforts to eradicate illiteracy.

In Syria, we have been diligently working to eliminate illiteracy with the hope of performing all plans set forth to this effect.

Our efforts have registered remarkable success. Illiteracy rate in Syria is constantly going down at a time when it is marking considerable increase in other world countries. In 1970, for example, illiteracy rate registered a low percentage of 53.5% and went down further in 1981 to reach 37.8%, and as low as 25.2% in 1989 and 18% in 1995. The process of elimination of illiteracy targeted 10-years-plus age group. In this context, a question arises as to whether audio-visual techniques can contribute to educate the illiterate.

We are trying through our cultural centers and libraries to display educational documentaries and popular stage performances. We are also planning to organize simplified educational lectures dealing with everyday life. We believe, however, that reading and writing are indispensable for literacy.

Adults' Literacy and Cultural Development Directorate

Under Decision No. 197 dated 21/1//1958 and its amendments issued by Presidency of the Republic on setting up the Ministry of Culture and joining therewith a number of Directorates and Departments, the Ministry of Culture was given the assignment of elimination of illiteracy.

In 1968, Ministerial Decision No 52 was issued to organize the Ministry of Culture and specify the duties of its Departments.

Efforts aimed at elimination of illiteracy during this period were represented in conducting various experiments into different sectors of elimination of illiteracy, creating a number of classes for elimination of illiteracy through principal and branch cultural centers associated with the Ministry of Culture. Efforts also embraced experimental field projects in certain sectors associated with the industrial sector in Damascus countryside in cooperation with the Arab Commission for Elimination of Illiteracy and Adult's Literacy to explore all positive and negative aspects of elimination of illiteracy efforts. This also aimed to raise the awareness of the people over illiteracy and its impact on society in collaboration with popular organizations. The results necessitated intensification of efforts for elimination of illiteracy, increase awareness over the problem of illiteracy by media means and provide the personnel involved in the efforts for elimination of illiteracy. Experiments revealed that efforts made for elimination of illiteracy were insufficient as long as new generations of young illiterates need continuous efforts in the process of literacy.

Following the Corrective Movement led by the late President Hafez Assad in 1970 and in the context of the state policies for promotion of literacy, Law No. 7 for elimination of illiteracy was issued in 1972 outlining work for elimination of illiteracy along with a new strategy coordinating efforts made by authorities involved in elimination of illiteracy and similar efforts by the Ministry of Education which was entitled under the subject Law to implement mandatory elementary education.

A special fund earmarked to the Higher Council of Elimination of Illiteracy was also created under Law No. 7 to provide independent financial sources required for elimination of illiteracy operations throughout the country. The Higher Council of Elimination of Illiteracy set forth a system for granting incentives, rewards and medals to active staff members involved in elimination of illiteracy efforts.

Implementation of Elimination of Illiteracy Law led to a considerable decrease in illiteracy rate among the 10-years-plus age group from 53.5% in 1970 to 14.2% in 1998. Nevertheless, the results did not rise up to the hoped-for target which set forth a policy to wipe out illiteracy with a view to the fact that the Ministry of Culture was unable to fully implement the plans

outlined to this effect due to lack of necessary financial allocations. However, the most recent plan outlined by the Ministry of Culture was announced in 1996 in collaboration with the UNESCO Regional Bureau. Accordingly, the plan was put up to the Higher Council for discussion and ratification in its session held in September 1996. The said plan aimed at liberating 1152766 people from illiteracy who form the total number of illiterates of the 13-45-years-old target age group within a period of five years, starting in 1997 up to 2001.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ELIMINATION OF ILLITERACY LAW LED TO CONSIDERABLE DECREASE OF ILLITERACY RATE

The second Education Conference of Developing Literacy was held in 1998 where one of the Conference Committees addressed the issue of elimination of illiteracy and adults' literacy by means of dialogue and discussion. Substantial recommendations by the Conference gave priority to secure necessary funds required for implementation of the National Plan (the expenditure of which at that time valued SP. 76 million earmarked every year over a five-year plan). But recommendations announced by the Conference were not effectuated and consequently financing the elimination of illiteracy plan was not realized. However, efforts made during 1997-2000 led to liberation of 202412 out of the target number of illiterates within the limits of available potentials. According to a recent statement by the Statistics Bureau, 960000 illiterates of the 13-45-years-old target age group were not liberated under the plan set forth to this effect. Illiteracy percentage of this group stands at 11.4% of total population: 5.2% (males) and 17.7% (females).

Work for elimination of illiteracy and adults' literacy in Syria is increasingly growing, especially that the Ministry of Culture performs this duty in collaboration with other authorities and popular organizations and competent Arab and international bodies in light of the decisions and recommendations adopted by the Higher Council of Elimination of Illiteracy.

This development witnessed the issuance of Legislative Decree No. 16 on 24/2/2002 stating that Ministers of Culture and Education shall undertake duties and authority originally entitled to the Higher Council of Elimination of Illiteracy by Decision No. 7. Under the aforementioned Legislative Decree, the Higher Council of Elimination of Illiteracy title was replaced by Ministries of Culture and Education wherever mentioned in Law No. 7, also

associating the Fund created under Article 13, Law No. 7, with the Minister of Culture. Accordingly, the new financial system was issued under Decision No. 1818 dated 20/11/2002.

Adults' Literacy and Cultural Development Directorate

In 2003, the title "Elimination of Illiteracy Directorate" was changed into the "Adults' Literacy and Cultural Development Directorate". Similarly, the title of "Elimination of Illiteracy Bureaus" available in the country's governorates were changed into "Adults' Literacy and Cultural Development Departments". New directives were also issued to amend the teaching system comprising three levels, including grant of certificates and appointment of teachers, supervisors and staff members in the newly established classes of elimination of illiteracy.

As a result, this qualitative development was accompanied by a considerable quantitative development which was best illustrated in decrease of percentage of illiteracy among the 10-years-plus age group from 53% in 1970 to 14.2% in 1999, whereby illiteracy rate among females decrease remarkably. This result was reached by the fruitful cooperation established between the Ministry of Culture and competent popular organizations.

Qualitative development, on the other hand, was represented in different aspects, including educational courses comprising three stages, namely:

- a) Basic Stage extending over a period of six months, during which essentials of reading and writing, arithmetic and general education are taught in two-hour classes a day.
- b) Follow-up Stage extending over a period of three months designed for people freed from illiteracy. During this stage, follow-up textbooks are taught to people under this category, providing them with necessary training to acquire general education and discussion of subjects in their syllabus.
- c) Free Follow-up Stage which forms an open stage offered to performance of plans prepared for literacy of adults.

In the early 1990s, the Ministry of Culture developed the curricula taught in elimination of illiteracy courses by introducing concepts related to population, health and environment education in the context of projects

performed in collaboration with a number of international organizations. New syllabi were, therefore, issued by the Ministry including a reading textbook "Welcome to Literacy" for the Basic Stage, and another new textbook for the subjects of mathematics along with a reading book for the Follow-up stage. A "Teacher's Guidebook" was also issued by the Ministry of Culture for both the Basic and Follow-up stages of elimination of illiteracy. Moreover, a new mathematics textbook for the Follow-up Stage was published by end of 2003. As part of the series of adults' literacy follow-up syllabi, the Adults' Literacy and Cultural Development Directorate issued 21 textbooks in a simplified style dealing with vital subjects related to everyday life designed for those freed from illiteracy.

In late 2002, the curriculum of elimination of illiteracy taught for the three levels was modified to replace the syllabi taught in the Basic and Follow-up stages. A newer elimination of illiteracy curriculum for the three levels was adopted and included the textbooks listed below:

- 1- Learn Arabic (texts for level 1)
- 2- Learn Arabic (drills for level 1)
- 3- Essentials of dictation and grammar (level 3)
- 4- Mathematics (level 3)
- 5- Informatics and computer science (levels 1 and 2)

The post-liberation from elimination of illiteracy stage was given top priority by the Ministry of Culture in light of the rich experience gained in this domain through action, cooperation and coordination between the Ministry of Culture and other popular organizations and authorities engaged in eradication of illiteracy.

By end of 2003, the first issue of Adults' Literary Quarterly was published in the context of the action plan prepared in cooperation with the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). This quarterly focused on cultural, educational and social subjects.

In the Field of Training:

The Ministry of Culture is continuously training personnel working in elimination of illiteracy in cooperation with local popular organizations as well as similar Arab and international bodies by organizing training courses and seminars of relevance held in the country and abroad.

It may be noted that many workshops and training courses have laid special emphasis on polishing the skills of participants, particularly their expertise in the areas of population, health and environment.

Besides, the Ministry of Culture organizes training courses in cooperation with the Adults' Literacy Departments based in the different Governorates as well as with popular organizations engaged in the process of elimination of illiteracy. The courses aim at rehabilitating teachers of elimination of illiteracy classes according to a syllabus designed specifically for this purpose.

In the Field of Projects:

A number of experimental projects have been carried out by the Ministry of Culture, covering the following:

- Leading experimental projects in the labor sector.
- A project for elimination of illiteracy and urban education for women in the Governorate of Damascus Countryside (1985-1989). The project was carried out in cooperation with the General Women's Union and UNESCO.
- A project for setting up two major centers (in Bosra and al-Rastan) designed for literacy of rural women and their vocational training (1988-1991). The project was performed in collaboration with the General Women's Union, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).
- A project for incorporation of population education with elimination of illiteracy for adults (1982-1991) and a project for social education (1992-1995). Both projects were performed in association with the UNDP and UNESCO.
- Projects for elimination of illiteracy of rural women and raising their healthcare awareness. These projects have been launched in 1993 in cooperation with the General Women's Union and UNICEF.
- Subordinate program (information, literacy and communication) from 1997 to 2000, and another subordinate program ("Catalysis") from 1997 until present time. Both programs have been signed with the UN Population Fund.

All projects mentioned above have uncovered the importance of linking elimination of illiteracy with vocational rehabilitation, i.e. non-separation between the alphabet and training. Both aspects can be realized by employing reading during training in skills and professions acquired through

self-education for later stages. Importance of mass literacy was also underlined in all experimental projects with the purpose of raising the awareness of the people (males and females) over matters related to health, environment, population and economy.

The results reached by these projects, it was revealed, came in agreement with the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (1990) to universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy. The achievements realized by the Syrian Ministry of Culture and popular organizations engaged in eradication of illiteracy have won the appreciation of international bodies of relevance to eradication of illiteracy, which granted the Syrian authorities official awards in recognition for their efforts made to this effect.

It may be noted that the process of elimination of illiteracy has gained momentum under the guidance and directives of President Bashar Assad, who has laid special emphasis on democracy of education which ultimately leads to a developed society capable of keeping abreast of the fast civil development.

Authorship and Translation Directorate

The Authorship and Translation Directorate aims to impart modern, rational, national and enlightening culture with a view to the fact that, like education, it is a long-term social investment seeking development of human potentials, broadening vistas of thoughts and establishing national cohesion. Expenditures of such an "investment" can never be considered as a waste of funds as alleged by some people.

Among its many duties, the Authorship and Translation Directorate is generally viewed as auxiliary to other duties of the "state" in developing countries, where foundation of social, economic and urban infrastructure is undertaken by the state, including setting up of educational institutions, public utilities and other establishments found in modern societies. Likewise, the duties performed by cultural departments, including the Authorship and Translation Directorate, act as a state-run publishing house providing substantial cultural projects parallel to infrastructural projects in other national domains. The state lays the ground for cultural infrastructure with its various divisions – film and theater industry, book industry, etc.

Direct information and publicity affairs, on the other hand, fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information.

In the field of "book industry", substantial publishing projects – specialized and general series, translations of essential intellectual publications by Arab and world writers – stand for infrastructure. Since its creation, the Authorship and Translation Directorate has adopted this principle by publishing the works of internationally acclaimed writers along with similar prominent writers from the Arab world. This Department has also issued specialized qualitative series and general education and scientific magazines and publications in cooperation with the Arab Heritage Revival Directorate, which is mainly concerned with publications dealing with heritage. The activity of the Authorship and Translation Directorate has contributed to Syria's policies in the realm of culture and projected the country's brilliant literary works, particularly publications by the Ministry of Culture.

Publications Plan of the Authorship and Translation Directorate

Categorization of published books into series generally aims at regularizing human knowledge and thoughts of the individual. Since the mid-1980s, the Authorship and Translation Directorate, therefore, categorized its publications subject-wise (or literary genre-wise) series. In the same way, the objective of the Ministry of Culture revolves around raising Arab culture up to the level of human culture of today, offering fundamental projects unaffordable by private publishers. The series issued by the Authorship and Translation Directorate, therefore, may be viewed as an integration between translated and authored works in general. But the Authorship and Translation Directorate's policy accords greater attention to translation based on the belief that translation is an essential factor for introducing the treasures of human thoughts – past and present – to Arab readers on the one hand, and an important factor for developing Arabic language and enriching and enlightening human thoughts on the other. Accordingly, the series of published books have been categorized as follows:

1) Intellectual Studies:

Intellectual texts of high value dealing with various fields of knowledge: philosophy, social sciences, general education (mainly translated).

2) Psychological Educational Studies:

Important books dealing with education and psychology (mostly translated works).

3) Scientific Studies:

Books whose subjects center on environment, informatics and simplified sciences (mostly translated).

4) Social and Economic Studies:

Subjects dealing with world economy in general and Arab and Syrian economies in particular.

5) World Critical Studies:

Most important critiques - past and present – (translated).

6) Arab Critical Studies:

Writings by Arab critics, mainly Syrians, about Arabic and world literature.

7) World Novels:

Most important world novels (translated from different languages and cultures).

