

Palimpsest



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## palimpsest, n. and adj.

a. A parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing.

# Bab al-Saghir

-the cemetery-

„Like Laudomia, each city, has next to it, another city, whose inhabitants carries the same name: it is Laudomia the city of the dead ..

The characteristics of the double city is well-known. The more that Laudomia grows and is settled with the living, the bigger also the city of the dead grows. The streets of Laudomia the city of the dead is just wide enough for the carriages of the gravediggers to pass, and they are lined with windowless structures, but the pattern of the streets and the order of the dwellings echo that of Laudomia the city of the living, and in both the families grow always closer and more crowded in the density of overlapping niches. (...) As in the city of the living, here it recounts the faces of hardship, aggravation, illusions, compassions, only it has also become necessary here to eliminate any kind of chance and classify these faces so that order is brought. To be assured, Laudomia the city of the living desires, in Laudomia the city of the dead an affirmation of itself (...)“

Italo Calvino, The City and the dead 5,  
*The Invisible Cities*.



[ 3 ]

The Bab al-Saghir cemetery is said to be the oldest cemetery in Damascus. It is of symbolical value, known to have been the sight where the conquering Sahaba (companions of the Prophet) fell in 634 while taking over Damascus. As the Abbasids destroyed any traces of their Umayyad predecessors and antagonists, none of this early material evidence survived. The site was important for the Fatimid dynasty who venerated the family of the Prophet and their burial sites, particularly those descended from his nephew, the Imam Ali. Under the Atabeg Turks, the cemetery was grandly renovated and expanded. Many tombs executed in the Seljuq Atabeg style, which anachronistically carried the names of the Sahaba and the Umayyad caliphs that had died nearly half a millennium before, were constructed at this time signifying the historical importance of the site.

The cemetery continues to be a popular site of pilgrimage to this day for both Sunni and Shi'i visitors. It houses the tombs of members and descendants of the Prophet's family, most notably the Mausoleum of Fatima Al-Sibtī, daughter Muhammad.



# CEMETERY AL BAB AS SAGEER.



ALSO THE CEMETERY OF BAB SAGEER HAS BEEN CUT WITH THE ACTUAL AL JARAH STREET.

AMONGST 2 METERS OF LAYERS!





# Contents

[ 1 ]	Preface	
		[ 2 ] Bab al Saghir
		[ 10 ] Prolog
		[ 12 ] History Damascus
[ 16 ]	Methodology	
		[ 20 ] Palimpsest
		[ 26 ] Classification
		[ 33 ] Localization
[ 30 ]	Collection	
		[ 37 ] Gate & Boundary
		[ 57 ] House
		[ 75 ] Edifice
		[ 99 ] Block
		[ 113 ] Neighborhood
		[ 127 ] Walled city
		[ 148 ] Overall view
		[ 152 ] Index
[ 154 ]	Inference	
		[ 154 ] Conclusion
[ 156 ]	Supplement	
		[ 156 ] Glossary
		[ 158 ] Bibliography
		[ 88 ] Acknowledgements



Marje's square



[ 1 ] Special

- [ 2 ] Bab al-Saghir cemetery
- [ 23 ] La Grande Platane
- [ 25 ] Madrasa al-Kamiliyya
- [ 34 ] Baklava

[ 37 ] Gate & Boundary

- [ 40 ] Bab al-Sharqui
- [ 44 ] Roman wall
- [ 46 ] Al-Jazari mill
- [ 48 ] Bab al-Faradis
- [ 50 ] Bab al-Saghir
- [ 52 ] Bab al-Kissan

[ 57 ] House

- [ 60 ] Bayt al- Aqqad
- [ 64 ] Damascene house I
- [ 66 ] Damascene house II
- [ 68 ] Bait al Nizam
- [ 70 ] Hanania Orthodox Church

[ 75 ] Edifice

- [ 78 ] Takiyya Sulaymaniyya
- [ 82 ] Al Qabbani School
- [ 84 ] Madrasa al-Zahiriyya
- [ 86 ] Hammam Nur al-Din
- [ 88 ] National Museum
- [ 90 ] Bimaristan of Nur al-Din
- [ 92 ] Azem Palace
- [ 94 ] Madrasa al-Adiliyya

[ 9 ]

[ 99 ] Block

- [ 102 ] Roman Theatre
- [ 106 ] Citadel
- [ 108 ] Yalbugha mosque
- [ 110 ] Merjeh square

[ 113 ] Neighborhood

- [ 116 ] Al-Midan
- [ 120 ] Shifting agriculture
- [ 122 ] Straight street
- [ 124 ] Ecochard plan

[ 154 ] Walled City

- [ 130 ] Light
- [ 132 ] Alleys
- [ 134 ] Urban layers
- [ 142 ] Umayyad Mosque

# Preface

The working model used for this project is the philological metaphor of the palimpsest, which etymologically defined, is a parchment that has been repeatedly scraped off and written on throughout history, whereby faint remains of parts of the former script become legible again.

The main focus for us, thus, is not the reconstruction of any type of original text, but rather an investigation into this plurality, perceiving more than just the sequence in the coexistence of what was written and what was being written.

