APOLLODORUS OF DAMASCUS
AND TRAJAN’S COLUMN

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Schlumberger
APOLLODORUS
OF DAMASCUS
AND TRAJAN’S COLUMN
From Tradition to Project

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G. Calcani
Organizing Bodies

ITALIAN INSTITUTE OF CULTURE IN DAMASCUS
«ROMA TRE» UNIVERSITY
GENERAL DIRECTORATE OF THE ANTiquITIES AND MUSEUMS OF SYRIA

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THE ITALIAN EMBASSY IN DAMASCUS

Sclumberger
Design and organization of the «Apollodorus Section» in the National Museum of Damascus: Architect Bassel Zurayk Fahrat
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Foreword
by Fiorella Festa Farina
Director of the Italian Institute of Culture in Damascus

The aim of the articles collected here is to introduce readers to Syrian architecture, and in particular to Apollodorus of Damascus, one of the very few architects of antiquity whose name and fame have come down to us.

The fame of Apollodorus is associated with commissions entrusted to him by the Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian, for whom he carried out civil and military works of architecture.

Some of these works are recorded in the literary sources: Procopius (De aedif., IV, 6, 11-13) attributes him with construction of a bridge on the Danube, Dio Cassius (LXIX, 4) the odeion, Forum and Baths for Trajan.

In addition to the attributions recorded by the writers of antiquity we have the testimony of modern scholars, who detect signs of Apollodorus’s hand in all the major buildings of the principates of Trajan and Hadrian in Rome and surroundings¹. Identification was made on the evidence obtained with analytic study of the monuments of certain attribution, revealing recurrent features of design that also appear in other architectural works that can thus be attributed to Apollodorus of Damascus with a reasonable degree of certainty. Among them we may mention Trajan’s port, the palace of the Horti Sallustiani (Sallustian Gardens), the Arch in the Coliseum Valley, Hadrian’s Villa, the Pantheon, Hadrian’s Mausoleum and the Temple of Venus in Rome.

Admiring the monuments of Rome we can form some idea of Apollodorus’s work and technical prowess. No experience can develop without cultural roots, and in the case of Apollodorus they can be traced to the architectural tradition of Syria. To be more precise, Apollodorus owed his particular mastery to Nabataean culture filtered through Greek modes of thought. Thus we can trace a long path of civilization leading to that experience in the art of building that saw new projects from the heart of Syria taking shape in the centre of Rome.

Retracing the path is no mere retrospective exercise: rather, it means casting revealing light on keystones of the fecund culture of the Mediterranean and acknowledging the common cultural roots.

Foreword
by Tammam Fakouch
Director General of Antiquities and Museums

The exhibition entitled «The Return of Apollodorus», inaugurated two years ago in Khan Ass’ad Pasha, in the old city of Damascus, was the starting point of an important cooperation project between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Italian Republic of Italy, focusing on the brilliant architect Apollodorus of Damascus.

This famous Syrian personage represents a hidden aspect of the history of our people in the region, above all because most of his works rose in the heart of the capital city of the Roman Empire.

The works of Apollodorus can be represented by one celebrated masterpiece, Trajan’s Column. Sixteen life-size casts were made from the column, matching modern technology with ancient art to demonstrate the high quality of architecture in those distant times. Original solutions and superb aesthetic results are two of the major characteristics of Apollodorus’s projects.

The casts of Trajan’s Column presented today in the National Museum of Damascus – capital of Syria, land of great civilizations – are the testimonial of his marvellous work translated into a modern, scientific exhibition.

The objective of the exhibition is to introduce this creative Syrian architect and the relevant history to his country, and to favour the development of cultural cooperation between Syria and Italy. These aims will be underlined with the constitution of a permanent museum-research centre on the life and works of Apollodorus, bringing together the Third University of Rome and the Italian Institute of Culture under the supervision of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in the Syrian Ministry of Culture.

The centre will be a model multi-cultural meeting place, and a precious reference point in the policy of dialogue between civilizations and cultures, which sees both sides firmly believing in the establishment of peace in the world.
Foreword
by Guido Fabiani
Provost of the «Roma Tre» University

The synergy implemented between our University, the General Directorate of the Antiquities and Museums of Syria and the Italian Embassy of Damascus-Italian Institute of Culture finds in the figure of Apollodorus an important reference point for research and cultural exchange between Syria and Italy in the area of the cultural heritage.