8) Arabic Stories and Novels:

Works by Arab writers – the Authorship and Translation Directorate is always keen to select quality stories and novels (authored).

9) World Short Stories:

Translation of quality selections of world short stories, taking into consideration writers and cultures (translated).

10) World Poetry:

Selections of world poems, poet or culture-wise.

11) Arabic Poetry:

Poems by contemporary Arab poets, mainly in Syria - the Authorship and Translation Directorate is always keen to select quality works of poetry.

12) World Drama:

Selected world and Arabic dramas (authored).

13) Complete Works of World Writers:

A long-term plan for publishing complete works of a selected list of brilliant world writers (translated).

14) Complete Works of Syrian Writers:

Re-publication of complete works or selections by 19th/20th-century Syrian writers, based on a long-term plan by the Directorate which publishes the works of one or two writers every year.

15) Art Series:

Projection of plastic arts in Syria (authored).

16) Monthly Book Series:

Important old and contemporary works addressing current problems or similar works of great literary value (authored/translated)

17) Arab Revival Issues and Dialogues:

Presentation of important Arab revival thoughts and problems. This series has consumed all its selected subjects and will start other series of complete works covering the "Martyrs of 6 May 1916" who represented Arab enlightenment, mainly in Syria.

18) Hot Issues:

An attempt to follow up problems currently under discussion at both the Arab and international arenas: dialogue of civilizations, globalization, human rights, modernization, democracy, development, concepts of the state and citizens, the law, changes, etc.

19) Eastern Literature:

Literature of persecuted nations, namely, Iran, Turkey and Asia (known in modern critic terminology as "post-colonial literature"). (Translated).

20) Women's Issues:

Modern studies addressing emancipation of women and developing their effective role in the society and culture (authored/translated).

21) History and Travels:

History and travels in ancient times (authored/translated).

22) "First Book" Series:

This series aims to encourage young writers by publishing their "first book" irrespective of its theme.

Books related to children, cinema, theater, archeology and heritage have their independent directorates, which can also work jointly with the Directorate of Authorship.

23) Two "Who's Who" bibliographical series (Arabic and international).

24) History of world literature series separately dealing with every culture or world literature to enable readers to explore this series chronologically.

25) Republication of some of Syria's distinguished old magazines, or similar selections along with related studies.

26) Holding of Arab symposiums dealing with general or specialized cultural topics.

General Remarks:

The points listed below are always observed for selection of translated books:

a- Books should enjoy a human effect of an agreed-upon value (past and present, from Plato to Habermas).

b- Books should satisfy the needs of Arab readers, i.e. they should tackle hot issues in the realms of world and Arab culture.

c- Selection of translated books should rely on a policy open to different cultures, ideas and other human perspectives (past and present).

d- Translated books should contribute to development of Arabic language and culture, i.e. they should be of relevance to current developments and problems of Arab societies and cultures.

e- They should feature a new addition to their respective domains.

f- Translation of books should be objective and distant from nepotism or favoritism.

Copyright Directorate

In 2001, President Bashar Assad issued Law No. 12, governing and regulating copyright in Syria.

The Copyright Directorate undertakes performance of the duties listed below:

- 1) Protection of copyright by litigating violations represented in illegal printing, publishing or selling of literary, artistic and scientific works as well as illegal publishing of books, computer software or audio-visual tapes.
- 2) Registration of works with the Copyright Directorate, whereby ad hoc committees explore such works and prepare a report of acceptance.
- 3) Establish pan-Arab cooperation in the field of copyright in coordination with the Intellectual Property Unit at Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO).
- 4) Cooperation with Muslim countries in the field of copyright through the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).
- 5) International cooperation in the field of copyright in coordination with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). A relevant symposium was held in association with WIPO on 16-17 June 2003 and 18-19 June 2003. The former was addressed to publishers, authors and the public, while the latter was addressed to members of courts of law (magistrates and lawyers) and customs authorities.
- 6) Bilateral cooperation with certain countries, which was materialized on the ground by convening the Syria-Norway Symposium on Copyright and Neighboring Right on 29 February – 2 March 2004.
- 7) Cooperation with Brazil, Tunisia and Kuwait in the field of copyright.

Children's Education Directorate

The Children's Education Directorate undertakes the following duties:

(i) Presentation of an advanced, varied, rich and interesting cultural and educational material to children through:

- Release of simplified scientific, historical and literary publications suitable for the three-stage childhood in various fields (publications, theater, cinema, music, radio and television varieties, plastic arts).
- Sponsoring children's talents by holding literary and art contests age-wise; encourage children by publishing their literary and art works in the framework of the Children Education Directorate's publications and "Osama" Magazine.
- Issuance of "Osama" Magazine on a periodically and monthly basis.
- Participation in local, Arab and international book and art exhibitions.
- Observe the International Children's Day on June 25th each year and the Arab Children's Day on October 1st every year.

To mark these two occasions, the Children's Education Directorate holds several activities, including stage performances, film screenings, book exhibition, painting workshops, music, etc.

- Coordination and cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to hold a special function marking the occasion of Disabled Child Day each year.
- Cooperation with the UNICEF over implementation of annual plans of projects proposed by the Children's Education Directorate (studies, seminars, symposiums, inauguration of children's libraries based in cultural centers, etc.)
- Participation in the Committee formed by the Ministry of Education in the framework of Children's Parliament.
- Working out plans to develop action and activity in the context of duties assumed by the Children's Education Directorate.

Arab Heritage Revival Directorate

Heritage is an aspect of the creativity of the individual and a collective creativity of the Arab nation over the centuries. Heritage is also the best expression of cultural as well as civilizational identity, including all forms of cultural and artistic expressions and features passed on from distant to recent past, whether material or non-material.

Arab Islamic heritage is characterized by reflecting more than one simple production which is not associated with a certain period, place or community. It is a composite culture comprising plentitude of features of time, life and attitude. The concept of heritage within the Arab cultural framework, therefore, forms an essential factor of each cultural outline, given its importance in constituting the cultural formation of Arab society. Academically, heritage is divided into three categories:

- 1- Material heritage, such as historical monuments and findings of archeological excavations.
- 2- Intellectual heritage represented in the production passed on from ancestors, including scientists, writers, think-tanks and politicians who had been witnesses and elements of creativity of their respective ages.
- 3- Social heritage comprising traditions and social values.

Material heritage can be apparently seen in standing patterns, monuments and buildings, whereas intellectual heritage can hardly prove its sensible presence in the individual and mass conscience as an element of cultural development. Importance of listing heritage among contemporary cultural activities is unquestionable, given its role in authenticating the originality of future cultural schemes. Heritage forms the "organic" continuity of civilizational identity and essential concept of implementing Arab unity throughout the different periods. Besides reflecting our Arab identity, heritage is a future potential which needs to be invigorated and activated to act as an integrated link between past and present. Regardless of its glorious past, heritage always needs to be enriched through renovation and development to guarantee its constant vividness.

Arab heritage is a deep-rooted heritage naturally found inside every Arab individual. But such heritage must not and shall not be as fetters to the creative talents of today. There are, as always have been, changeable and unchangeable features in every culture over the ages. Defining these

changeable and unchangeable features is a difficult mission faced by all modernized cultures which have always overcome this difficulty. Heritage itself, particularly verbal, picturesque, musical, professional, literary and aesthetic heritage is always and constantly changing. Modernization, therefore, can never be seen as unorthodoxy over heritage, whereas stillness can only be interpreted as unorthodoxy and inactivity which put heritage itself in jeopardy.

The importance of Arab heritage as a means to understand other cultures and enhance international cultural cooperation and promote, versify and maintain cultural communication in all its forms from time immemorial has prompted Syria over the past few decades to accord special attention to Arab heritage from a national Arab perspective. The Arab Heritage Revival Directorate was, therefore, created under the Ministry of Culture. The newly established department was given several tasks, including studies of Arab heritage, handling manuscripts to become as ready reference to scholars and new generations of Arab heritage students. The Arab Heritage Revival Directorate also undertakes editing and publication of manuscripts as originally sought by their authors after probing their content to be able to correct any mistakes accidentally committed by scribes and refill missing phrases or even paragraphs which faded away in the course of time.

The Arab Heritage Revival Directorate, Ministry of Culture, has prepared a scientific plan to edit and reproduce Arab heritage books by focusing on selection of manuscripts in the first stage, followed by collecting copies of the selected manuscripts. The second stage of this complex process is represented in studying and arranging these copies according to standards adopted in this activity to identify the original copy whose text will be the subject of replication.

In the pre-final stage, comparison between the original text and other replicas leads to identification of any mistakes, and such distortions committed by scribes will be corrected. The researcher is required to fully comprehend the text in question before performing the final stage, the important steps of which may be listed as follows:

- 1- Replicate the old handwritten text – which is found in different and multi-formatted styles and fonts – to a simplified modern handwriting style to become legible for today's readers.

2- Give titles to chapters originally omitted or inadequately clarified by the author.

3- Correct mistakes found in the text and refill missing parts.

4- Give numbers to chapters, parts, translations, etc.

5- Show differences of copies by introducing footnotes.

6- Arrange and interpret Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions quoted in the text of the manuscript.

7- Interpretation of verses and Arabic proverbs.

8- Provide necessary identification of bibliographical names, locations and countries.

9- Explain unfamiliar vocabularies and scientific terms and expressions.

10- Interpretation of quotations.

11- Footnotes and comments.

12- Provide diacritics and necessary punctuation marks.

13- Correction of errata.

14- Provide general and detailed indexes for easy reference usage.

The Arab Heritage Revival Directorate has over the past few years published hundreds of books in its series of "Reviving and Imparting of Arab Heritage" and the "Selections from Arab Heritage" series. These publications were highly acclaimed throughout the Arab world due to the aforementioned scientific techniques and studies adopted in replication and reproduction of valuable manuscripts at reasonable and inexpensive price.

Besides, the Arab Heritage Revival Directorate has been keen to provide Arab heritage bibliographies and has also been keen to obtain valuable manuscripts through exchange and purchase from similar libraries and international and Arab research centers in addition to local authorities

engaged in heritage studies, including the "Arab Heritage Institute", "Historical Documents Center", Damascus University, Ministry of Awqaf (Ministry of Endowments). Cooperation has been also established with the scientific and heritage institutions listed below:

- Juma' al-Majed Heritage Center (United Arab Emirates)
- Zayed Heritage and History Center (United Arab Emirates)
- National Council of Culture, Arts and Literature (Kuwait)
- Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO)
- Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Arabic Manuscripts Institute (Egypt)

Many Arab Islamic heritage scholars contribute to this sublime mission by diligently working on reproduction of manuscripts to be available for successive generations as reference of the wonderful works made by the ancestors (writers, scholars, think-tanks, etc). This treasure of manuscripts has formed the pillars of modern civilization.

Revival of Arab heritage and all its achievements reaffirm that Arab civilization has always been eligibly ready for dialogue with other Western civilizations. The Arab Islamic civilization has become a need in an age where values are deteriorating, and "pragmatism" has become the mainstream generated by the "globalization" culture and the "unipolar culture".

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

- **The Assad Library**
- **Theater & Music Directorate**
- **The Higher Conservatoire**
- **"Hanna Mina" Novel & Short Story Awards**
- **Syrian Cultural Center in Sao Paolo**
- **Syrian Cultural Center in Paris**

- **Ziryab Orchestra**

The Assad Library

Inaugurated by the late President Hafez Assad on 16.11.1983, the Assad Library is regarded as "Syria's national library". It is situated in the western part of Damascus on a location overlooking the well-known Omayyad Roundabout. The total area of the Library's 9-storey building amounts up to 22000 sq.m surrounded by 6000-sq.m gardens.

Priority is given by the Library to collect all forms of cultural heritage, including books, periodicals and other cultural materials and arrange them for easy use by scholars and researchers.

The Library accords special attention to contemporary cultural Arab heritage by collecting selections of relevant subjects in an effort to preserve the old Arab heritage (manuscripts). The Library always tries to collect such manuscripts found in Syria and handles their restoration and storage in appropriate storerooms.

The Assad Library

Provision and Deposit Department

This Department supplies the Library with all sources of information covering all fields of knowledge, including printed and non-printed materials. The Department is also in charge of maintaining cultural contacts of the Library with other scientific centers inside and outside Syria by exchanging cultural materials in the form of gifts. The Department applies the "legal deposit" system which obligates every Syrian author or publisher to deposit five copies of their publications at the Assad Library.

The Library is supplied with cultural materials and information sources through purchase, exchange or "legal deposit". The Provision and Deposit Department includes the following sections:

1- The Provision Section, which in turn includes three subdivisions: "Periodicals Division", "Book Division" and "Non-printed Division".

2- Legal Deposit Section

3- Exchange and Gifts Section

The Provision and Deposit Department also supervises the work of Periodicals Reading Halls to facilitate formalities required by visitors.

Categorization and Indexing Department

This Department, which carries out categorization and indexing of cultural materials received by the Assad Library, comprises the following sections:

1- Categorization Section

2- Indexing Section

3- Index Preparation Section, which has three subdivisions, namely:

a) Typing, Reproducing and Facsimile Division

b) Proofreading Division

c) Cards Management Division

Documentation and Information Department

Collection and documentation of national cultural heritage and imparting the same at both the Arab and international levels are among the basic duties performed by the National Assad Library. The Library Administration has, therefore, worked out a plan for documentation of intellectual productivity in Syria. Publication of relevant works on a regular basis, projecting them locally, regionally and internationally is on top of the activities performed by this Department.

The Documentation and Information Department issues the following publications:

1- Analytical Survey of Syria's Dailies and Magazines

2- Syria's National Bibliography, Past and Present

3- List of Academic Theses

The Documentation and Information Department undertakes preparation of various bibliographies and surveys; conduction of necessary studies required

by the Library; issuance of a magazine dealing with documentation affairs and libraries which fall in the context of the Library's activity.