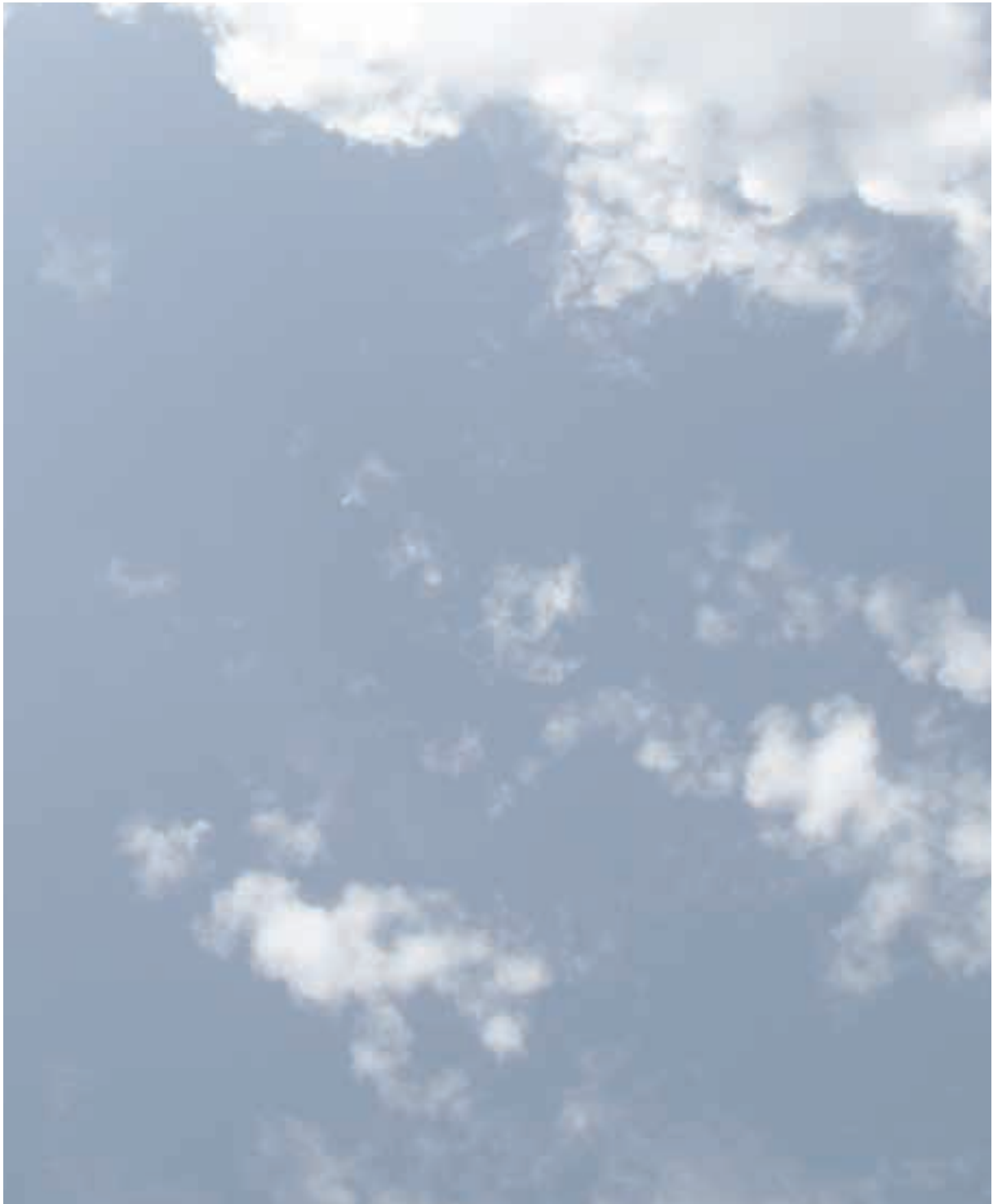
Throughout the project we tried to understand the discourse in a broader sense and within the context of cultural and literary science, ranging from Enzensberger to de Montaigne. We have come to perceive and represent the palimpsests of Damascus, treating architecture as a storyteller in the Damascene way of making, unmaking, re-making its own environment.



modernist housing typology in former agricultural zone



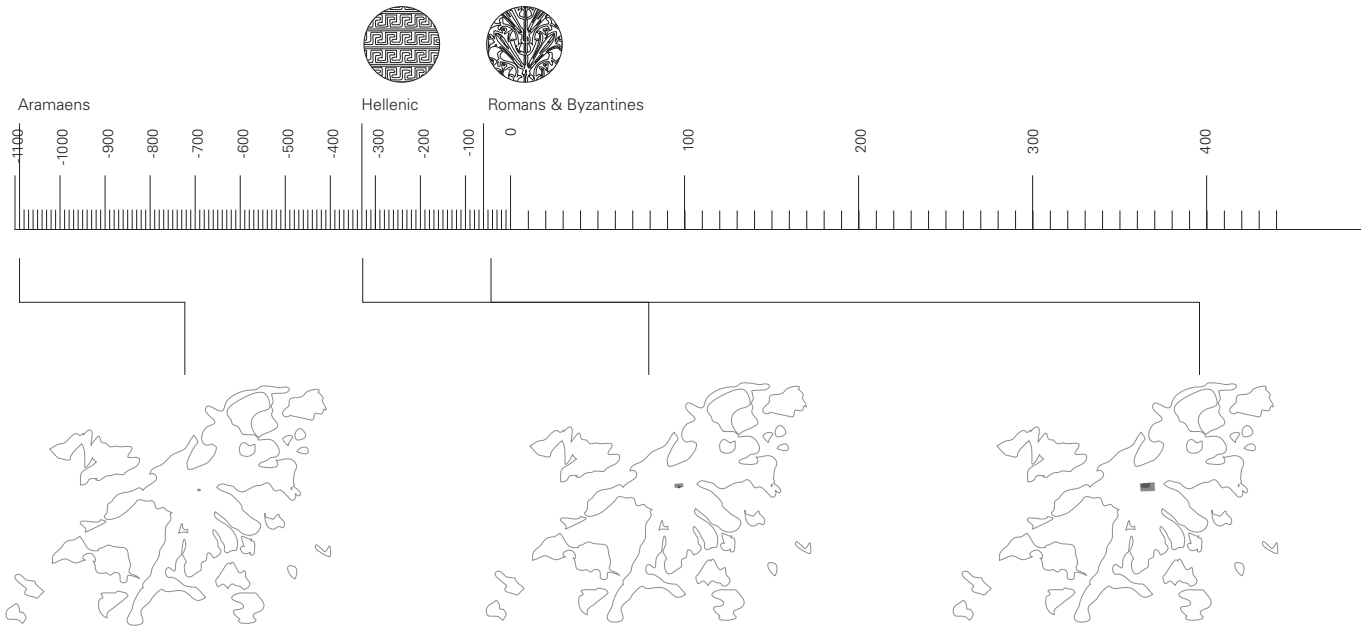
oasis



vault

**DRAFT**  
© ETH Studio Basel

# Historical overview



## Pre-historic

Damascus has evidence of habitation as early as 5000 BC. Situated in the fertile Ghouta oasis on the River Barada and in the junction of important trade routes.

### Arameans and Assyrians

They originated from the Arabian Peninsula and moved northwards to settle in the Fertile Crescent. The moderate climate and fertile soil of Syria made it an ideal place for the settlement of the Aramaeans. Being a natural oasis irrigated by the River Barada, Damascus became an increasingly important city in the Aramaean Kingdom, as mentioned in the Old Testament, arranged around the two major monuments. The Royal Palace and the temple of Hadad.

After several battles, the Assyrian armies managed to reach the Syrian coast and in 841 BC.

It is most probable that the remains of the Aramaean town lie buried under the eastern part of the old walled city. However, excavation of the area is almost impossible because of the architectural value of the monuments and buildings standing there today.

## Persians and Seleucids

Sovereignty over Damascus passed from the Assyrians to the Chaldeans under King Nebuchadnezzar in 572 BC. Babylonian domination came to an end in 538 BC, when Cyrus, King of Persia, took the city and established it as the capital of the Persian province of Syria.

### Hellenic rule

The year 333 BC was a turning point in Syria's history; in this year, the armies of Alexander the Great conquered Persia and Damascus, marking the start of an age of classical civilization. It was the first time that Damascus came under western control.

They made Antioch the capital, but Damascus remained to be the most prominent political and economic center in the Fertile Crescent.

The Greek era lasted for 250 years, but left very few traces in Damascus. There was much interaction between the local inhabitants of Damascus and the new Greek community, which resulted in Damascenes adopting many aspects of the Greek culture. Small greek city with straight street grid, agora and Zeus temple on the same site as the Temple of Hadad.