Launched several years ago to address matters of archaeology, conservation, exposition and cultural services, this line of research now moves on to a more ambitious project, namely the creation in Damascus of a Museum-Research Centre dedicated entirely to Apollodorus in his native city.

What is a museum supposed to represent today – what function is it to perform in contemporary society? The simple display of objects does not in itself suffice to satisfy the growing demand for information coming from the public.

The traditional museum no longer attracts visitors, while changes in society and, indeed, in university education itself mean taking a new look and applying new tools in the places reserved to bear witness to our history.

This is the challenge we set ourselves in embarking upon the Italian-Syrian project on Apollodorus of Damascus: a museum able also to apply state-of-the-art communication technologies to express, through this figure and his works, the values of a past reverberant with echoes, awaking the historical memory of our contemporary society.
A few days ago, in Beirut, I had occasion to talk to an old friend about the future of archaeological research in our respective countries. He took a rather optimistic attitude, which was a pleasant surprise for me, especially when I cast my mind back to the mood dominating our conversations in Paris (we were both university students at the time), marked by bleak reflections on the difference between academic life in the country we had chosen for our studies and the difficulties we would be facing when we returned to our own versions of academia.

On hearing the exposition of his new ideas I eventually found myself accusing him of fanaticism once again: he seemed to have set out to provoke me, at least until I began to get a clearer picture of things as the conversation went on...

We were having coffee in a bar at the suq al Baraghit when he suggested I take a look about me, and then he asked, «Isn’t there something in the multitude around us that arouses your curiosity?».

I went on gazing into the surrounding area while he continued, «For seven months I have been trying to focus my attention, as if to discover for the first time everything about me, surprised, as it were, at the existence of a world I had previously ignored. You know, I used to go looking for some quiet, secluded place where I could latch my thoughts onto something that would take me back to the Latin quarter and our meetings in Paris, as if to dissociate my bodily presence here from the city I had chosen for my thoughts to live in, but now I try not to let any of the details of the scenes I am faced with escape my attention.»

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* General Directorate of the Antiquities and Museums of Syria.

1 This paper is among the first in a series that will cover aspects of Syrian architecture, in the hope of successfully conveying to Arab readers some ideas about the development of the various architectural styles of the Middle East.

2 Paper read on the occasion of an international conference held in the National Museum of Damascus on 19th December 2001 «Between Damascus and Rome, the Architecture of Apollodorus in Classical Culture».
Actually, this new approach was sparked off when I came across an old guidebook dealing with the residential Lebanese architecture of the last two centuries; the simplicity of the architectural style helped me to focus my attention on the similarity they showed in plan with buildings dating to far more distant periods...».

At this point I broke in to ask him precisely what he was getting at, and he went on, «It’s an aesthetic experience that reveals the different matrices superimposed from the remotest times, although the causal observer fails to notice them. It’s like, for example, our failure to respond to the peculiarity and development of oriental architecture because we are so accustomed to it. Let me give you a few examples. We might begin with the so-called first architectural renaissance that took place in these parts in the second half of the fourth millennium BC4: prosperity in the Euphrates area5 and the rapid evolution shown by civilization in the area we are dealing with (above all the civilization known as al Waraka in Arabic, reaching as far as Anatolia)6 led to the organization of a system of trade routes, the most important being in fact the road running from the area in question to Anatolia; a great many emporiums and trading stations rose along the way, the most significant example being the site of Habuba, on the Syrian side of the Euphrates, possibly constituting the earliest urban site found7...».

Again I interrupted him with, «All this I know, but what has it to do with what you were saying before? You were talking about the influence of this architectural renaissance on the country today».

His answer came promptly, «Let's not stop short at a sectorial view of the aspect, but try to take in all the historical-architectural, economic and social elements available to us: the organization of the city, for example, with an administrative-religious building usually situated on a plateau around which the residential quarters spread out is much like the cities throughout the Euphrates area, and indeed we find it in Al Warka as in Salabikh, and in all the sites of the same period found in Syria and Anatolia. We see the same sort of similarities in the architectural style - the various temples always have a nave and two aisles, the central nave being raised above the level of the aisles and supplied with one or more hearths, generally used in the religious ceremonies, following a typology to be found, again, in Al Warka, and notably in the temple of Al Abyadh, the temples of the Iyana religious complex and the temples of Jabal Arudah and Tell Qanas».