The Documentation and Information Department includes the following:

- Documentation Section, which in turn includes the Bibliography and Survey Section.
- Information Section, which includes the Magazine Issuance Division and Studies Division.

Technical Affairs Department

This Department is engaged in performing regular and emergency maintenance works required by the facility, including maintenance of the air-conditioning system, electronics and computers as well as completion and restoration works for interior and exterior parts of the Library's premises, including its furniture, etc.

The Assad Library

Duties performed by the subject Department are carried out by the following five subdivisions:

- 1- Electricity Section
- 2- Air-conditioning System Section
- 3- Completion and Restoration Section
- 4- Sanitary Section
- 5- Electronics Section

Other modifications for the building are also carried out by the Technical Affairs Department when and necessary.

Manuscripts and Rare Books Department

This Department maintains collection and storage of old Arab heritage materials and rare books and prepares necessary indexing for easy use by scholars and researchers.

The Assad Library keeps a big collection of manuscripts received from other state-run libraries, as well as manuscripts obtained through purchase or exchange of cultural materials with other institutions. The total number of manuscripts maintained by the Assad Library in early 1999 reached up to

20,000 volumes including 40,000 titles, which ranked among the largest collections of Arab libraries.

The manuscripts were basically procured from the libraries listed below:

- Al-Zahiriya Library (Damascus)
- The Endowment and Ahmadiya Library (Aleppo)
- Libraries of cultural centers based in different Governorates and cities of the country
- Library of the Antiquities and Museums Directorate

Other manuscripts were added to the Library through purchase, exchange and gifts. Besides, there are some 3000 rare books (Arabic as well as foreign-language books) kept at the Assad Library.

The Manuscripts and Rare Books Department consists of two sections:

1- Investigation and Studies Section, which performs the following assignments:

- a) Indexing and categorization of manuscripts.
- b) Preparation of special forms designed for computer archiving of these manuscripts to facilitate handling by interested researchers and scholars.
- c) Preparation of printed indexes dealing with each of the manuscripts subject-wise (the library has so far issued five similar indexes).

2- Storage Section: It comprises four storerooms designed for keeping manuscripts and rare books. These storerooms are fully prepared for well preservation of the manuscripts and rare books under appropriate conditions: lighting, temperature and humidity.

On the other hand, the manuscripts and rare books reading halls are provided with:

- 1) Index cards of the manuscripts maintained by the Library (subject, author and title-wise).
- 2) Index lists of manuscripts available in other Arab and foreign libraries.

The Manuscripts and Rare Books Department always tries to meet the requirements of scholars and Arab and foreign research centers by providing

them with paper and filmic copies of the manuscripts found in the Assad Library.

Cultural Activity Department

The Cultural Activity Department organizes all cultural activities of the Library. It also makes necessary arrangements for receiving visitors who wish to explore the Library and its services. The Department includes two sections: Cultural Activity Section and Public Relations Section.

It may be noted in this respect that the Assad Library is always engaged in holding various functions, including intellectual, cultural and scientific symposiums, seminars, lectures, gala nights, film screenings, art exhibitions, classical music concerts and book exhibitions. The latter features a special event under the Arabic Book Exhibition, which is held in the first half of November each year with the participation of a large number of Arab publishing houses and some foreign publishing agencies. A special cultural symposium is simultaneously held with the Book Exhibition in the presence of think-tanks and scholars from Syria and other Arab countries.

Administrative Affairs Department

It is commissioned to follow up the personnel administrative and legal affairs. It also follows up administrative matters of relevance to planning and statistics. The Administrative Affairs Department is entitled to supervise organization of the various training courses.

This Department comprises the Personnel and Legal Affairs Section as well as the Administrative Affairs Section. The latter includes the following subdivisions: Services Division, Correspondence and Control Division, Planning and Statistics Division.

Financial Affairs Department

It carries out financial matters related to the budget allocated to the Library, and supplies all items required by the different Departments of the Library. The Financial Affairs Department includes the Contracts Section, Accountancy and Requirements Section.

Printing Press, Bookbinding, Restoration and Facsimile Department

This Department performs the duties of bookbinding of cultural materials available in the Library, restoration and printing of the brochures published by the Library, facsimile of cultural materials. The Department includes the sections listed below:

1- Printing Press and Bookbinding Section: All publications of the Library are issued by well-trained staff of the Press Section. The process is preceded by necessary computer feeding and editing of relevant data for final print by RISO machine. The most important of these publications:

- a) Analytical Survey of Syria's Dailies and Magazines
- b) List of Academic Theses
- c) Syria's National Bibliography
- d) Index of manuscripts available at the Assad Library
- e) The Assad Book Exhibition Directory

The Bookbinding Section is engaged in binding (or restoring when necessary) books pertaining to the Library. It also offer services related to bookbinding, including production of covers and containers designed for keeping books.

2- Facsimile Section: It handles reproduction and archiving of manuscripts received through exchange with other local manuscripts centers and similar centers abroad. This section is also in charge of reproduction of newspapers, magazines and periodicals and saving the same in special filmic archives. Other services provided by this section for scientific research purposes include three types of photographic reproduction of documents: microfilm (16mm or 35mm), microfiche (105mm) and photocopying. There are separate rooms associated with this section which contain special apparatuses for reading filmic documentary material.

3- Restoration Section: This was basically established to preserve the nation's cultural heritage and other historical documentary material, including manuscripts and rare books, for longer periods. This process involves reproduction of such documentary material without distorting their historical, artistic or structural value. The process is carried out by a well-trained team of technicians and experts through the following stages:

- a) Sterilization of historical documents.

- b) Monitoring appropriate temperature conditions in storerooms designed to keep manuscripts and valuable documents.
- c) Regular technical treatment of sheets and covers of manuscripts and similar documents in an effort to maintain their historical value intact.

Assad Library

Administration Department

It follows up implementation of directives made by Director General of the Assad Library, and organizes relations with other Departments of the Library as well as with foreign authorities inside and outside the country. Besides, the subject Department performs certain duties assigned by the Director General in connection with implementation of works which require collective efforts by several departments other than a single department.

The sections listed below are associated with the Administration Department:

1- Central Computer Section: Most computer units available at the Library are linked to this section, whose personnel perform regular maintenance works for these computers, prepare backup copies of computer data, and provide computer training to workers of the Library.

2- Data Feeding Section: This section is in charge of feeding the data of book index cards and periodicals through networks linked to the Central Computer.

3- Book Exhibition Data Section: It handles feeding of all data and information related to the annual Book Exhibition, including a large database about title and price of books, publishing houses along with their addresses, etc.

4- Information Section: This section offers services to readers to facilitate search operations of books and publications using monitors connected to the Central Computer.

5- Information Services Section: It provides internet service to all researchers to obtain required information through online databases associated with the Library. The Section also provides a database for all

speeches and press coverage of the late President Hafez Assad, a database of all legislations issued in Syria since 1918, and information about index cards for books and manuscripts maintained by the Library. The Section contains updated encyclopedias covering geography, history, science, culture, etc. which are also available on CDs.

Training Courses

The National Assad Library holds three training courses a year in the field of indexing and filing, basically offered to civil servants working in government institutions which include archives and libraries sections. The Library also offers special courses in collaboration with regional organizations (ALESCO and ISESCO).

International Book Exhibition at Assad Library

Based on its objectives set forth to promote all areas of knowledge and encourage cultural activity in the country, the Assad Library held its first Arabic Book Exhibition in 1985. Since that date, consecutive book exhibitions have been able to establish a firm bond between readers and books and have also contributed to a remarkable increase of publication activity in Syria. Statistical surveys show a growing development of the Arabic Book Exhibition at the National Assad Library since its inception in 1985.

Directorate of Theaters & Music

Theater in Syria was first born at the hands of Ahmad Abi Khalil al-Kabbani (1833-1903), but grew bigger with the establishment of Syria's National Theater in 1959 when theater developed from amateur to professional artistic activity.

After half a century of strenuous efforts by a group of people who were greatly fond of this art, setting up theatrical clubs and amateur troupes, they were able to lay the ground for the art of theater in Syria. In late 1959, however, the Arts Directorate, which belonged to the Ministry of Culture at that time, invited troupes and people interested and involved in theatrical activities to a preparatory meeting to discuss a proposal for formation of a national troupe on the pattern of Egypt's National Theater. After brief

deliberations, several art clubs and amateur theatrical companies (Oriental Club, the Free Theater, the Arts Club, Theater Advocates ..) responded to the call. As a result, a national troupe associated with the Ministry of Culture was formed, signaling the first such formal troupe in Damascus. This development marked the second birth of theater in Syria 90 years after the appearance of the pioneer of the theater, namely, "al-Kabbani" in 1871. The first stage performance of the National Troupe was premiered on 25.2.1960 under the title "The Ecclesiastusae" by Aristophanes adapted to the stage by renowned writer "Tawfiq al-Hakim". A few months later, a regulatory decision was passed by the Ministry of Culture, providing for creation of theaters and related troupes. Article (1) of the said decision reads as follows:

"Three theaters shall be set up by the Ministry of Culture, where each theater shall comprise one or more troupes:

- 1- "National Theater", which will be dedicated to stage performances.
- 2- "Omayyad Folk Arts Troupe", which will be dedicated to folk art performances.
- 3- "Puppet Theater",

The first Director General of the National Theater Troupe was Mahmoud al-Masri, a member of the Oriental Club, while stage performances of the National Theater Troupe were premiered by Dr. Rafiq Sabban - who had newly returned to the country from France – in collaboration with the late artist Nihad Qal'i, who later assumed full-time administration of the National Theater.

Almost on the same date, the Popular Theater, also associated with the Ministry of Culture, was also established and comprised a number of professional artists, including Mohammad Ali Eido, who briefly held the administration post of the National Theater and directed a number of its stage performances, Mazhar al-Shagouri, Omar Qanou' and Abdul Latif Fatehi (the latter became Director General of the Puppet Theater). In 1969, the Puppet Theater was merged with the National Theater.

Directorate of Theaters & Music

In 1963, Dr. Rafiq Sabban formed the Television Drama Art Troupe, which was associated with the TV Establishment, and included a number of reputable actors: Hani al-Rumani, Salim Kallas, Riyadh Nahhas, Yousef

Hanna, Kawthar Mardo, Elit Anjouri ...). This troupe was later administratively joined with the National Theater.

In the 1960s, the National Theater was provided with academic cadres who studied the art of theater abroad (Egypt, the former Soviet Union ..), including some brilliant names: As'ad Fida, Ali Okla Ersan, Khodr al-Sha'ar, Mohammad al-Tayyeb, Yousef Harb, Husain Idlibi, Fardos Atasi, Eskandar Kini, Hasan Oweit, Mahmoud Khaddour, Fouad al-Rashed, Tawfiq al-Munajjid, Sharif Shaker ... The National Theater sought the expertise of other artists, such as TV director Salim Qattan, Faisal Yasiri, Salim Sabri, Sharif Khaznadar ...

The interest shown by the National Theater towards these specialized cadres belonging to state-rune institutions had turned the National Theater to an institute for educating those engaged in the theater field in a practical way and thus gained valuable experience at a time when the Higher Conservatoire was not established until 1978.

The theater audience grew bigger in the course of time by virtue of the National Theater, whose popular performances attracted larger audiences that reached up to 30.000 in one of the stage performances (as reported by Mr. Jean Alexan in his book "National Theater and Supporting Theaters"). Theater in Syria, it may be said, flourished remarkably by the National Theater's efforts which took into consideration common issues of the people, especially that the administration of the theater realized the important social and political role played by their National Theater on the one hand, and the distinguished entertainment provided to the public on the other.

The National Theater across the Country

A National Theater was established in Aleppo on 25.6.1967 under a decision by the Ministry of Culture, stating: "A theater titled Aleppo National Theater shall be set up in Aleppo, where this theater shall be associated with the Arab Cultural Center of Aleppo and belongs to the Ministry of Culture and its art troupes."

In February 1993, a similar decision was issued by the Ministry of Culture providing for the establishment of a National Theater in Tartous. In the same year, another National Theater was set up in Lattakia. A project for setting up more national theaters across the country is under consideration.

Supporting Theaters of the National Theater

Puppet Theater

A theater dedicated to children known as the Puppet Theater was established in the country in 1960 and was run at that time by the late actor Abdul Latif Fatehi.

Experimental Theater

The Experimental Theater was established in 1976 and was run at that time by the great Syrian writer, the late Sa'dullah Wannous, while its premier theatricals were directed by renowned stage director, the late Fawaz Sajer.

Touring Theater

Created back in 1971, the Touring Theater aimed to present its stage performances in rural and remote areas to introduce the art of theater to the public. In the 1970s, the Touring Theater presented over 1000 stage performances in almost 700 villages across the country.

Children's Theater

It was established in 1980 and was run at that time by stage director Adnan Joudeh, who presented five theatrical shows for children in the 1980s (all five performances were written and directed by Adnan Joudeh himself).

Folk Arts Troupe (associated with the Directorate of Theaters and Music)

It was formed simultaneously with the Ministry of Culture in 1960 to present folkloric performances adapted for the stage from Arab heritage and other theatrical shows expressive of aspirations of the Arab nation.

Zenobia Troupe

In the summer of 1985, renowned artist Hussain Nazek was assigned to form the Zenobia Troupe as supplementary group to the National Omayyad Troupe. But this theatrical company was dissolved last year (2003) and stopped all stage activities.