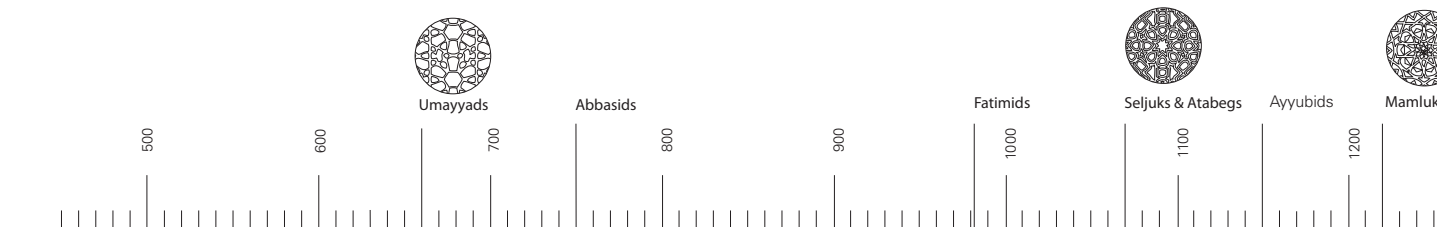
## Romans and Byzantines

In 64 BC, Damascus was under full control of Roman and Byzantine authorities. The city flourished as a result of political stability and economic growth that accompanied the expansion of the Roman Empire. Damascus gained a significant economic importance as the crossroads on the east-west trade route. This prosperity led to further expansion of the city.

Christianity was introduced to Damascus, shortly after the death of Jesus Christ. It had already taken root there by the time St. Paul arrived in Damascus in 34 AD.

Damascus soon became an important center of Christianity.

With the break-up of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, Syria became a part of the eastern province of the Byzantine Empire. Under the new rulers, Damascus maintained its economic and strategic significance. To defend their eastern border against Persian attacks, the Byzantines fortified Damascus and turned it into a military headquarters, but they were still not able to face the continuous assaults from the east, so they entrusted the defense of Syria to the Ghassanids.



## The Omayyads

The year 635 was a turning point in the history of Damascus. Muslim armies under Khaled Ibn al-Walid entered Damascus. The Muslims had travelled from the Arabian Peninsula northwards, inspired by their new religion, facing little resistance on their way.

Islam brought a new set of cultural, economic and social rules to Damascus. There was a mass conversion to Islam, but Jews and Christians, who now became a minority, were treated with tolerance by the Muslims.

In 661, a golden age started for Damascus with the Omayyad Dynasty. Muawiyah made Damascus the capital of his empire. Soon, Damascus became the most important cultural, economic and political center in an empire that stretched from Spain and shores of the Atlantic Ocean to Iran and India.

The center of the city remained behind the city walls, but suburbs like Shaghour, Midan and Qanawat were built to incorporate the growing population. As houses crowded the limited area of the walled city, Damascus became a labyrinth of passageways rather than the Roman streamlined city.

## Abbasids

750 AD Abbasids make Bagdad capital. Damascus have a declining population. Abbasids erases Umayyad buildings and destroy large parts of the city, including the Ummayyad mosque.

## Fatimids

969 AD. The following years were marked by insecurity. The city were fragmented while independent markets and mosques were erected. By the end of 12th century there were more than 242 mosques within the old city.

## Seljuks

In 1076, the Fatimids lost control over Damascus to the Seljuks, a Turkish tribe that converted to Islam in the 10th century.

The period up until the arrival of Nour Ed-Din in 1154. He defeated the Crusader armies and used Damascus as the base for his military campaigns.

The Seljuk era brought an artistic and architectural revival to Damascus.

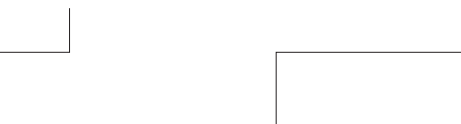
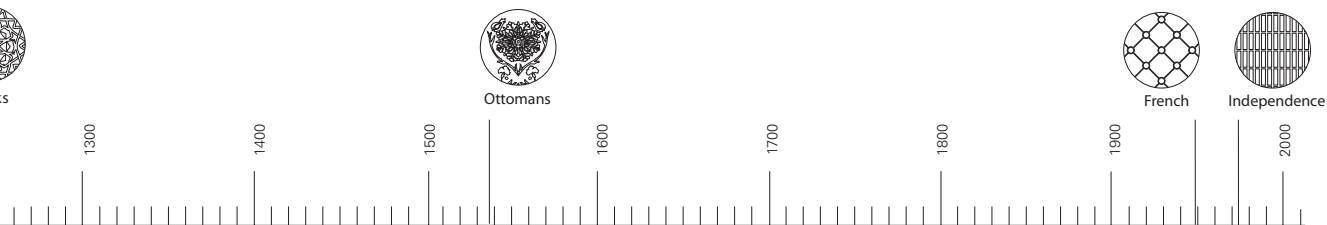
He also ordered the construction of a Shams al-Muluk Palace and the renovation of the city's walls and gates.

## Ayyubids

1154 AD Ayyubid leaders defeated the Second Crusade. Increased insecurity enables Damascenes to build extra-muros. Satellite suburbs in Salhiyye, Maydan, and Saruja develop on roads leading out of the city.

## Memluks

The period was one of a relative prosperity to Damascus. A new sophisticated administration system was introduced. However, this was a period of great stability and prosperity under the governorship of Tankiz. His overthrow in 1340 marked the beginning of Mamluk decline as Damascus did not find another strong leader that could bring back political stability. The Memluks were also great contributors to the Damascus' architectural heritage. The city grew rapidly with the new wealth generated. There was little room for buildings in the Old City and most Mamluk buildings that can be seen today are found outside the Old City. Salhiyyeh quarter underwent a surge of building and developed into a town of its own. The map of Damascus at the time shows that, unlike former periods, the city was completely surrounded by suburbs.



Ottomans

With the Ottoman conquest of Syria in 1516, Damascus lost its political strength yet retained its commercial importance.

A second factor in the continuing prosperity of Damascus was the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca and Medina. Annually a great caravan under the command of the pasha of Damascus passed through Damascus for the Muslim holy cities. The city also profited from trade in the merchandise that the pilgrims brought back from Arabia. The Midan, as the headquarters for this traffic. Between 1831 and 1840 Syria once more came under Egyptian control with the rise of Muhammad 'Ali. Europeans were allowed into the city on more lenient terms; foreign schools and missions were established.

After Midhat Pasa, the great Ottoman reformer, became governor in 1878, he made civic improvements, widening streets and improving sanitation. During World War I the Syrian capital was the combined headquarters of Ottoman and German forces in their struggle to the Suez Canal and subsequent defensive war against British forces and their Arab allies.