At this point I asked, «So you mean that the architectural renaissance of those distant times was characterised by architectural elements to be used anew in later periods, and in a vaster geographical area».

9 VALLET Régis, La formation de l'habitat urbain en Mésopotamie, Abu Salabikh, une ville neuve sumérienne, Habitat et Société, XIXe Recontres Internationale d'Archéologie et d'histoire d'Antibes, ed. F. Braemer, S. Cleuziou et A. Coudart, Antibes 1999, pp. 151-165.
VALLET Régis, Habuba Kêbira Sud, approche morphologique de l'habitat, Les maison dans la Syrie antique du IIIe millénaire aux débuts de l'Islam, pratiques et représentation de
«Precisely! But I want to take this further, beginning with consideration of the fact that what we have been talking about is the first example in human history of a uniform culture spreading over such a vast area, with everything this implies – agricultural organization over an immense area channelling water from the Euphrates and the Tigris, the creation of efficient road systems and conduct of trade helped by the introduction of significant cultural developments such as the invention of the compass, the use of writing and trade stamps and seals... All this took place in the context of territorial, but also cultural, expansion characterising relations between the cities south of the Euphrates and the rest of the Middle East, eventually leading to the formation of a common cultural humus over an astonishingly vast area».

«I don’t want to interrupt yet again but, given your analysis of architectural history in the area, I’d like to know how it is that such widespread cultural uniformity did not give rise to a single political system – one united empire».

«I’ll be brief. Given that the evidence we have at the moment simply does not suffice to account for the dispersal and eventual disappearance, in the last quarter of the 4th century BC, of this coherent system, I can only suppose that the mass moves of the Bedouin population and the pressure they put on the Euphrates valley destabilised and consequently disrupted the area occupied by this civilization, at least until the second architectural renaissance».

«What do you mean by the second architectural renaissance?»

«I mean that cultural evolution that came under way with reconstruction of the city of Mari, in the first quarter of the 3rd century BC, accompanied by new, stable, state organization of the central area of the Euphrates valley, while at the same time external trade saw a new lease of life.

The city I am talking about – a walled city – covered an area of about 200 hectares, developing according to a circular plan, with an upper part


FOREST Jean-Daniel, Les premiers temples de Mésopotamie, (4e et 3e millénaires), BAR Int. 765, Oxford 1999:


where the royal palace and public buildings were raised, and a lower part occupied by the residential districts and kitchen gardens. The city was connected with the Euphrates by a navigable canal serving both for irrigation and for the supply of goods, and surrounded by a sort of earthworks, consisting of broad platform of beaten earth functioning both as defensive bulwark and a dike against river floods.  

Thanks to the organization and prosperity enjoyed by the city, together with the fact that it was an important crossroads for the major routes in the area, it achieved quite singular prominence as a trading centre, which in turn led to increasing agricultural production and extension of the canal system as far as the upper Euphrates and the Khubur area.  

"Ah," I broke in with a laugh, "now I see why Mari is claimed to have been a sort of World Trade Centre of antiquity...".

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Margueron Jean-Claude, Espace agricole et aménagement régional à Mari au début du IIIe millénaire, BSA, IV, 1988, pp. 49-60 (= Irrigation and Cultivation in Mesopotamia, I).  
«Actually, when I was talking about the architectural organization of the city of Mari, I might as well have been talking about a large proportion of the cities in the Euphrates valley\textsuperscript{15}, and indeed in Syria in general\textsuperscript{16}, built during that period. It was in fact precisely by virtue of this refound uniformity that the Syrian cities, together with the neighbouring areas, took on a regular architectural and urban configuration, ultimately surviving, with few modifications, to our own day».

«Sorry, but I’m still a bit confused, especially about the relationship between these models and the subsequent architectural forms».

Looking at me with a touch of wonderment, my friend went on, «I’m surprised at you being confused, seeing that, given the position you occupy, you ought to know that Syria already possessed its own clearly defined architectural characteristics in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennia BC, differing from those in the rest of the Euphrates area precisely on account of the simplicity I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation, based on the idea that architecture should reflect the combination of political and religious conceptions prevailing in the civilization where it developed.