Theaters in Syria

All theaters in Syria are associated with the Directorate of Theaters and Music. In Damascus, there are three theaters, namely, "Kabbani Theater", "Hamra Theater" and the "Puppet Theater", in addition to theaters based in cultural centers and the "Azem Palace Theater", the "March 8th Theater" and "Workers Unions Federation Theater".

Directorate of Theaters & Music

In Aleppo, there are three theaters, namely, the "Artists Union Theater", "Aleppo Citadel Theater" and the "Cultural Center Theater". In other Governorates, theaters are only limited to cultural centers. It may be noted in this context that theaters of the Assad Culture and Arts House will be made functional in the near future, signaling a qualitative step towards the infrastructure required for a new theatrical development in the country.

Festivals Organized by Directorate of Theaters and Music

Damascus Theatrical Arts Festival

In response to the recommendations reached at the Arab Theatrical Arts Conference held in Cairo in March 1969, the Damascus Theatrical Arts Festival held its first event in May 1969 in collaboration between the Artists Union and the Ministry of Culture. The Festival aimed at realizing the following:

- Refining an Arab theatrical art which can address the Arab nations and reflect their interests and aspirations.
- Creating a humane Arab theatrical art.

The said Festival continued its activities until 1988 when its 11th event marked the end of its activities. Fresh efforts, however, aim to revive this Festival in view of the important role it played in Syria over a period of two decades.

Bosra International Festival

The Bosra International Festival started its activities in 1978 at the Azem Palace Theater and the First Bosra International Festival was held at the Bosra amphitheater the same year. Since that date, this festival has been held in September every year, but became a biannual event over the past few years – it held its 17th event in September 2003.

The Children's Theater Spring Festival

It was first held in February 2004 and presented ten shows within 10 days' time in Damascus, Aleppo and Lattakia. The Children's Theater Spring Festival is planned by the Directorate of Theaters and Music to be held on an annual basis during the mid-academic term holiday to enable school students to attend (free of charge) its shows.

Statistics

Stage productions at the Directorate of Theaters and Music since 1960 up to December 2004 have been as follows:

- National Theater in Damascus has presented 210 plays.
- National Theater in Aleppo has presented 63 plays since 1968 up to the present time.
- National Theater in Tartous has produced 18 theatrical shows since its creation in 1993.
- The Children's Theater has presented 21 stage performances.
- The Puppet Theater has presented 40 shows since it was first set up in 1960.

It may be noted that National Theater shows in Lattakia, Tartous and Aleppo have all included stage performances dedicated to children.

The Higher Conservatoire

It was set up under Legislative Decree No. 8 dated 28.4.1977 to produce specialists in the various theatrical arts in an effort to realize a genuine Arab theatrical revival.

The Higher Conservatoire is an academic institution granting its graduates BA degree in theater arts. This institution also provides an opportunity for post-graduate studies and research in the different theater studies. Besides, the Higher Conservatoire offers specialized courses for theater artists and other categories interested in this art.

The Institute's Departments

The Higher Conservatoire consists of four Departments: Acting, Stage Studies, Expressionist Dance, and Theatrical Design and Techniques, in addition to a children's ballet school.

Third and fourth-year students of the Higher Conservatoire perform acting shows to the public. Besides, there are two shows performed by pre-graduates during the first academic term (January) and during the second academic term (mid-May). Other activities basically made by students and teachers of the institute often assume training and rehearsal nature. Students from different academic stages are provided with an opportunity to show

their skills and qualifications to an open audience during the World Theater Day falling on 27 March every year. Public theatricals are also presented by the Higher Conservatoire Troupe, which has represented Syria in several international theater festivals.

The Experimental Theater Institute accords special attention to its students by regularly inviting experts and interested people to attend its experimental shows. Students delegated to countries of advanced theater arts often carry short performances for presentation during participation in festivals held in this context.

In an effort to enrich the knowledge and experience of the students and upgrade their art level in the field of theater, a number of training courses and workshops are organized by the Higher Conservatoire on an annual basis under the supervision of visiting artists and experts of the various theater arts.

Acting Department

Curriculum of this Department consists of various subjects and is divided into three basic fields, namely, the art of performance, practical subjects (body movements, gestures, voice, space ...), and theoretical subjects (theater and knowledge).

Curriculum Objectives:

The curriculum prepares students methodologically to comprehend theatrical action in the world's theatrical experience, also to fully realize the artistic, intellectual and ethical constituents of such theater.

- Frees students from the control of ready-made patterns of body, mind and emotions, and helps them get rid of similar patterns which distort theatrical expressionism.
- Explores the students' potentials and helps them identify their points of weakness and power.
- Trains the students for contemplation, analysis and expression according to a methodology based on supported scientific research.

The study course is based on integrated units set in accordance with the two academic terms, where the student jointly works with either the same or different teacher.

Theatrical Studies Department

Graduates of this 4-year-study Department are granted a BA degree in theater studies. Admission of students in this Department is governed by an admission test.

The Theatrical Studies Department prepares its students to become experts capable of conducting theoretical and practical theatrical research. Graduates of this Department can work in the field of theater studies as researchers, assistant stage directors, or dramaturges. They can also take part in preparing stage performances as assistant directors, or designers of theater elements, such as cinography, lighting, costumes, etc. Besides their theoretical classes, students should gain practical experience and attend training courses in the abovementioned areas. The syllabi of this Department were, therefore, designed to provide students with a variety of knowledge, expertise and experience supported by observing performance stages of theatrical shows where they are often involved in the process.

Expressionist Dance Department

The study course at this Department focuses on essential subjects (classical dancing, modern dancing, local and world folk dance, ear training, music). Theoretical subjects, on the other hand, include history of world dance, mechanism and designing.

This Department produces professional specialists involved in stage experience dealing with body expressive movements and the art of gesture as dancers, or designers of dance shows.

Design and Theater Techniques Department

The course at this Department consists of principal subjects, including art designing, drawing and formation, advertising, perspective and space principles, architectural styles and Arabic calligraphy. Theoretical subjects of this course include history of costumes, history of theater and script analysis.

This Department prepares its students to be qualified in the domain of cinography (décor/art designers, lighting designers, costume designers, make-up specialists). Graduates of this Department are viewed as professional technicians indispensable to complete the various art performance elements.

“Hanna Mina” Novel & Short Story Awards

This award has been earmarked by the Ministry of Culture to encourage young creativities and look after their gifted people in line with the development and modernization process initiated by President Bashar Assad, who always shows appreciation and respect towards open-minded think-tanks in the diverse fields.

President Assad has accorded top priority to keep intellectuals and think-tanks under his care based on his belief that their unlimited creativity and open-mindedness fall within the major factors leading to success and progress. President Assad's appreciation and special attention accorded to those creative and skilled think-tanks were best manifested in decorating a prominent group with Syria's First Order of Merit in recognition for their creativity in the realms of thought and culture. Intellectuals who have been invested with Syria's First Order of Merit, include among others, Dr. Fakher Akel, Dr. Abdul Karim al-Yafi, Hanna Mina, Zakaria Tamer and Dr. Adel Awwa.

It is a source of pride and grace to have Syria's novel and short story award associated with name of great and creative novelist and short story writer Hanna Mina, who offered Arabic literature wonderful literary works and enriched Arab culture with his brilliant thoughts and noble humane emotions, winning several Arab and world awards.

Arab Cultural Center in Sao Paolo

The Syrian Arab Cultural Center in Sao Paolo, Brazil, plays a noteworthy role by performing the duties and activities listed below:

- 1) Promotes and enhances cultural and art cooperation between Syria and Brazil.
- 2) Generates cultural activity to project Arab civilization, past and present; provides necessary facilities for readers to explore this civilization; organizes holding of lectures and symposiums.
- 3) Organizes art exhibitions, gala nights and concerts.
- 4) Celebrates national occasions by holding festivals and similar functions.

- 5) Facilitates ways for Arab community members and Brazilian nationals to learn Arabic language.

To accomplish these missions effectively, the Syrian Cultural Center in Sao Paolo performs the following:

- 1- Expands the scope of admission in Arabic language courses for Arab community members and Brazilian nationals, where 300 students from all walks of life attend each course.

- 2- Celebrates national occasions; projects Arab civilization and its contributions to world civilizations through lectures and interviews held with Arabic language course students. The Center also organizes art exhibitions.

The Center projects tourist attractions and archeological sites available in Syria by holding seminars and providing relevant information to university and school students, as well as by distributing tourist brochures supplied by the Ministry of Culture. Other activities of the Center include translation of certain interesting articles, the most recent of which was titled "Syria Governs Rome". This interesting translation was distributed to Arab community clubs and societies and other Brazilians.

Syrian Cultural Center in Paris (Window for dialogue among cultures)

Located in the 7th District, one of the most beautiful Parisian localities, the Syrian Cultural Center is based in a historical 19th-century three-storey building owned by the Government of Syria. The chancery building comprises a large library and multi-purpose halls designed for conferences, lectures, screenings, musical evenings, concerts and many other functions. The third floor of the building holds administration offices and classrooms for teaching Arabic language. The Syrian Cultural Center in Paris was opened in 1980 under an agreement signed between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the French Government during a state visit to France by the late President Hafez Assad in 1976. Under the agreement signed by the late President Hafez Assad and French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing, a Syrian Cultural Center was opened in Paris and a similar French Cultural Center in Damascus.

Since its creation, the Syrian Cultural Center in Paris has diligently worked to introduce the Arab culture, of which Syria's share has always been noteworthy, to Western societies in general and the French people in particular. Teaching Arabic language is another service provided by the Center as a national mission aimed at further binding Arab communities living abroad with their native language and mother tongue on the one hand, and providing an opportunity to interested foreigners of different nationalities to learn the Arabic language. Other objectives sought for implementation by the Syrian Cultural Center in Paris include:

- 1) Develop and enhance comprehension of the language and civilization of the Arab world.
- 2) Introduce civilizations witnessed by Syria and their contributions to humanity and world civilization in general.
- 3) Promote cultural cooperation between the Syrian Cultural Center with other centers and institutions based in France.
- 4) Contribute to developing and strengthening cultural ties between Syria and France.
- 5) Promote dialogue among civilizations for the benefit of humanity.
- 6) Display video films made by Syrian film directors, representing the various features of Syria's contemporary film industry.

Activities of the Center:

- 1- Art exhibitions: plastic arts, painting, photography, sculpture, carving, ceramics, pottery, fashion-wear and handicrafts. Selection of such exhibitions is based on artistic quality in the first place. The Syrian Cultural Center has been widely reputed for presenting quality displays.
- 2- Lectures covering all areas of culture from ancient Syria up to its present tourist heritage, in addition to subjects tackling the various Arab and foreign cultures.
- 3- Concerts (oriental and Western). Oriental music includes music composed by Abdul Wahab, songs by Fairoz, etc. while Western music includes musical pieces by Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and others. These remarkably successful concerts feature the performance of professional musicians and talented Syrian artists, like Dhia' al-Sukkari, Ghazwan Zirkli, Dania Tabba', Ashraf Kateb, Raji Sarkis, Ghaith Jaser and a host of distinguished Arab and foreign artists.
- 4- Round-table discussions comprising three or more debaters of cultural or literary subjects of interest to the Center's visitors.

- 5- Cultural and literary symposiums and gala nights.
- 6- Screening of video films made by Syrian film directors, featuring contemporary mainstream of Syria's cinema.
- 7- Get-togethers aimed at introducing Syrian community members to students coming to France on scholarship.
- 8- Receptions held on national occasions.

As far as teaching Arabic language is concerned, the center provides classes for 5 levels and another class for children. The teaching staff members comprise qualified teachers who are assigned to teach 80 – 100 students of different nationalities, particularly Arab-origin students.

Besides its library which contains a collection of 8000 books covering Arab Islamic and foreign civilization, literature and arts, the center includes two multi-purpose halls.

Relations between the Syrian Cultural Center and other cultural institutions in France

The Syrian Arab Cultural Center in Paris is a major partner in the French-Syrian Friendship Society, which actively works for promotion of bilateral friendship and cooperative ties. The Syrian Cultural Center and the Arab World Institute in Paris are bound by firm relations. It may be noted that the Syrian Arab Cultural Center participates in the Foreign Cultural Week event, which started activities in 2002 in response to an initiative made to this effect by a number of Paris-based cultural centers, including the Syrian Arab Cultural Center. At present, the event is held with the participation of 34 foreign cultural centers and institutes.

On the other hand, we have started to boost cooperative relations with French institutions engaged in the cultural domain, a development that is best manifested in the exchange of visits between our side and the Mayor of the 7th District, where the Syrian Arab Cultural Center is based. Meetings between the two sides have been fruitful and encouraged French officials to further enhance cooperation between the two countries.

Ziryab Orchestra

The Ziryab Orchestra, which was established circa 2001, basically aimed to introduce the works of classical Arab music composers and to present Arab

music in a modern academic style. The Orchestra has held 14 concerts over the past two years (2002 – 2003), presenting the works of composers from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia, in addition to a set of new musical compositions in new orchestration and style with the purpose of reviving beautiful Arab music.

The Ziryab Orchestra consists of 24 performers of musical stringed instruments (violin, viola, violoncello, double bass) in addition to ancient Oriental musical instruments and signing.

This Orchestra was founded and supervised by master violinist of the National Orchestra of Damascus, Mr. Ra'd Khalaf, who is a well-known solo violinist and music composer. He has composed many musical works, including program music for dramas, soundtracks and other works performed by the National Orchestra of Damascus.

Other musicians of the Ziryab Orchestra are graduates of the Music Conservatoire and are among Syria's best performers.

The Ziryab Orchestra is the only private group in Syria and the Arab world who tries to present this special music in both style and content. The Ziryab Orchestra was named after the great Arab musician "Ziryab", who served in the Abbasid Court during the 9th century and achieved wide-spread reputation and popularity for his magnificent contributions and development of Arab music and conveyed our music to Europe when he settled in Andalusia.