French Mandate

With the departure of the Ottomans, Damascus entered a new era, during which it has changed in size, physical appearance, and political role. An independent Syrian state was declared in 1919 with Damascus as its capital; Faysal was proclaimed king early in 1920. A few months later, the French, with a League of Nations mandate, defeated his army and entered the city. Damascus resisted the French takeover, and an uprising in 1925 was put down only after the French bombarded the city, causing much damage in parts of the Old City.

The years of the French mandate over Syria, from 1920 to 1946, were a period when Damascenes, along with their fellow countrymen, struggled for their nation's independence and for the broader goal of a single Arab state. The Ba'th Party, devoted to that goal, originated there during World War II. The mandate period lasted until April 1946, when, responding to a United Nations resolution, French troops finally left Syria. Once again Damascus was the capital of an independent Syria.

The French Mandate planned new suburbs in western style and left the old city decay.



Independence

In 1946 Syria was given Independence to the Syrian Arab republic.

Under the republic, Syria's turbulent political life has revolved around Damascus. In this role it has functioned as a pole of attraction for political forces, for economic interests, and for rural people seeking a better life. On several occasions, leadership of the country changed by coup d'état, to the rumble of tanks in the streets. In the 1960s the Ba'th Party came to power in Syria and brought more stability to government. A soviet inspired suburb in Mezza was built.

In 1948, the State of Israel was declared. Palestinian refugees settled in Yarmouk where in June 2002, there were 112,550 refugees registered.

In Jaramana (south east of Damascus) are about 1 million Iraqi refugees by today.

The physical limits of terrain and finite water sources argue for decentralization to satellite communities some distance away. The city grows rapidly and uncontrolled.

Syrian Government plans to build industrial cities outside of the big cities to accommodate people living in illegal settlements.





# Perception

-a mental map-

When we first arrived in Damascus, the city immediately cast a spell over us...

We were impressed by its timeless appearance in which ideas such as continuity, rupture and permanence seems to materialize. Damascus unites these paradoxically ideas and „let them melt into the air“ in between the Barada river and the Qasiyun mountains.

The ideas of continuity, rupture and permanence come from our intuitive and subjective experiences and it seems scientific to try to simplify them into black letters on a white piece of paper. However this ineffable joy of perception motivated us to enquire into the very first motives which influenced our intuition.



[17]

# Methodology of the project

The permanent changes in the urban fabric and the buildings themselves make it almost impossible to read the city using chronologically. We see the connections between layers not as sequential in time but juxtapositional, superpositional or even disjunctive in space.

This conclusion brings us also to more plausibly to explore the differences in between the layers that lies in space which are visible to a n specific object and those which lies in time using the chronological structure of historical time.

Our work is structured within the ideas of perceiving, receiving and conceiving.

## Perceiving

Our initial perceptions of the city of Damascus led us to begin with a set of 60 intuitively selected objects or items which we term probes. Our instincts were supplemented of course by careful observations of the environment, meticulous note-taking and multiple sketches of buildings, objects or things that evoke our initial curiosity.

## Re-perceiving

After an initial cataloguing we selected 36 of the first 60 probes and developed specific tools of representation for each, such as the more traditional sections, plans, axonometries and the more ingenious such as fairytales. From the selected 36 we then concentrated on 6 more specific items, each of a different scale. Starting with the smallest scale of gate & boundary, houses, edifice, block, neighborhood we then proceeded to even another level of deeper analysis..





# Process of conceiving

What are the tools to describe the process which we have uncovered for each of our probes? What are the instruments we deployed to understand our probes?

## Historical section

For each probe we have constructed a very objective section based on history, showing the periods of the history which are traversed for each specific probe.

## Perceptual section

With the help of this tool first section in time we attempted then to show the divergence between the history and what is perceptible in the probe. The most visible layer in the physical structure appears on the top of the soil, while the less visible at the bottom. In case that a historical layer which appear as relevant in the historical section but is not perceptible today, the soil is going to show a blank field. The chronology of time is irrelevant in this tool.

## Palimpsestical typologized

With certain operations which we have observed, such as morphological disjunction, superpositions and juxtaposition, as well as ideological super- and juxtaposition or programmatic super and juxtaposition, we could define the palimpsestical nature of each probe.

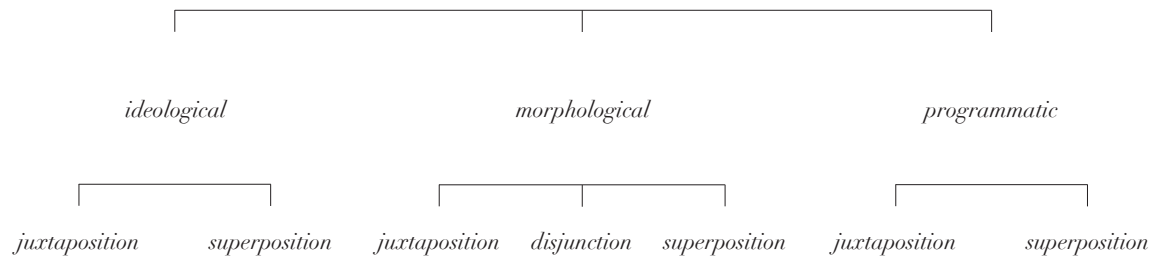
## Programmatic usage

The variability and adaptability of programmatic usage in history are organized here

## Links:

The relationship from the object with other objects or themes such as history, articles, essays is shown in this description of the probe.

*palimpsestic nature*



[ 21 ]

# Morphological

-superposition & juxtaposition-

It is called a morphological superposition when a physical structure overlaps an existing one.

A juxtaposition implies that the new structure supports on another one that has been there before. The order in which the material strata are superposed or juxtaposed doesn't have to imply a chronological order.

[ 22 ]

## Disjunction

In biology, a disjunct distribution is one in which two closely related taxa are widely separated geographically. A morphological example is the former Herod's theatre which has been neglected and the material re-used to built other houses in town.

Since this is an dynamic system, the neglected stone would only land exactly in the same place in the most unlike case and besides that, it will always land in a transformed context.





The large hollow sycamore tree with a diameter more than 10 feet planted by Muhammed's son in law, according to the legend was worshipped under the name of Imâm Ali. Visitors from abroad came to gaze at this marvel of nature which had been cut down in the last century.

# Ideological

-superposition & juxtaposition-

The Ideology which is the doctrine that guides an individual or a collective, can also be superposed or juxtaposed. The continuity, disruption, and permanency are topics which are strongly related to our understanding of ideology.

When we refer to a superposition, we mean an authoritarian and imperative change of doctrine.

The ideological juxtaposition requires coexistence. A contemporary ideology allows anyone of the past to continue existing.

[ 24 ]

# Programmatic

-superposition & juxtaposition-

The last type, which relates to utilization, makes a statement on the ability of structures to adapt to new demands. The dynamic of the collective city depends on the flexibility of individual buildings. A superposition in program means that a new type of use replaces a previous one. Differently, juxtaposition permits an older utilization to further exist.