This simplicity can, for example, be seen in the places of worship, generally consisting of a spacious rectangular hall called the sacred hall, with the idol placed at the centre in keeping with the idea that direct relations between the community and the divinities they worshipped should be encouraged\textsuperscript{17}.

A similar example is offered by the architectural simplicity of the castles and royal palaces built in the period, where the positioning of the throne room, looking straight on to the entrance, must have symbolised the somewhat informal relations existing in the court, with direct communication between sovereigns and subjects\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{15} To cite a few examples: Tal Baydar, Tal Al Khuwayra, Tal Mabtuh east and west.

\textsuperscript{16} The sites of: Tal Al Bay’a, Tal Al Suybat, Tal Hadidi, Tal Asharna.


MATTHIAE Paolo, A New Monumental Temple of Middle Bronze II at Ebla and the Unity of the Architectural Tradition of Syria-Palestine, AAAS, XL, 1990, pp. 111-121.


I don’t want to go any further into the matter now as it will soon be time for you to leave for Damascus, but I would like to sum up my ideas in a few words: the Syrian architecture of that time, with its simple style and departures from the rest of eastern architecture (take Egyptian architecture, for example), reflected a vision of man in his social and spatial relations. Architecture arises to meet the needs of people, which is why we must look at all the beauty about us to achieve a real understanding of it.

After this encounter I decided to stay on in Beirut. I wandered about for hours on end, and I realised what I would have to do once I had finished my studies in Europe: look about me, plumb the profundity of man in eastern civilization, because the only way out of my crisis lay in losing the world and gaining my own country.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAAS = Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes.
AASOR = Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research.
BAH = Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique.
BEO = Bulletin d'Études Orientales.
BSA = Bulletin on Sumerian Agriculture.
MARI = Mari, Annales de Recherches Interdisciplinaires.
NAAO = Notes d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Orientales.
SDB = Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible.
TMO = Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient.
Fig. 1 - Plan of the city of Al Warka, on the site of Mahbiba.

Fig. 2 - Plan of the north temple on the site of Tel Qannas, dating to the Al Warka period.

Fig. 3 - Plan of the city of Mari.

Fig. 4 - Plan of the temple on the Tell Marib, site, dating to the first half of the second millennium B.C.

Fig. 5 - Plan of the castle in the city of Qarqafs, dating to the modern Bronze Age.
Syria in the Times of Apollodorus of Damascus
by Maamuon Abdulkarim*

The Damascus architect lived from 60 to 130 AD, at a time when Syria, conquered by the Roman empire, was going through a very important period of development and prosperity from many points of view, political, scientific, economic and, above all, architectural.

At the time of Apollodorus the buildings of Syria were characterised by architectural elements that had never appeared hitherto, representing an absolute novelty that would eventually be radically modified in the Islamic period.

We have little documentation of the Hellenistic period in Syria: the data yielded by archaeological investigation are indeed scant, little having come to light on the great Via Recta of the city of Antioch, or in the Agora of the city of Dura Europos, while evidence of the fortifications of Ibn Hani has appeared only with sporadic finds. As much can be said of the remains of the theatre in the city of Apamea, while a large proportion of the finds made on the classical sites refer to subsequent periods, and in particular the Roman and Byzantine ages.

With Alexander the Great, in the first place, and his successors, the Seleucids, subsequently, the Hellenistic period saw a great many novelties arriving in the field of architecture that had never been used before. The first point worth underlining here is the changing form of the Syrian city itself, the city walls being extended outwards while the streets took on a chequerboard pattern crossing at right angles, with two major axes running north-south and east-west. At the same time architectural complexes unknown to the previous civilizations were introduced, including agora, theatre and gymnasium.

The period was also characterised by the building of new cities positioned strategically or for trade, bearing Greek names such as Antioch, Al Ladiqiyya, Apamea, Selucia and Europos, while reconstruction or extension was carried out on other cities dating back earlier than the classical period, such as Aleppo (Beroea) and Hama (Epiphania), and by the end of the Hellenistic period Damascus was called with the name of Dimetrias.

To have some idea of the city structure in the Hellenistic period we can analyse Dura Europos, which was discovered in the 20th century. Built on a strategic site on the Euphrates around 280 BC, it was conquered by the

* General Directorate of the Antiquities and Museums of Syria.