The Ziryab Orchestra has successfully presented ancient and contemporary music in a modern style aimed at giving this music its Eastern feature in a modern way and performed in a universal language understood all over the world. In other words, the music performed by the Ziryab Orchestra features the technical nature of Western classical music which tries to highlight the skills of musicians and at the same time maintain the oriental spirit undistorted. This group produces some ancient musical instruments to echo their historical sounds in a combination of past and present by associating them with large-size musical stringed instruments, generating a mixture that echoes music of the past played by certain musical instruments, including "Sumerian Lyre", "Santir", "Ziryabian Lute", "Pan Flute", "Ancient Lute" and "Andalusian Rebec".

The Ziriyab Orchestra presented a special concert titled "Performance in Mari", which was a combination of music playing, signing, acting and dancing. It was the first such performance presented in Syria and the region. Other performances by the Ziriyab Orchestra were presented at:

- Assad Library
- Azem Palace
- Tourist Village (Monte Rosa)
- Russian Pavilion (at Damascus International Fair in favor of "Sama" Arts Group)
- Damascus International Fair
- Amman Culture Capital of the Arab World
- Inaugural ceremony of Arab Businesswomen Conference
- Exhibition of Arabs & the World (Damascus)
- Ministry of Information (Radio & TV Establishment)
- Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
- Al-Basel Institute Graduates Association
- Syrian Fraternity Society
- Ancient musical instruments played in "Ibn Sina" Opera, Doha, Qatar
- Orchestral Shows 2004
- Syria, Holland, Lebanon and Oman

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

- **Plastic Arts**
- **Annual Fair**
- **Biennale Mahaba**
- **Fine Arts Galleries**
- **Sculpture Forum**

PLASTIC ARTS IN SYRIA HAVE WON THE CONFIDENCE OF WORLD ARTISTS AND ALSO BECOME A FORUM FOR NEW CREATIVE EXPERIENCES, PRODUCING YOUNG BLOOD OF ARTISTS WHO ENJOY REQUIRED CREATIVE AND INVENTIVE AWARENESS.

Contemporary Arts

PLASTIC ARTS IN SYRIA HAVE WON THE CONFIDENCE OF WORLD ARTISTS AND ALSO BECOME A FORUM FOR NEW CREATIVE EXPERIENCES, PRODUCING YOUNG BLOOD OF ARTISTS WHO ENJOY REQUIRED CREATIVE AND INVENTIVE AWARENESS.

Plastic arts in Syria have won the confidence of world artists and also become a forum for new creative experiences, producing young blood of artists who enjoy required creative and inventive awareness.

The various forms of plastic arts, including oil/water painting, sculpture, graphic art, advertising and ceramics, have always received special attention by the Ministry of Culture since its inception. The Ministry of Culture is the institution which oversees these art exhibitions along with their regular functions, conferences, symposiums and all relevant events, whether on the individual or collective levels. The Ministry also attaches special attention to monuments, sculpture forums, frescoes and all open-air arts: squares, parks, streets, building façades and other places normally visited by the public.

Plastic and applied art institutes work under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, which enjoys a good relationship with the Fine Arts College at Damascus University (which is the only official academic institution in Syria involved in teaching and training of young art talents.)

The Ministry of Culture provides all necessary assistance to artists and organizes annual and periodical festivals and events such as the Biennale Mahaba in Lattakia, the Annual Syrian Plastic Artists Exhibition and the Sculpture Forum, etc.

The Ministry has assigned duties related to plastic arts to the Fine Art Directorate, which also organizes foreign cooperative relations such as inviting foreign art exhibitions to the country or holding Syrian art galleries abroad, in addition to Syrian participations in art conferences and events.

Contemporary Arts

SYRIA'S PLASTIC ART MOVEMENT HAS RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION AND SUPPORT BY THE CORRECTIVE MOVEMENT INITIATED BY THE LATE PRESIDENT HAFEZ ASSAD. THIS MOVEMENT HAS, THEREFORE, BEEN ABLE TO MAKE A CONFIDENT START AND SPREADS WIDELY TODAY.

Besides, the Fine Art Directorate oversees and coordinates between official and private art galleries and other galleries pertaining to Syria-based foreign cultural centers. Activities of the Central Fine Art Union and its branches across the various Governorates are normally performed in coordination and cooperation with the Fine Art Directorate. The most important of such activities is the Annual Syrian Plastic Artists Exhibition, which was initially limited to display drawings, oil/water paintings, sculptures, graphic arts and ceramics, then included Arabic calligraphy and photography works.

The Ministry of Culture, represented in the Fine Art Directorate, tries to acquire masterpieces of Syrian artists displayed at individual or collective art galleries for onward distribution to modern art museums, or saving these objets d'art for future display at the Modern Art Museum, which is expected to be soon inaugurated in Damascus given that initial architectural outline has been already completed.

The Modern Art Department at the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, which is associated with the Ministry of Culture, is another institution involved in obtaining distinguished works by Syrian plastic artists of different generations and trends. The Modern Art Department now holds a valuable collection of works of art, including photography, sculpture and graphic art works by pioneer artists of Syria's plastic art movement and succeeding generations of distinguished talents.

Contemporary Arts

THE VARIOUS PLASTIC ARTS, INCLUDING DRAWING, OIL/WATER PAINTING, SCULPTURE, GRAPHIC ART, CERAMICS AND ADVERTISING, ARE AMONG THE MANY ACTIVITIES WHICH RECEIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION BY THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE.

A good deal of these works of art is now displayed at the Modern Art Hall in the Damascus National Museum, while the rest is safely kept at the Directorate's storerooms.

Some of these masterpieces, which have been collected by the Fine Art Directorate - Ministry of Culture - over the past many years, are displayed at the Basel Plastic Arts Museum in the Dummar Cultural Complex. Many other works of art still lying at the storerooms are expected to be displayed for the public at potential galleries. The Ministry of Culture has supplied our

diplomatic missions abroad through the Foreign Office with a large collection of works made by elite Syrian plastic artists.

Moreover, a number of specialized periodicals are published by the Ministry of Culture, including the widely-read magazine "Plastic Art Life", which deals with every form of plastic arts at the local, Arab and international levels. This periodical, the only magazine in the Arab world that is dedicated to modern and contemporary visual culture, has achieved a qualitative development in form and content – new issues are color-printed while in the past they used to be in black and white. Fresh efforts aim at making this magazine a platform for Arab writers and critics concerned with all matters related to plastic arts.

Other books dealing with plastic arts are also published by the Ministry of Culture on an annual basis. Many of these books throw light on biographies of pioneer Syrian plastic artists and other prominent Arab and world artists, as well as other publications which are viewed as records of important events in this form of art.

The Ministry of Culture has been long printing the majority of exhibition directories along with their brochures and complimentary invitation cards, particularly the exhibitions held at galleries of Arab cultural centers and similar galleries of the Fine Arts Union.

Contemporary Arts

On top of these directories, reference may be made to the directory of the Annual Exhibition of Syrian Plastic Artists. The said exhibition is organized by the Fine Arts Directorate, Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the Central Fine Arts Union and its branches in other Governorates and is held in October each year under the patronage of President of the Syrian Arab Republic. This directory contains all details about the works displayed at the Annual Exhibition of Syrian Plastic Artists, including photography, drawing, oil/water painting, sculpture, ceramics, graphic art and Arabic calligraphy. In other words, the directory is a documented reference and record of this exhibition which, in turn, reflects the development achieved in contemporary plastic art movement in Syria. It may also be noted that all Syrian plastic artists participate in the mentioned exhibition by displaying over 500 works of art every year.

The "Biennale Mahaba" for contemporary Arab plastic arts is yet another activity organized by the Ministry of Culture in the context of the Mahaba Festival, which is organized by the Ministry of Culture and is held in Lattakia in August every year. Other activities of the Mahaba Festival also include Syrian plastic art exhibitions and similar exhibitions for photography and Arabic calligraphy which altogether makes the Mahaba Festival an event of various forms of art and culture.

Special symposiums on contemporary plastic art issues are also organized along with the annual plastic art exhibitions which are held in the outline of the Mahaba Festival, where Syrian and Arab art critics are invited to attend the event. It may be noted that on the sideline of the Mahaba Festival, the Ministry of Culture honors three of the top Syrian plastic artists, in addition to other awards granted to distinguished works of art displayed at the Biennale Mahaba in the areas of photography, sculpture and graphic art (three awards each).

The Ministry of Culture has been consistently honoring artists participating in the annual exhibition either by purchasing the majority of their displays or by providing necessary facilities to help Syrian plastic artists ship their works of art to other Arab and world countries for onward display therein. Participation by those artists in art shows, at both regional and world levels, is organized by the Ministry of Culture, which also invites Arab and international exhibitions to be held in Syria where local artists can explore other works of art to enrich their experience.

Contemporary Arts

International sculpture gatherings were first organized in Syria by the Ministry of Culture with the participation of artists from different parts of the world. Syrian sculptor and art critic, Dr. Mahmud Chaheen, Head of the Sculpture Department, Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus University, was assigned by the Ministry of Culture to prepare a directory documenting details of the First International Sculpture Forum, which was held at Lattakia's Assad Sports City in the context of the Mahaba Festival activities in 1998 with the participation of 17 sculptors from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Italy, France and Spain. This illustrated reference book, titled "Stone Poems", included biographies of sculptors participating in the event and the steps they had experienced while creating their works, starting from raw stone up to their final shape on pedestals.

The Ministry of Culture is now making serious efforts to upgrade the plastic art movement in Syria and push this process forward to go hand in hand with other forms of culture, the background of which was properly established during the remarkable development witnessed by Syria under the Corrective Movement that was initiated by the late President Hafez Assad and is now diligently and actively followed up by President Bashar Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Syria's plastic art movement has received considerable attention and support by the Corrective Movement initiated by the late President Hafez Assad. This movement has, therefore, been able to make a confident start and spreads widely today. It is imperative for Syria's plastic art movement to maintain its progress and further develop into a fully-fledged art movement in a world where arts in general and plastic arts in particular have become the main landmarks featuring world civilizations and cultures.

It is no doubt that the Corrective Movement has laid the ground for the inception of an integrated plastic art movement that made the nation's glorious history and rich heritage a source of inspiration, while at the same time has been keen on selectively employing modern techniques to produce a wonderful and creative mixture between past and present.

Plastic art, so to speak, has gone beyond the substance of a painting or statute and developed into an aesthetic feature of civilization that can touch all aspects of today's life. It is such an art that contains civilizational elements and features inspired from our life, history and heritage, but it is not confined to the boundaries of heritage.

Contemporary Arts

Plastic arts re-coin modern techniques according to these features and values of heritage to produce a new distinctive and unique art, which is the objective sought by the Ministry of Culture in the process of development and modernization led by President Bashar Assad in a fresh civilizational spirit. President Assad's high appreciation and admiration in this form of culture is clearly illustrated in his recurrent visits to the sculpture forums and gathering held in different Syrian cities. The President spares no effort to encourage the expansion of these activities to reach all parts of the country.

This is clearly seen in the art which decorates public places in almost every city in an attempt to impart the value of plastic arts among the people.

President Bashar Assad has extended maximum help and support, through the Ministry of Culture, to Syria's plastic artists underlining the necessity for acquiring the cream of their production for onward display at our art museums.

Based on its belief of the important role played by plastic arts in reflecting the development of the country as well as refining the aesthetic visual taste of the people, regardless of their education, and in response to the directives of President Bashar Assad and commensurate with the state policy, the Ministry of Culture properly performs the duty of looking after plastic arts and the people involved in this domain. To achieve this goal, the Ministry spares no effort to upgrade plastic arts up to the level of becoming capable of honestly expressing the comprehensive development witnessed by Syria both under the auspicious Corrective Movement and the present process of development and modernization.

Biennale

Syria: A Million-Year Culture

- **Biennale Mahaba (al-Basel Festival)**
- **Assad Culture and Arts House**
- **Syrian National Orchestra**

Biennale Mahaba (al-Basel Festival)

The 16th Mahaba Festival (al-Basel Festival) presented distinguished activities, particularly the opening ceremony held in Lattakia's Assad Stadium in the presence of a large audience comprising more than 70.000 people from Syria and abroad. The Festival delivered a clear and open message summing up the history of Syria from the early period of Ugarit

Kingdom up to modern Syria. The event noticeably featured a wonderful mixture between action, image and music on the one hand, and between performance and ambience on the other.

Efforts, thoughts and creativity formed expressive "panoramic" combinations performed by charming youngsters. Performance was parallel to the efforts made to produce such a magnificent presentation and rose up to the title of the festival itself "Mahaba" (love). Sails hoisted and music of rejoice played to welcome all visitors from Syria and the Arab world. Daily activities during the Festival used to start at early morning hours until late at night, and sometimes mixed with sunrays where the sun and moon changed places smoothly and charmingly, adding rainbow spectrum on the atmosphere of the Festival.

Assad Culture and Arts House

The Assad Culture and Arts House is a cultural edifice which forms a source of pride to the Syrian people. The Assad Culture and Arts House was erected under directives of the late President Hafez Assad in light of his comprehensive strategy for building the society and the cultural policy of construction and architecture.

The Assad Culture and Arts House was built on a 45000 sq.m-site, including 23000 sq.m of gardens and roads with a building area of 37000 sq.m, and a parking area which accommodates 240 cars.