Madrasa al-Kamiliyya. Fomer theological school from 1100 A.D., today a primary school and Madrasa.



Object	Period													
	aram.	hellen.	ro.-byz	umma.	zengid	abbas	fatimid	seljuk	ayyub.	mamluk	otto.	french	indep.	top
Agora neighborhood	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Al Adiliyya									X					
Al Kamiliya								X						
Al Qabbani school													X	
Azem Palace											X			
Bab al Faradis									X					
Bab al Jabieh								X						
Bab Kissan									X					
Bab al Saghir									X		X			
Bab Sharqi			X		X						X		r	
Bab Touma					X				X				r	
Bait al Quwalty											X			
Bait al Nizam											X			
Bait al Sibai											X			
French street												X		
Hotel Complex											X	X	X	r
Jupiter Temple remains			X											
Kanayad al Hatab street				X				X		X				
Old House 1			X				X				X			r
Old House 2						X			X		X			r
Ommayad Mosque	X	X	X	X	X						X			
Roman Theatre			X											
Streight street			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Zitadelle								X			X			
AL-Zahiriyya madrasa										X				
former agricult. zone*												X		
Al midan Mosque												X		X
Al midan house												X		
Al Qorashi lane												X		
Bab as Sageer cementery					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hafez al assad bridge													X	X
Hanania ortodox church											X			
Al-Salihiye Mosque										X	X			X
Al-Salihiye Watertower										X	X	X		
Bab Assalam street			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Saruja small Mosque					X			X	X		X			
Souq al Joma					X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Annasr street *rail terminal*											X			f
Four seasons Hotel														X
Hippodrome			X							X	X	X		f
Yalbuga mosque								X					X	
National Museum*					X							X		
Suleymanike kulliyesi											X			

Inner Damascus

West South  
outskirts

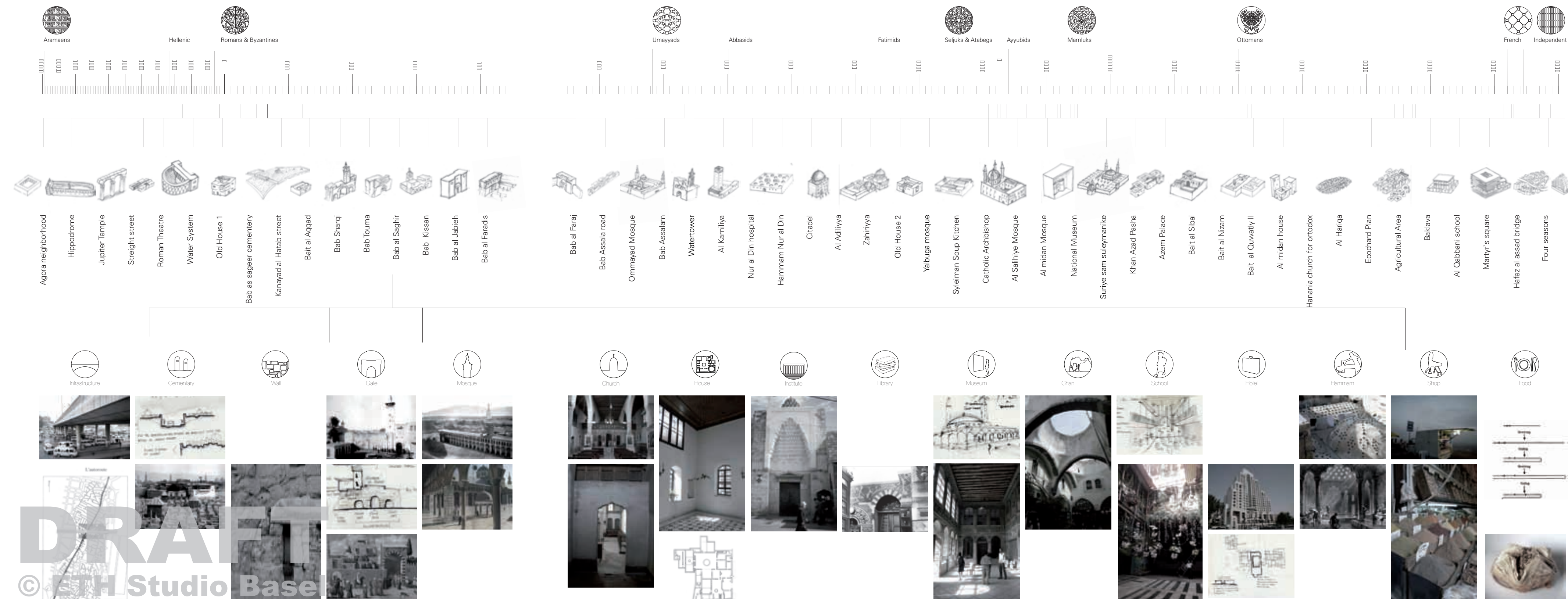
North  
outskirts

Downtown

Typology														Palimpsest		
zone	street	mosq.	church	cem.	house	shop	gate	wall	muse.	intit.	hotel	school	library	morphology	ideology	program
X														superposition		X
												X			X	
												X			X	
												X		superposition	X	X
					X				X					juxtaposition		X
							X							superposition		
							X							superposition		
							X		X					superposition		
		X			X	X	X							super.-juxta.	X	X
		X			X		X							super-juxta.	X	
							O		X					superposition		
					O											X
					O						f			juxtaposition		X
					O						f			juxtaposition		X
	X													superposition		
X					O						X			superposition		X
						X	X							juxtaposition		
	X	X			X	X	X							superposition		
					O						X			juxtaposition		X
					O					X				juxtaposition		
X		X		X		O			X					super.-juxta.	X	
X					X	X				X				juxtaposition		X
	X								X					superposition		X
		X						X						juxtaposition		X
											f	O	O		X	
X														erasure		X
		X				X								super.-juxta.		X
					O									superposition		X
	X													superposition		X
				X										superposition		
X														superposition		X
			X		X											X
					X											X
	X													superposition		X
														juxtaposition		X
	X													super.-juxta.		X
X																X
											X			superposition	X	
X														erasure		X
		X												super.-juxta.		
		X			O	X			X					juxtaposition	X	X
		f							f							X



Table of Palimpsest



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# How to read the collection