The Project's Sections:

The project was basically designed to provide two main blocs:

- a) Theaters bloc
- b) Institutes bloc
- c) A courtyard between the two blocs

The Opera House, which is a part of the theaters bloc, has a seating capacity of 1500 and a large stage fully equipped with state-of-the-art accessories and services including a fly tower which can keep and shift up to 80 background sceneries. The stage floor, which consists of six sections, is also provided with a hydraulic "elevator" mechanism (large movable sections of a stage floor which move vertically are called an elevator). This "elevator"

mechanism provides a possibility for shifting a variety of scenes fit for all art shows. The stage is also equipped with a backstage of standard dimensions along with all accessories. The front part of the stage contains an orchestra pit which can seat up to 110 musicians. This orchestra pit is also carried on an "elevator" for versatility purposes. It consists of two separate sections with controlled elevation according to the nature and type of performance.

This huge project is basically designed for various performances including traditional and modern operas and ballets as well as special stage performances, concerts, art shows, film screening, conferences and meetings.

The seats are distributed to a ground hall with 20 side boxes, two galleries and a separate VIP box which can be accessed through a separate passageway linked to a VIP lounge.

The drama theater is designed for stage performances and concerts with a seating capacity of 750. The drama theater is also provided with an orchestra pit which can seat up to 40 music players. This theater is distinct in its protruding forestage surrounded with semi-round tiers which make the audience feel as if they are in the middle of the action set on the stage.

Seats of this theater are distributed to a ground hall, upper auditorium and a VIP box leading to an attractive fully equipped lounge.

Multi-purpose Hall:

It is a traditional flat-floored hall with a seating capacity of 250. This hall, however, is different from the two other halls, where the seats here are mounted on mechanically adjustable carriers to allow quick reformation of interior arrangement fit for various activities, such as limited stage performances, experimental theater shows, small-scale concerts and art shows as well as film screenings, fashion shows, lectures, symposiums, etc.

Stage, Administrative and Technical Services:

These services are provided to all three halls according to quality international standards, including:

- Workshops for scenery building and various set pieces.
- Drawing and design room.

- Costume preparation and services room.
- Rehearsal rooms.
- Technician workshops.
- Makeup and hairdressing rooms.
- Dressing rooms for group members, and individual dressing rooms for stars of the stage and prominent artists.
- Costume, set pieces, lighting and acoustics equipment storerooms.

Administrative services, on the other hand, include offices, conference rooms, accountancy and archives sections, and areas allocated for engineers and technicians running the facility.

Besides, technical services are offered through the following systems:

- Acoustics, including paging, intercom, simultaneous translations facility and wireless microphones as well as a telephone network, part of which is offered for public use.
- Alarm system.
- Dolby film screening system for both the main and the multi-purpose halls.

Institutes Bloc:

It consists of a three-storey building, including the Higher Theater Conservatoire, the Higher Music Conservatoire and the Ballet School.

The ground floor contains:

- Entrance hall and information section, elevators and stairs.
- Seven classrooms for teaching various theoretical drama subjects.
- Reading hall associated with a library which contains a rich collection of reference books.
- Administration, archives and student services rooms.
- Cafeteria for students equipped with special service kitchen.
- Heating and air conditioning center, storerooms and service areas.

The first floor contains:

- Three classrooms for teaching theoretical music subjects.
- Four classrooms for teaching practical music performance.
- Conference room with limited seating capacity.
- Ballet training and body fitness rooms.
- Lobbies leading to lecture and drama halls.

- Drama lecture room with a seating capacity of 150, equipped with hanging scenery system.
- 150-seat stage training and rehearsal room along with necessary storeroom and under-stage area.
- Workshops for building scenes and costume designing at the Institute's level.

The second floor contains:

- Twenty six individual studios for music performance.
- Teacher rooms.
- General services.

The Courtyard

This open-air courtyard is enclosed by the two building blocs and links all other facilities (visitors waiting rooms, pavilions, restaurants, cafeteria) overlooking the courtyard. The courtyard was designed to provide an overview of the attractive surrounding façades. A beautiful pool is built in the center of the courtyard. An open-air theater with a seating capacity of 250 is also built next to the pool.

The courtyard can be also used for holding art exhibitions, cultural conferences, lectures, gala nights and festivals on all cultural occasions.

Syrian National Orchestra

The Syrian National Orchestra was formed back in 1993, i.e. three years following the creation of the Higher Conservatoire. Formation of this orchestra was the result of a natural development of the musician cadres who increasingly grew with the new classes created at the Higher Music Conservatoire. The institute has adopted the newly-born orchestra and prepared its students to become major members of the Syrian National Orchestra which comprised over 180 musicians during several concerts.

The Syrian National Orchestra consists of students, graduates and teachers of the Higher Conservatoire who count 33, 46 and 13 respectively, in addition to 13 Russian experts who form part of the teaching staff of the institute. Average age of the orchestra members is approximately 27.

The National Orchestra has represented Syria in several international forums and festivals, including concerts held in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait,

Turkey, Germany and the USA. Many of the orchestra members have also participated in joint musical performances with other world orchestras, such as the Joint Euro-Mediterranean Orchestra, Aurora Youth Orchestra, Mediterranean Youth Orchestra and Algeria's National Orchestra.

Among members of the Syrian National Orchestra who have won international awards, reference may be made to Kinan Azmeh (clarinet), Lubana Qantar (singing), Talar Dakremijian (singing) and others.

The first Syrian opera was performed by the National Orchestra in 1995 in cooperation with the British Council in Damascus. The opera was titled "Dido and Aeneas" composed by renowned British classical music composer Henry Purcell. The Syrian National Orchestra performed other operas and concerts written by Arab classical music composers from Syria, Lebanon and Iraq as well as other European composers from Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Some renowned Arab and world musicians have worked with the Syrian National Orchestra, including Ahmad Sa'idi (Egypt), Edward Milkos (Austria), Amin Civin Sheli Sham (Turkey), Pierre Alan Pieget (France), Francesco Rettig (Chile), David Radge (USA) and many others.

Cinema

- **General Film Establishment**
- **Private-Sector Cinema**
- **Kindi Movie Theaters**
- **Awards Won by Syrian Cinema**

History & Development First Generation of Pioneers

Syrian Cinema: History & Development

When the Lumière brothers had their premier show at the Grand Café in Paris in 1895, Syria was then under the Ottoman occupation. Cinema was first introduced to the country in 1908 when a group of foreigners arrived in Aleppo from neighboring Turkey and presented a cinema show at one of the city coffee houses.

Cinema was formally introduced to Syria in 1912 through a film screening arranged by Mr. Habib al-Shammas at his coffee house in Damascus. But the projector at that time was run manually.

In 1916 the Ottomans built the first moving picture theater in Damascus (on the same site where the Parliament stands today). This picture house was known as "Jinaq Qal'at", a title used to commemorate the anniversary of the Ottomans' victory over the British fleet in the Straits of Jinaq Qal'at linking the Mediterranean with the Sea of Marmara. The "Jinaq Qal'at" picture house, which was inaugurated by Ottoman ruler Jamal Pasha, presented German films but was destroyed by a blazing fire only one month later.

Another picture house "Damascus Flower" opened in 1918. It was a joint venture between a man known as "Solo the Mechanic", who was the projectionist at "Jinaq Qal'at" theater, and the owner of the coffee house where the cinema was set up. A series of movie theaters – or rather show or screening areas – soon opened in the city.

In 1920, two years following Syria's independence from the Turks' rule, the French troops entered the country and declared the French Mandate over the nascent state of Syria. As a result, local film production did not see any light during the 1920s due to the instability caused by revolts and revolutions against the French occupation. In late 1920s, however, Syria witnessed relative calm and stability and cinema industry in the country became a possibility.

Beginnings First Generation of Pioneers

One year after the birth of film production in Egypt, i.e. in 1928, the first Syrian feature silent film "Innocent Convict" was made by a group of young enthusiasts comprising Ayyub Badri, Ahmad Tillo, Mohammad Muradi and Rashid Jalal who established a film production company known as "Haramon Film".

This movie was written, directed and filmed by Rashid Jalal, while the cast included Ayyub Badri, Ahmad Tillo and Mohammad Muradi. "Innocent Convict" was based on a true story of a bunch of thugs who terrified the people of Damascus. The film premiered with a big success despite the French authorities' attempt (when Syria was still under the French occupation) to prevent the show of "Innocent Convict".

In 1931, "Helios Film" production company was established and produced another silent film titled "Under the Sky of Damascus" – written and directed by Ismael Anzour under production supervision of Rashid Jalal. Not long before the premiere of "Under the Sky of Damascus", an Arabic-language sound film titled "Chant of the Heart" was displayed in Syria, marking the first time when an Arabic-language sound movie entered the country. Similar screenings of foreign-language talkies soon followed, and "Under the Sky of Damascus" (a silent film) was a complete flop. Moreover, the French authorities stopped the display of the film under fabricated legal reasons and "Under the Sky of Damascus" was a box-office fiasco and "Helios Film" closed down its offices.

Ayyub Badri later made another silent movie titled "Duty Calls", starring Ayyub Badri himself, a dancer called Christine and a number of amateur actors. This film was followed by another silent drama by film-director Ayyub Badri about revolutions against the British rule in Palestine. The director borrowed certain battle scenes from foreign films and edited them in his movie. Ayyub Badri's films were silent and he, therefore, used to attend the shows along with a number of his friends where they used a microphone to say out the dialogue to make the audience believe they were watching a sound film.

In late 1947, i.e. a year after Syria's independence from the French rule, a man called Nazih Shahbandar established a private studio furnished with equipment mostly invented by his own. In 1948, he made the first Syrian sound film "Light and Darkness", written by Mohammad Shamel and Ali Arnaout, featuring a number of prominent Syrian actors and actresses in leading roles, including Rafiq Shukri, Evet Faghali, Anwar al-Baba, Hikmat Mohsen, Nizar Fouad and Sa'd al-Din Baqdounes.

History and Development **Second Generation of Pioneers**

In 1950, “Irfan and Jaliq” film production company was established in Aleppo and started its cinema business by making a movie titled “Wayfarer”. This motion picture was directed and filmed by Ahmad Irfan, starring the renowned Syrian singer Najib Sarraj.

In the early 1960s, Zuhair al-Shawwa produced and directed his debut “Green Valley”, starring Zuhair al-Shawwa himself, Amira Ibrahim, Dalal Shamali, Akram Khulqi and Khaled Hamdi.

In 1963, Zuhair al-Shawwa started working on his second film production “Beyond Borders”, a drama about the Palestinian cause. But after two years of continued efforts, Zuhair al-Shawwa found out it was impossible for him to complete the film due to lack of necessary financing required for this high-cost production, and he never finished this work although he had invested all the money earned out of his earlier film.

In 1966, Zuhair al-Shawwa made his third and last film “The Devil’s Game”, starring al-Shawwa himself, Amira Ibrahim, Najwa Sidqi, Najah Hafiz and others. “The Devil’s Game” was perhaps the production that wrapped up the early stage of Syrian cinema-making which featured over enthusiasm and less experience and technical potential. The early Syrian cinema mainly relied on efforts by a handful of amateurs who were the writers, producers and directors and even the stars and cinematographers of their own motion pictures. In other words, this period did not produce a practically genuine film industry, but came out with a deep awareness of the nature of Syrian cinema along with its basic requirements.

General Film Establishment Second Generation of Pioneers

When the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance was established in 1958, a small department for film production and cinematography was also created in the Ministry of Culture itself, which assigned Salah Dehni, a graduate of the Higher Cinema Studies from Paris, to run this department.

This newly established department produced a number of documentaries directed by Yugoslavian expert Pushko Votchinitich and filmed by his countryman Tomislav Pinter. These documentaries included "Eternal

Damascus", "The Only Witness" (about Arwad island), "Colors of Beauty" (about Lattakia and neighboring areas), etc.

Salah Dehni was also the director of several short films including "Water and Draught", "Arab Antiquities in Syria" and short film series titled "Culture News". "Applied Arts in Syria" was another short film directed by Yousef Fahde.

Syria's first participation in an international film festival dates back to 1962 when it participated in the 12th Berlin Film Festival with "Eternal Damascus".

One of the fruits born by Syria's March 8 Revolution under the Baath Party in 1963 was the creation of the General Film Establishment. This institution was associated with the Ministry of Culture and enjoyed an independent financial and administrative status. Duties assigned to the General Film Establishment, as stated in the Decree issued in favor of its creation, included the production of feature and short films, provision of studios, establishment of cinema clubs, imparting cinema culture, etc.

In its early years, the General Film Establishment produced a number of short films, covering the various cultural, economic and social aspects of life in Syria. But production of feature films began in 1967 by producing "The Lorry Driver", which was written by renowned lawyer and writer Najat Qassab Hasan and directed by Yugoslavian movie-director Pushko Votchinitch, who had made several short films for the Ministry of Culture. "The Lorry Driver" featured a number of Syrian actors and actresses in leading roles, including Khaled Taja, Hala Shaukat, Abdul Latif Fatehi, Thana' Dibsi and others.

The film tells the story of a hard-working young man who works as a lorry driver assistant. Developments show how disagreements step up among the lorry drivers themselves who demand an increase in wages on the one hand, and their struggle with their employer on the other.

Direction of Syria's first public-sector production of a feature film by a foreign filmmaker was greatly controversial. But this seemed inevitable while our filmmakers were in dire need of such a beginning to accumulate and gain necessary experience required for an uneasy job: the making of feature films.

Regardless of the foreign nationality of the director of "The Lorry Driver", the film remains a special work in Syria's motion picture industry, signaling the first production by the public sector. Moreover, "The Lorry Driver" has outlined the mainstream of the majority of films produced later by the public sector, i.e. introduction of hot social and national issues in an artistic and intellectual style without seeking box-office profit as normally done in almost all film productions.

In 1965, an attempt by the General Film Establishment to produce a trilogy did not bear fruit. But fresh efforts in 1970 proved successful by making a trilogy titled "Men in the Sun", directed by Mohammad Chahin, Marwan Mouazen and Nabil Maleh. Production of this trilogy was prompted by the June 1967 setback, at a time when guerrilla war against the Israeli occupation was gaining momentum. This trilogy won the Silver Award at the Carthage Film Festival. "The Encounter", a part of this trilogy, also won the Short Film Award at the Damascus International Film Festival. "The Encounter" was the first indigenous film made by Syria's public sector.

The period extending between 1963 and 1975 may be viewed as a "foundation" period for the Syrian cinema in terms of technicality and intellectuality. In 1970, the General Film Establishment obtained all necessary equipment and technologies to become a self-reliant film production institution, excluding the film development and color printing unit which became ready and operational only in 1975 when it made "The Opposite Direction", directed by Marwan Haddad.

The foundation stone was also laid for a "cinema city" to serve as a distinguished base for developing film industry in Syria.

At the intellectual and technical level, the Syrian cinema combined all subjects about the Palestinian cause and the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the psychology and life of the Syrian people. The Syrian cinema was set to address all hot issues, including the social struggle between the haves and have-nots, between powers of the past and the future. It may be argued that since its inception, Syria's motion picture industry has been going to and fro between two concerns: the national political concern and the social concern.

The period extending between 1963 and 1975 also featured openness of the Syrian cinema to elite Arab screen stars and prominent filmmakers, including Egyptian movie-director Tawfiq Saleh, Iraqi movie-director Qais al-Zubaidi and Lebanese movie-director Burhan Alawiya. The national mainstream generally limited to major Arab issues, such as the Palestinian cause and pan-Arab unity, has been the most important feature of motion picture sought by the General Film Establishment.

History and Development Second Generation of Pioneers

The public-sector cinema has, therefore, never, tried to diversify the film genres of its production. Musicals, light comedies, action movies, or other genres of commercial cinema were absent in the film industry of the public sector. Since its creation, the General Film Establishment has outlined its objectives for a comprehensive educational mission to refine the people's taste for the art of cinema within the context of the battle fought by serious culture against ignorance and hackneyed ideas.

It may be noted in this respect that the Corrective Movement initiated by the late President Hafez Assad in 1970 has greatly contributed to the development of the art of cinema in Syria since the early 1970s.

During this period, i.e. the 1970s, the General Film Establishment produced a number of important films, including "The Knife" (1971) which is an adaptation of a novel titled "What's Left for You" by Ghassan Kanafani. Directed by Khaled Hamada, "The Knife" indirectly addresses the Palestinian issue.

"The Leopard" (Al-Fahd), an adaptation of a novel with the same title written by Haidar Haidar, was directed by Nabil Maleh and won the Jury Award at the Damascus International Youth Festival 1972. The film tells the story of a simple farmer who finds out that the feudal system is an extension of the colonial era. His land seized and he himself is sent to jail, tortured and degraded bitterly by the forces of oppression as represented in the person of gendarmeries. He escapes from the prison and hides in the mountains. Armed with a rifle, the lone fugitive fiercely fights the gendarmeries and the feudal thugs.

"The Dupes", an adaptation of a novel "Men in the Sun" by Ghassan Kanafani, was directed by Tawfiq Saleh. The film won the Grand Prize at the 4th Carthage Film Festival as well as several awards at other film festivals.

"The Dupes" is a drama about three Palestinians who try to escape their miserable life conditions and head for Kuwait seeking a job opportunity, but their unsuccessful trip ends up tragically.

"Shame", a trilogy adapted from three stories written by Fateh al-Mudarres and directed by Bashir Safiyya, Wadi' Yousef and Bilal Sabouni. All three stories of this trilogy describe the life and misery of peasants under the feudal system.

"Al-Yazirli", an adaptation of a novel "On Bags" by Hanna Mina was directed by Qais al-Zubaidi. The film shows several instances of various human relationships, at the heart of which is a family with an absent father. The elder sister runs away and only a child left to face the challenges of life alone.

"Daily Life in a Syrian Village" is a joint effort by playwright Sa'dullah Wannous and film-director Omar Amirilai. This semi-documentary depicts day-to-day life at a village in Syria's northeastern region of Jazira, and throws light on the concerns of the people and their view of the world.

"Kafr Qasem", directed by Burhan Alawiya, takes the massacre perpetrated by the Israeli troops against the Palestinian people of Kafr Qasem village in 1956 as an introduction to address the Palestinian problem in general. "Kafr Qasem" won the Golden Award at Carthage Film Festival as well as two other awards.

"The Opposite Direction", directed by Marwan Haddad, is a drama about daily suffering of a number of young men from all walks of life during the post-June debacle and its impact on their political and social concerns. The young men are filled with despair, disappointment and hopelessness, but the film lays special emphasis on the positive spirit which survived the defeat and stresses on going beyond the ordeal. "The Opposite Direction" was the first color film completely developed and printed at the labs of the General Film Establishment (earlier, all color films were developed and printed abroad).

If we tend to call the early cineastes (Ayyub Badri, Rashid Jalal, Nazih Shahbandar, Ismael Anzour, Yousef Fahde, Zuhair al-Shawwa) "first generation of pioneers", we can certainly call those who appeared later and worked under the General Film Establishment "second generation of pioneers", comprising, among others, Salah Dehni, Mohammad Chahin, Khaled Hamada, Marwan Haddad, Nabil Male and others, who laid a solid ground for cinema industry in Syria.

Reference may be also made to "Sweetheart .. Oh Mulberry Fruit" which was directed by Marwan Haddad. An adaptation of a novel by Ahmad Daood, "Sweetheart .. Oh Mulberry Fruit" tells the story of a young man from the countryside who moves to the city because of his job. He cannot resist the temptations found in the city life and ends up tragically.

History and Development Generation of the Eighties & Nineties

"The Trap", a film tells the story of a poor woman who is looking for a job to support herself and her ill mother. During her job hunt, she encounters many bitter experiences. The film was directed by Wadi' Yousef and written by Ali Okla Irsan.

"Vestiges of Pictures", an adaptation of a novel by Hanna Mina and directed by Nabil Maleh, presents a panoramic picture of life of peasants in the late 1920s and their struggle with the gendarmeries, representatives of the feudal system.

"Heroes are Born Twice" a drama directed by Salah Dehni, dealing with the Israeli occupation of Palestine from the point of view of a child.

"The Fifth Castle", a film by Bilal Sabouni which tells the story of how a simple countryside man is sent to jail by accident. He is imprisoned in a cell occupied by political detainees, where he becomes more aware of the world around him.

Generation of the Eighties and Nineties

Young blood appeared in the Syrian cinema in the early 1980s, consolidating the achievements realized by their predecessors from the second generation of pioneers.

A number of young men, who graduated from institutions of cinematography in the former Soviet Union and other eastern European countries, came back home and started making their first features after working briefly in the production of short films and documentaries. Every one of those young filmmakers has had his own style which characterized the nature of his films. This may be best illustrated in the black comedy of Samir Zikra; the miniatures of Mohammad Malas; the bitter cynicism of Osama Mohammad; the sad comedies of Abdul Latif Abdul Hamid.

Other young fellow filmmakers have also left their unique imprint on their work, such as the serious realism of Remon Boutros; the metaphoric musical tragedies of Maher Kiddo; the deep visual contemplation of Riyadh Shayya; the introduction of women's affairs by Waha al-Raheb, etc. The style has diversified and multiplied, adding a special "flavor" to the Syrian cinema and enriching its nature with more colors and shades.

A common factor, however, among those young filmmakers is represented in the "auteur" cinema, i.e. they are the directors and screenwriters of their films. The other common factor among the young blood in Syria's filmmaking is revealed in the memories and experiences they had been through in their respective hometowns. It may be argued, therefore, that the Syrian cinema of the 1980s and 1990s has presented an environmental and cultural image covering the various parts of the country.

It is worth mentioning that many films made by the said movie-directors have won different awards at different Arab and international film festivals.

Following is a review of the most important films released during this period (1980s and 1990s):

"The Half-Meter Incident" (1980), "Next-Year Events" (1985), "The Black Flour" (1998):

"The Half-Meter Incident", a film by Samir Zikra, is a journey into the world of a junior civil-servant from a conservative poor origin, whose mind is mainly occupied by the "femininity" of women rather than their personalities. The film uncovers this class of people along with their

contradictions, impulses and aspirations for a better life to overstep the bitterness of impoverishment at any cost.

"Next-Year Events" describes the problems faced by a young musician who seeks to form an orchestra but fails to materialize his dream on the ground due to several social and administrative obstacles laid in his way. "The Strangers' Earth" shows different snapshots of Syrian enlightening intellectual Abdurrahman Kawakibi.

"The City Dreams" (1984) and "The Night" (1992), two films by Mohammad Malas, the first of which shows Damascus in the eyes of a child during the 1950s and the political developments taking place as well as the love stories, violence and unrealized dreams. "The Night" recounts the story of a son trying to make a biography of his father who once crossed the border city of Quneitra into Palestine to fight against the occupation forces. He returns home, gets married and dies of disappointment over the dismal situation in occupied Palestine.

"Daylight Stars" (1988) and "The Peep Show" (2002) are two films directed by Osama Mohammad. "Daylight Stars" tells the story – in a gloomy and cynical tone - of a family belonging in all financial, educational, ethical and emotional aspects to the middle class of the society. The family tries to introduce a happy event into their life, but the happiness turns into a tragedy. "The Peep Show", a drama which describes the life of a lone countryside family, where the grandfather dies without naming any of his three grandchildren. One of the grandchildren returns from the June 1967 defeat smeared in mud. What matters in this film may not be the story. It is rather the style of depicting these worlds and how they are translated into images on the screen.

"Jackal's Nights" (1989), "Verbal Messages" (1991), "Rain Rise" (1995), "Breeze of the Soul" (1998), "Two Moons and an Olive Tree" (2001), "Listeners' Choice" (2003) – the latter was directed by Abdul Latif Abdul Hamid. The first, second, fifth and sixth of the said films can be described as light comedies about countryside people, their small world, the diversity of their down-to-earth nature and honesty. The third of the abovementioned films, i.e. "Rain Rise" is an urban comedy about the life of a writer who leads a roving and wearing life between reality and dreams and nightmares in a surreal and extremely cynical way mixed with transparent and delicate sentiments. The fourth film, "Breeze of the Soul", is a plain tragicomedy and

rather seems as a pleasant and melodious poem in good grace of love and human communication.

"The Moss" (1991) and "Wandering" (1997), two films by Remon Boutros, are a panoramic portrait of life in the city of Hama. Through this portrait, the first of these two films tells the story of a family including five brothers bitterly fighting each other over an inherited piece of land. The second film, "Wandering", shows part of the history of Hama during Hosni al-Zaeem's coup d'état and the debacle of Palestine.

"Something is Burning" (1993) and "The Black Flour" (2001) are two films by Ghassan Shmeit. "Something is Burning" tells the story of a family deported by force by Israel after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Twenty years later, the family still feels homesick, clinging to the past and rejecting acclimatization with their new life away from their homeland. "The Black Flour" is a drama about a Syrian village after evacuation of the French troops from the country, and the suffering normally experienced during independence.

"Neighing of Directions" (1993), a film by Maher Kiddo which allegorically and metaphorically tells the story of a girl in search of the thugs who raped her and murdered her family.

"Al-Lajat" (1995), a film by Riyadh Shayya, is set in "Al-Lajat", a barren and vast piece of basalt land in southern Syria. In this film, this land is a tragic place where the characters are longing to gain both love and freedom.

"Dreamy Visions" (2003) was the first General Film Establishment's production by a female filmmaker, Waha al-Raheb, and naturally the focus of "Dreamy Visions" was on women's issues in today's societies. The film tells the story of a girl who is mistreated by her father until she is driven to run away in search of herself. During her search, we are introduced to the story of her life and story of the homeland.

In the 1980s and 1990s many directors who made films in the 1970s stopped their activity, while others from the same generation, i.e. the second generation of pioneers, have continued their filmmaking business. One of the active directors is Mohammad Chahin who is actually the most prolific filmmaker in the Syrian cinema. Mohammad Chahin has made several films for both the public and private sectors, including "The Sun in a Cloudy

Day", which is an adaptation of a novel by Hanna Mina and produced by the General Film Establishment in 1985. "The Sun in a Cloudy Day" is set in a Syrian coastal city during the French colonial rule, where a young man from an aristocratic family seeks a change in his life away from the corrupt atmosphere of the family. He engages himself, therefore, in the life of a plain and down-to-earth people of one of the poor and traditional city slums, where he learns many things that he missed before.

After a long hiatus, Nabil Maleh made the "Comparse" (Extra), which approaches the world of people living on the margin of life and their hectic search for love and happiness.

Second Stage: Private-Sector Film Production

In 1964 "Syria Film" production company was basically established by Mohammad Rawwas, a veteran cinematographer and one of the founders of this profession in Syria. "Syria Film" tried to capitalize on the popularity achieved by the legendary duet "Doried Lahham" and "Nihad Qali" in their TV sketch "The Pearl Necklace". The film production company made a color screen adaptation of the same TV sketch under the same title. An Egyptian director of Lebanese origin was called to direct "The Pearl Necklace", which featured a celebrity named Sabah in the leading female role. The film was a hit and many producers were prompted to repeat the experience with Doried and Nihad, producing some 13 films for the duet in the 1960s, i.e. this period was practically dedicated to the duet Doried and Nihad, except for two films "The Devil's Game" and the "The Strangers' Encounter" – both were directed by Zuhair Shawwa and the latter starring Miriam Fakhrudin and Fahd Ballan. Doried's and Nihad's films were mostly directed by Egyptian movie-makers with Egyptian and Lebanese cast. Film producers rarely took the risk of assigning a Syrian movie-director to make any of these films with only few exceptions.