-the iconography & the page-

## Time periods



independence



french mandate



ottomans



mamluks



seljuks



umayyads



romans & Byzantines



hellens

## Typologies



gate



wall



house



mosque



church



cementery



institute



educational



museum



hotel



hammam



food & restaurant



shop



storage



bridge



street



area



no usage



project's name

**Bab Al-Sharqui**  
-eastern gate-

Variant Names Gate of sun  
Location East of walled city  
Aprox. age 2073 years  
Building Usage Gate, observation tower, Minarett



object's sketch

short description

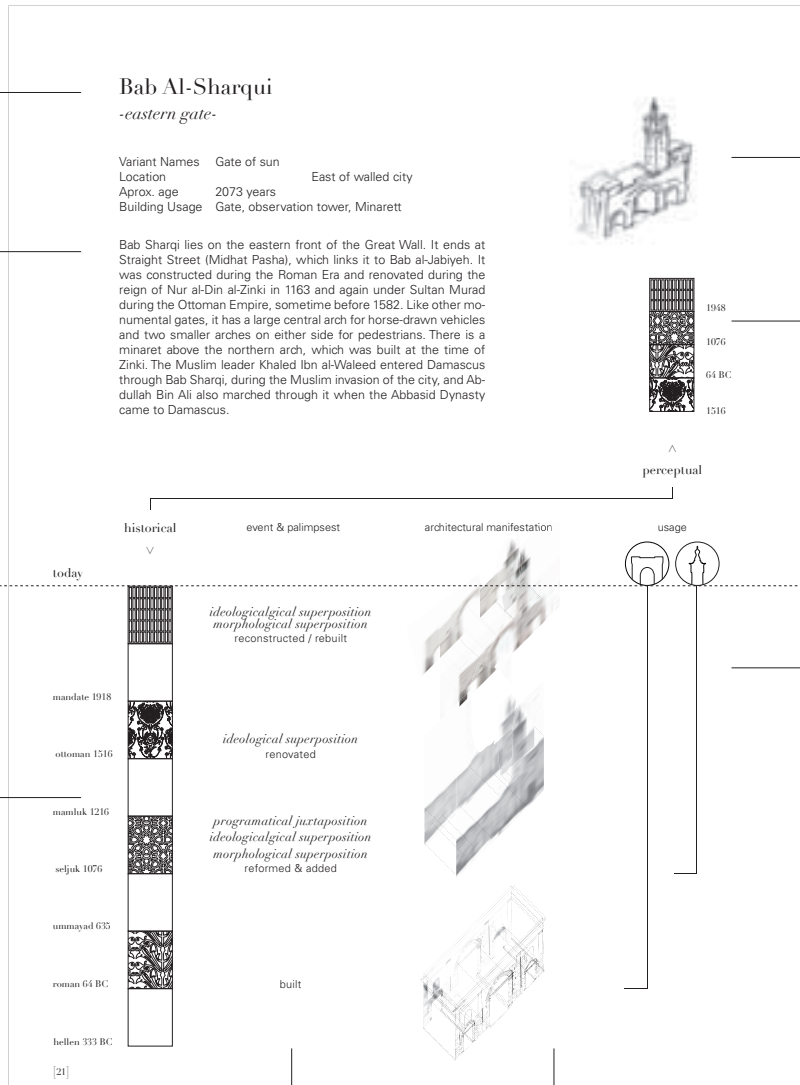
Bab Sharqi lies on the eastern front of the Great Wall. It ends at Straight Street (Midhat Pasha), which links it to Bab al-Jabiyeh. It was constructed during the Roman Era and renovated during the reign of Nur al-Din al-Zinki in 1163 and again under Sultan Murad during the Ottoman Empire, sometime before 1582. Like other monumental gates, it has a large central arch for horse-drawn vehicles and two smaller arches on either side for pedestrians. There is a minaret above the northern arch, which was built at the time of Zinki. The Muslim leader Khaled Ibn al-Waleed entered Damascus through Bab Sharqi, during the Muslim invasion of the city, and Abdullah Bin Ali also marched through it when the Abbasid Dynasty came to Damascus.



anachronic perceptual classification of the object. The most visible historical period at the top, the less visible at the bottom.

today's perception  
historical review

the historical periods that are particularly relevant for the object are highlighted with a hatching.



[ 31 ]

programmatic classification from the moment the structure has been built till today's usage

classification into palimpsestic nature:

-morphological  
-ideological  
-programmatic

description of the event

-built  
-reformed  
-neglected  
-renewed  
-rebuilt

the architectural manifestation approximately shown, is related to historical descriptions or archeological reconstructions.



Suleyman soup kitchen

Bab al-Faradis

Roman wall

House I

House II

Bab al-Sharqui

Bayt al-aqqad

Bait al-Nizam

Bab al-Kissan

Bab al-Saghir



# The baker's Transformation

„Take a square piece of pastry dough fold it over and stretch it so that it is only half as long but twice as wide. Then divide the rectangle in half and lay the right half over the left. Now begin again from the beginning. (..)

The pastry dough structure exhibits a number of surprising characteristics that are not immediately apparent.

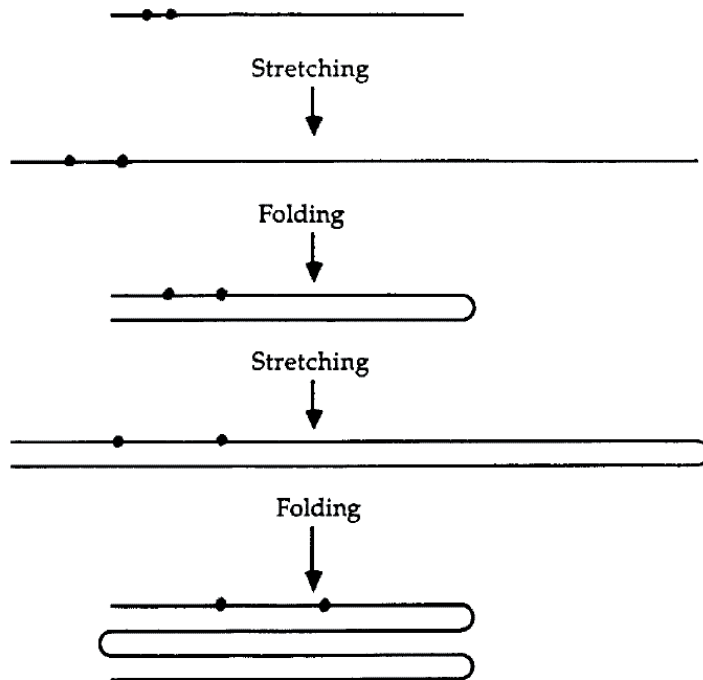
Perhaps it could also be used to explain the structure of historical time, it's layers and folds, it's irritating topology.