The period was mainly characterized by a flurry of intellectual and artistic activity and the desire for making quick profit with minimum funds required for financing the film productions.

During that period, too, the private sector obviously failed to create an indigenous moving picture industry, where productions basically relied on technical and art services provided by the General Film Establishment.

The first generation of pioneers, who were at the same time actors for the private-sector cinema, tried to establish the technical ground for an independent local filmmaking industry. They procured required equipment from foreign sources, while some of them manufactured the equipment locally. They also completely relied on national art potentials for their productions. But in its second stage, the private sector presented the worst of all Arab and world commercial cinema to the Syrian audience.

Nevertheless, we can find a very few private-sector productions which tried to appear as relatively clean films, thought and art-wise. Such productions include Doried Lahham's recent films "Ghawwar's Empire", "The Report", "The Borders" and "Kafroon", which tried hard to employ comedy in presenting key national and social issues. Similarly, Mohammad Chahin's "The Wolves' Jungle", a film which uncover greedy contractors who are willing to sacrifice everything human in return for gaining more profit.

Private film productions came to an end in the early 1990s and the majority of screen actors and actresses turned to television work and Syrian filmmaking has become restricted to productions of the General Film Establishment which is the sole and genuine representative of the art of cinema in Syria.

Reference may be made in this respect to the limited and short-lived efforts by the public sector to make feature films. In 1971 the Film Section at the Political Department of the Ministry of Defense produced a single feature titled "Up to the Last Man", directed by Amin Bonni. The film is an adaptation of a play "Song on the Road" by Ali Salem, which tells the story of five soldiers stranded in a strategic position besieged by enemy forces during the war and are left with no supplies or any contact with their headquarters.

The Political Department also produced a short film titled "Tel al-Faras" (1985) by Lutfi Lutfi.

In 1974, "Only One Man Needed" was the only feature produced by the Artists Union. Directed by Lebanese filmmaker George Nasr, "Only One Man Needed" featured a host of prominent actors and actresses in leading roles. The film tells the story of a powerful family's control over a village with all its potential.

Likewise, the Television Establishment produced a single feature "Ambiguities of Extremely Ordinary Incident" (1974) by Haitham Haqqi, as well as a number of short films, including "The Swing", "Fire and Water" (by Haitham Haqqi), "Al-Qumeitra 74" (by Mohammad Malas), and "The Child and Sun" (by Lutfu Lutfi).

Documentary Cinema

In 1932 when Helios Film production company was making "Under the Sky of Damascus", a gifted photographer called Noor al-Din Ramadan used a cine-camera that he had bought from a German man in Beirut to film certain national events extending from 1932 to 1936 with short film reels. This man used the camera for shooting deliberations of the first Syrian parliament, return of the Syrian delegation from Paris, demonstrations staged in Damascus protesting the French mandate, reception of Dr. Abdul Rahman Shahbandar and Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, the funeral of national hero Ibrahim Hanano and other important events and occasions. This photographer was harassed by the French authorities which subjected his work to censorship and cut several shots before allowing him to display his films. This continuous harassment left Noor al-Din Ramadan with no choice but to quit the profession of cinematographer.

In 1951, Yousef Fahdeh established a film processing lab in Damascus, which contained equipment required for development and printing of films. During 1952-1953 Yousef Fahdeh filmed two color 16mm documentaries about Damascus and Lattakia, after which he shot a number of documentaries about various subjects. In Lebanon, Yousef Fahdeh was able to film two features, namely, "To Whom the Sun Rises" (1958) and "In a Strange Home" (1960). When the General Film Establishment was created in Syria, he was recruited as an expert for the Establishment's development and printing laboratory. He also filmed several documentaries for the General Film Establishment.

In 1956, a Film Department was created in the Syrian Army. The Department was successively headed by prominent Syrian cine artists and experts, including Rashid Jalal, Ismael Anzour, Mohammad Rawwas, Khaled Hamada, Marwan Haddad and others.

This Film Department issued an illustrated newspaper, military training films and several documentaries about military and national subjects.

Syria's actual documentary cinema in started with the creation of both the General Film Establishment and the Film Department at the Syrian Television Organization.

Among the many documentaries produced by the General Film Establishment, we may mention "Water and Drought" (1961) by Salah Dehni, "Napalm" (1970 – winner of Silver Award at Baghdad Festival) by Nabil Maleh, "Children's Testimony in Wartime" (1972) by Qais Zubeidi, "In a Traditional Quarter" (1972 – winner of Jury Award at Moscow Film Festival) by Marwan Haddad, "About Her" (1975) by Samir Zikra, "Wishes" (1983) by Abdul Latif Abdul Hamid, "Sheikh Salem Ali Revolution" (1984 – winner of the Silver Award at Damascus Film Festival) by Isam Suleiman, "The Tent" (1985) by Maher Kiddo, "The Witness" (1986) by Rimon Boutros, "Today and Everyday" (1986) by Osama Mohammad, "Euphrates Rituals" (1995) by Walid Harib, "Renaissance of a City" (1995) by Basel Khatib, and the series of documentaries made by Wadi' Yousef about the October Liberation War.

Documentaries produced by the Film Department at the Syrian Television Organization include: "We Are OK" (1969 – winner of Silver Award at Leipzig Film Festival) by Faisal Yasiri, "Away from Home" (1969) by Qais Zubeidi, "Attempt at Euphrates Dam" (1970 – prize winner at Leipzig Film Festival) by Omar Amirilai, "Memory" (1977) by Mohammad Malas, "Palestine Roots" (1986 – winner of Golden Award at Damascus Film Festival) by Amin Bonni and "Damascus, a View Distance" (1986) by Hind Midani. Reference should also be made to the series titled "Homeland Memoirs" (1984-1987) by Amin Bonni. This valuable series formed reference documentaries about the history of Syria and Arab countries since the mid-19th century.

The private sector has approached documentary films with only two productions "The Road to Peace" by Amin Bonni, and "Dream", directed by Mohammad Malas and produced by Maram film production company.

Animated Pictures

Syria has been engaged in the art of animated filmmaking and started such productions only in the late 1980s when Nizar Ghazi and Samir Jabra made their debut animation “Traffic Light” (1989) in favor of the Syrian Television Establishment. But animation productions suspended and resumed in the early 1990s when the General Film Establishment’s plans included such productions. Among the best of animations produced by the General Film Establishment, reference may be made to “Sumerian Tale” (winner of Arab Critics Award and Special Jury Award at the 1991 Damascus International Film Festival), “One Thousand Pictures and Picture” (winner of the Grand Prize at the Cairo Children’s Cinema Festival 1996, and the Golden Prize at the Plastic Arts Festival in Tunisia) – both animations were made by Muwaffaq Qatt; “He and She” by Naser Na’sani (winner of the Golden Prize at Damascus Film Festival 1995); “The Stick” (1994) by Naser Na’sani; “Veto” (1991) and “Sorry Mr. X” (1993), both by Abdul Mu’een Oyoun al-Soud.

History and Development Damascus Film Festival

Damascus Film Festival

The Damascus Film Festival, which was first held in 1979, has set forth the objectives listed below:

- Develop and upgrade national Arab cinema and support new pictures dealing with the life condition of the people in an effort to express their issues and primary aspirations.
- Support and project serious trends in Asian and Latin American cinema as well as third world cinema in general.
- Establish renewable joint relationship between the art of cinema and cine artists, and between cinema and the audience.
- Build cultural and intellectual links between Arab cine artists and their counterparts in other third world countries, and world countries in general.
- Accomplish art, cultural and educational missions and contribute to impart the culture of cinema among the people.

Activities of the Damascus Film Festival include a Feature Film Competition and a Short Film Competition as well as art shows and other

cinematic events dedicated to certain film genres, in addition to many other diverse activities.

It may be noted that the Damascus Film Festival is not the first such function held in Syria. In 1955, a film festival was held among other activities of the Damascus International Fair. US, French, Italian and Egyptian films participated in that festival but they generally featured pure commercial movies.

A year later, i.e. in 1956, the event was re-held but with a completely different participation of films in terms of thought and art level. Unfortunately, the festival was a short-lived event and stopped activity due to regulatory matters.

In 1972, the General Film Establishment held a film festival under the title “First Damascus International Youth Film Festival”. Critics and cinema career people believe that that event was the beginning of a substantial turning point in the history of Arab cinema. The festival drove Arab cinema to reconsider and renew its concept of the art of cinema and its association with life as expressed and addressed by this new cinema. Again, the “Damascus International Youth Film Festival” seemed to be a short-lived experience when it was halted for a period of seven years. In 1979, a new cinema event was initiated under the title of the Damascus International film Festival, which is still organized up to the present time. This biannual festival tried to grasp and gain the experience of previous festivals and is always trying to develop and improve its activities. It is worth mentioning that in 2001 the 12th Damascus International Film Festival changed its nature from a regional festival dedicated to the cinema of Asian, Latin American and Arab countries into an international event hosting participations from all parts of the world.

The great Latin American film director Miguel Leitín who chaired the Jury Committee at the 9th Damascus International Film Festival in 1995 described the event as the most important of all other film festivals in third world countries.

The Damascus International Film Festival is one of many other cultural festivals organized by the Ministry of Culture which offers full support for the continuity and development of such important big events.

Film Distribution

In 1969 a law was issued to limit the import of films exclusively by the General Film Establishment. The said law was in fact made to save Syrian audiences from the uncontrolled flow of low-level commercial films imported by private-sector agents irrespective of the art or ethical values promoted by such films as long as they were able to make big profit.

Limitation of film imports by the General Film Establishment provided a profit margin which helped this institution to develop its productions and offer financial support to creative experiments by your film directors. The General Film Establishment does not seek any profit out of its productions. Since its creation, the Establishment has outlined its objective for delivering an art and cultural message that can only be done through this very Establishment.

Following the import of films, they are sold to distributors and movie theaters. But film distributors often refrain from purchasing films of pure artistic nature. The General Film Establishment displays such films in theaters associated with the Establishment itself in spite of the resulting financial loss.

With the decrease of film activity in the Syrian market, however, restriction of film importation has been lately lifted to encourage distributors and cinema owners who have now become free to procure whatever films they wish to display.

History and Development Movie Theaters and Cinema Publications

Movie Theaters

Statistics reveal that number of movie theaters in Syria in 1957 was 60 and the number became 90 in 1960, then increased in 1963 to reach up to 112. But picture houses decreased in number to 102 in 1993, then dropped off to 92 in 1981 although population doubled at that time. The reason is the competition between cinema and television and video home cassettes as well

as TV satellite channels. With less number of moviegoers, cinema owners became more indifferent to renovate their movie theaters which appeared in a poor condition. Consequently, filmgoers grew less in number and quality, a development which drove many families to stop going to movie theaters (families and erudite people were formerly the main audience of cinema shows in the country). However, this refined class of moviegoers is now limited to picture houses run by the General Film Establishment as well as a few quality cinemas owned by the private sector.

Cinema Periodicals and Publications

In 1978 the Ministry of Culture published the first issue of a quarterly magazine "Cinema Life", which is in fact the only academic magazine specialized in the art of cinema all over the Arab world.

Since its first publication, "Cinema Life" has published numerous profiles about history and development of cinema in Syria. The magazine also follows up local film releases and updated information about Arab and world cinema matters.

The General Film Establishment issues, within the framework of the Ministry of Culture's publications, a periodical series of books under the title "The Seventh Art". The books basically deal with theoretical cinematic subjects and biographies of prominent world filmmakers and other personalities involved in the art and industry of moving pictures. This series included, for example, biographies of Luis Buñuel, Akira Kurosawa and Ingmar Bergman, as well as "cinematic contemplations" by Andrei Tarkovsky, Andre Varda, Satyajit Ray, Federico Fellini, Elia Kazan and others. The "Seventh art" series also include many reference books dealing with the different aspects of filmmaking, such as scriptwriting, direction, editing, program music, etc.

A new cinema series of publications has been recently issued under the title "Cinematic Studies and Documents" which focus on film criticism and related subjects written by Syrian and film critics and cine scholars.

History and Development The Cinema City

The Cinema City & General Film Establishment Services

The foundation stone of the new "Cinema City" was a highly important step to develop and upgrade the level of film industry in Syria. The project aims to provide all requirements necessary for filmmaking by Syrian hands. Continued modernization of equipment and machinery owned by the General Film Establishment has also kept the Syrian cinema on contact with the latest film technological developments and achievements.

It may be noted that the General Film Establishment has always offered all possible facilities and services to private film productions at almost token charges.

Finally

In 1987, "Day Seven", a magazine published in Paris, conducted a survey among a large number of cine artists and experts on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the birth of Arab feature filmmaking. The survey was about the top ten films ever released by Arab cinema. The top ten films listed by film critics and cinema scholars included three productions by the General Film Establishment:

1. "The Dupes" by Tawfiq Saleh
2. "City Dreams" by Mohammad Malas
3. "Kafir Qasim" by Burhan Alawiyya

The selection of three Syrian films, despite the limited number of film productions in Syria, is an evidence that the Syrian cinema has witnessed a remarkable development under the General Film Establishment and Ministry of Culture. This also shows that the Syrian cinema has made its way in search of delivering its own unique voice to a world which does not care much about hackneyed voices.

The Syrian cinema is no longer a "novice". It has developed the experience to appear with a distinguished presence at Arab and international film festivals. Nevertheless, Syrian moving picture industry people are fully aware that the way is still long ahead to reach their hoped-for target for a better performance and more quality film productions in terms of art, thought and technology.