If one could imagine a structure of history besides the linear time of classical physics, it may be easier to grasp the leapfrogging of time. In our pastry dough, memory does not exist along a continuum; It is discrete. In the bakers transformation the dough dissolves in to an innumerable array of leaping points, which distance themselves from one another in unforeseeable ways, only to meet again, who knows how or when. In this way there is an inexhaustibly large number of contact between different layers of time. „

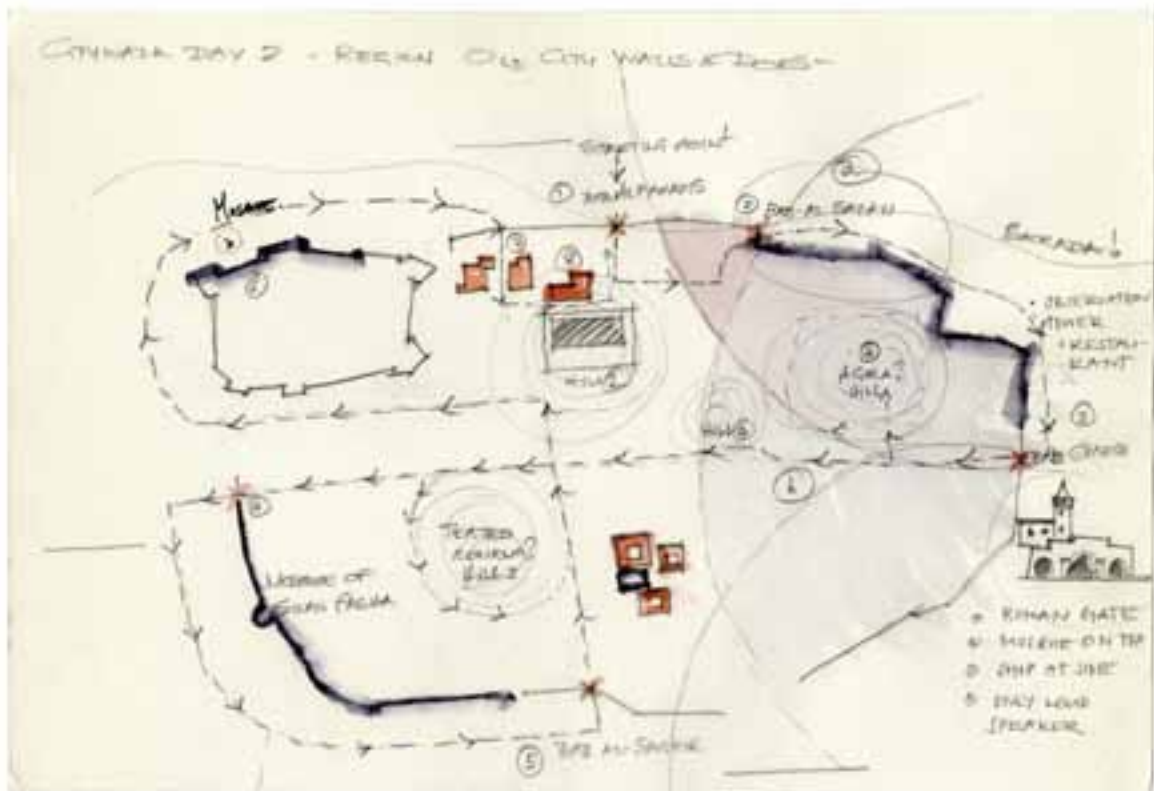
*Zig Zag the politics of culture and vice versa.*

Hans Magnus Enzensberger: A pastry dough of time. A meditation of anachronism.





[ 35 ]



perceptual drawing

gate & boundarie [ 37 ]





Suleyman soup kitchen

Bab al-Faradis

Roman wall

Bab al-Sharqui

Bab al-Saghir

Bab al-Kissan



[ 40 ]	Bab al-Sharqui
[ 44 ]	Roman wall
[ 46 ]	Al-Jasari mill
[ 48 ]	Bab al-Faradis
[ 48 ]	Bab al-Saghir
[ 50 ]	Bab al-Kissan

# Bab Al-Sharqui

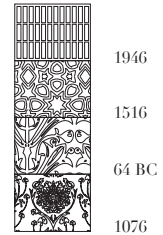
-eastern gate-

Variant Names Gate of the sun  
Aprox. age 2073 years  
Building Usage Gate, minarett

[ 44 ]  
link to page



Bab Sharqi lies on the eastern front of the Great Wall. It ends at Straight Street (Midhat Pasha) which links it to Bab al-Jabiyeh. It was constructed during the Roman Era and renovated during the reign of Nur al-Din al-Zinki in 1163 and again under Sultan Murad during the Ottoman Empire, sometime before 1582. Like other monumental roman gates, it has a large central arch for horse-drawn vehicles and two smaller arches on either side for pedestrians. There is a minaret above the northern arch, which was built at the time of Zinki. The Muslim leader Khaled Ibn al-Waleed entered Damascus through Bab Sharqi, during the Muslim invasion of the city, and Abdullah Bin Ali also marched through it when the Abbasid Dynasty came to Damascus.



^  
perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

architectural manifestation

usage

[ 40 ]

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

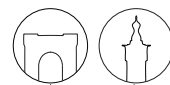
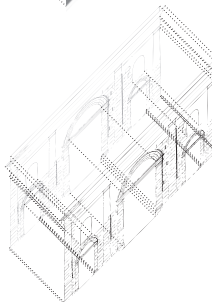
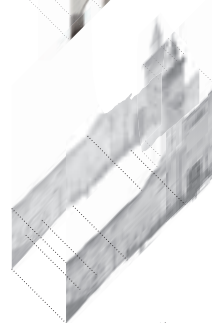
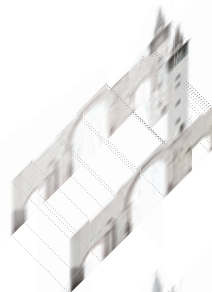
hellen 333 BC

*ideological superposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
reconstructed / rebuilt

*ideological superposition*  
renovated

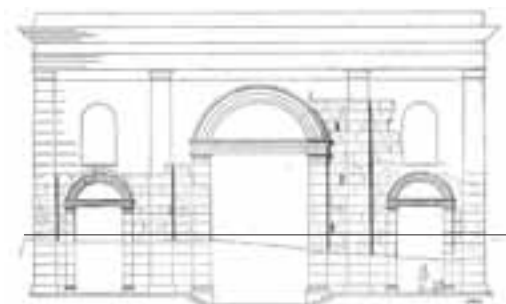
*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*ideological superposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
reformed & added

built



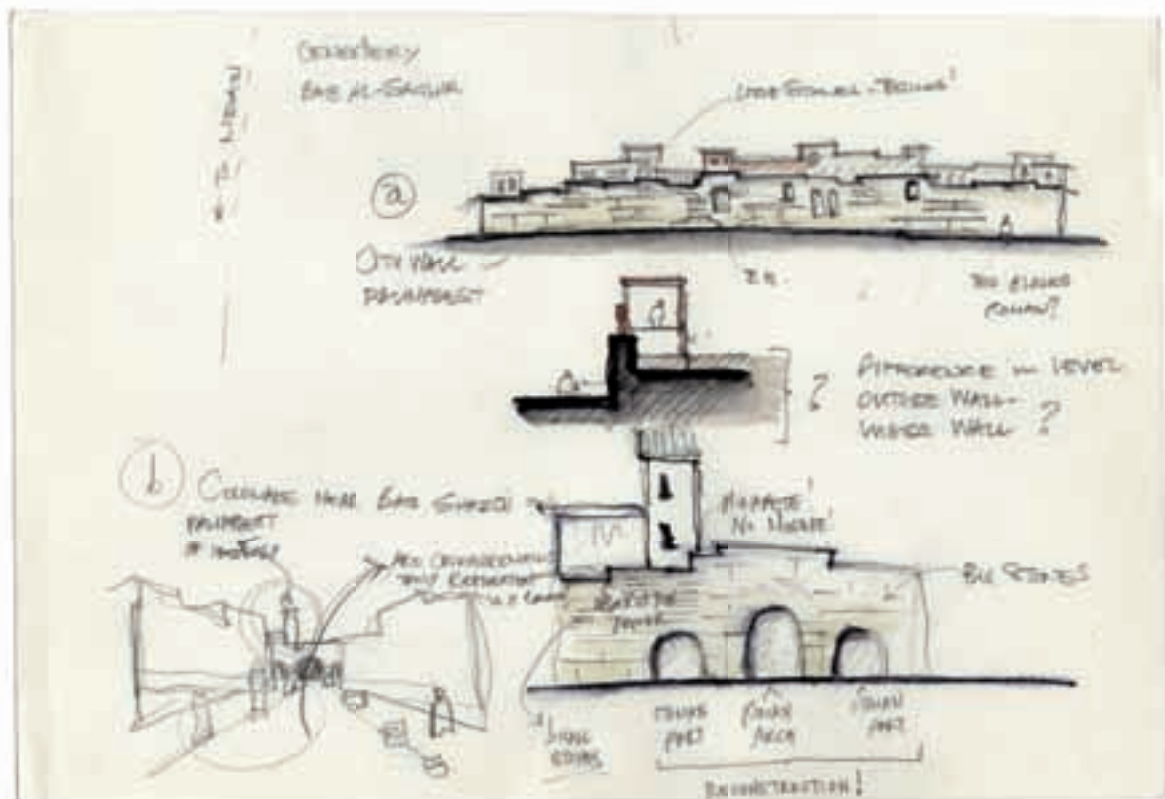


[ 41 ]



today's ground level

This picture made by Gertrude Bell shows a general view of the gateway in 1911. At that time, the standard Roman entrance with three doors and a central arch was closed. Only the eastern opening was used to enter the city. The Roman origin of the filling stones in the lower part of the central and western opening is suggested by the size and the way they have been cut. Possibly, they only reached the site after a disjunction from the city walls 1000 years later, and joint the original Roman stones.



perceptual drawing



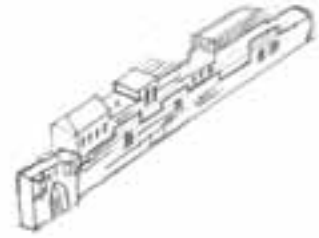
After a reconstruction-project at the end of the past century the triple entrance was restaured. The will of showing the Roman heritage is notorious. The small bricks form Seljuk time are been covered by new tiles which try to simulate to be Roman. At the end one can apreciate a morphological palimpsest going from the authentic roman blocks, through the Mamluk superposition of an observation tower and the Ottoman minarette.

# Roman Wall

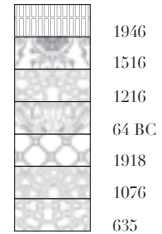
Location  
Aprox. age

Around old city  
2000 years

[ 42 ]  
link to page



The Wall of Damascus was built in the Roman Era with large, tapered stones. It was oblong in shape, designed in the manner of Roman military camps, cities, and fortifications. At the time of the Islamic conquest in 635 A.D. Damascus wall was still solid and impregnable, so the two Muslim leaders entered the city through Bab Sharqi and Bab al-Jabieh respectively. Thus Damascus wall was preserved throughout the Umayyads. But when the Abassids stormed Damascus, they destroyed large parts of the wall and it deteriorate over the years. But it was partly reinforced at the time of the Ayyubids, in order to withstand the attacks of the Crusaders. During Ottoman rule, however, it was neglected altogether, and some masonry was removed for use in other buildings; later on, numerous houses were built upon the greater expanse of it.



^  
perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

[ 44 ]

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*disjunction*  
*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
expanded

*disjunction*  
*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
expanded

*disjunction*  
*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
expanded

*disjunction*  
*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
built

*disjunction*  
*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
restored & expanded

preserved

built







[ 45 ]

The original rectangular Roman shape, began to morph in reaction to the growing density turning into the irregular oval one, that we know today.

# Al-Jazari mill

Variant Names      Salihiye-mill  
 Aprox. age          700 years  
 Building Usage      Watersupply mill, house

[ 142 ]  
 link to page



Al-Jazari a small mill on the edge to Salhiye, built in the 13th century to provide water for the close Mosque and the vecinity. After beeing used as a watersupply system it lost it's representative character and since then it is protected by some sort of refugee who care for the place and keep it maintained. It has never been exposed so this is maybe the reason why the medieval structure ist still visible although the whole surrounding has changed dramatically since then.



1216

^  
 perceptual

[ 46 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

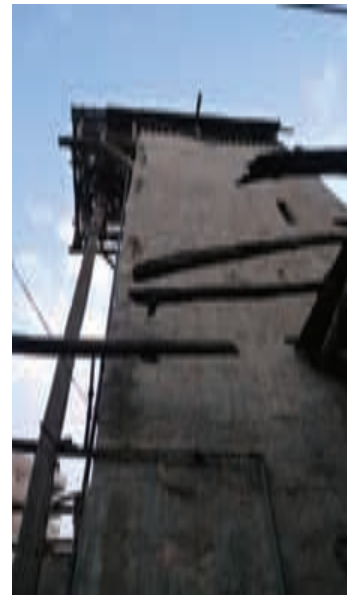
hellen 333 BC

*morphological continuity*  
*programatic rupture*  
 reformed

*morphological continuity*  
*programatic continuity*  
 used

*morphological continuity*  
*programatic continuity*  
 used

*morphological continuity*  
*programatic continuity*  
 built







[ 47 ]

The palimpsestic nature of this object does not depend on its taxonomy. But on the expression of continuity.  
The Tower colonizes Salihiyye with distracted sheds that pretend to be almost involuntary, elemental forms of vernacular naturalness that could almost be unnoticed, assuming a sublime anonymity.

# Bab Al-Faradis

-gate of paradise-

Variant Names Gate of Mercury, Bab Al-Almara  
 Aprox. Age 2000 years - actual 768 years  
 Building Usage Gate, billboard

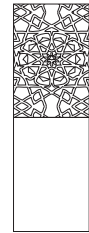
[130]  
 link to page



This gate is one of the northern gates and was named after the paradise in the Roman Age.

Bab al-Faradis was reformed by King Imadulldine Ismail in 1241 manifesting planet Mercury.

The other name , Bab Al-Amara, comes from the location in the Amara district, home of the Muslim scholars. The reason why the district is called Amara refers to a name of an important building where people used to pray in the 14th century.



1216

^  
 perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨



today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

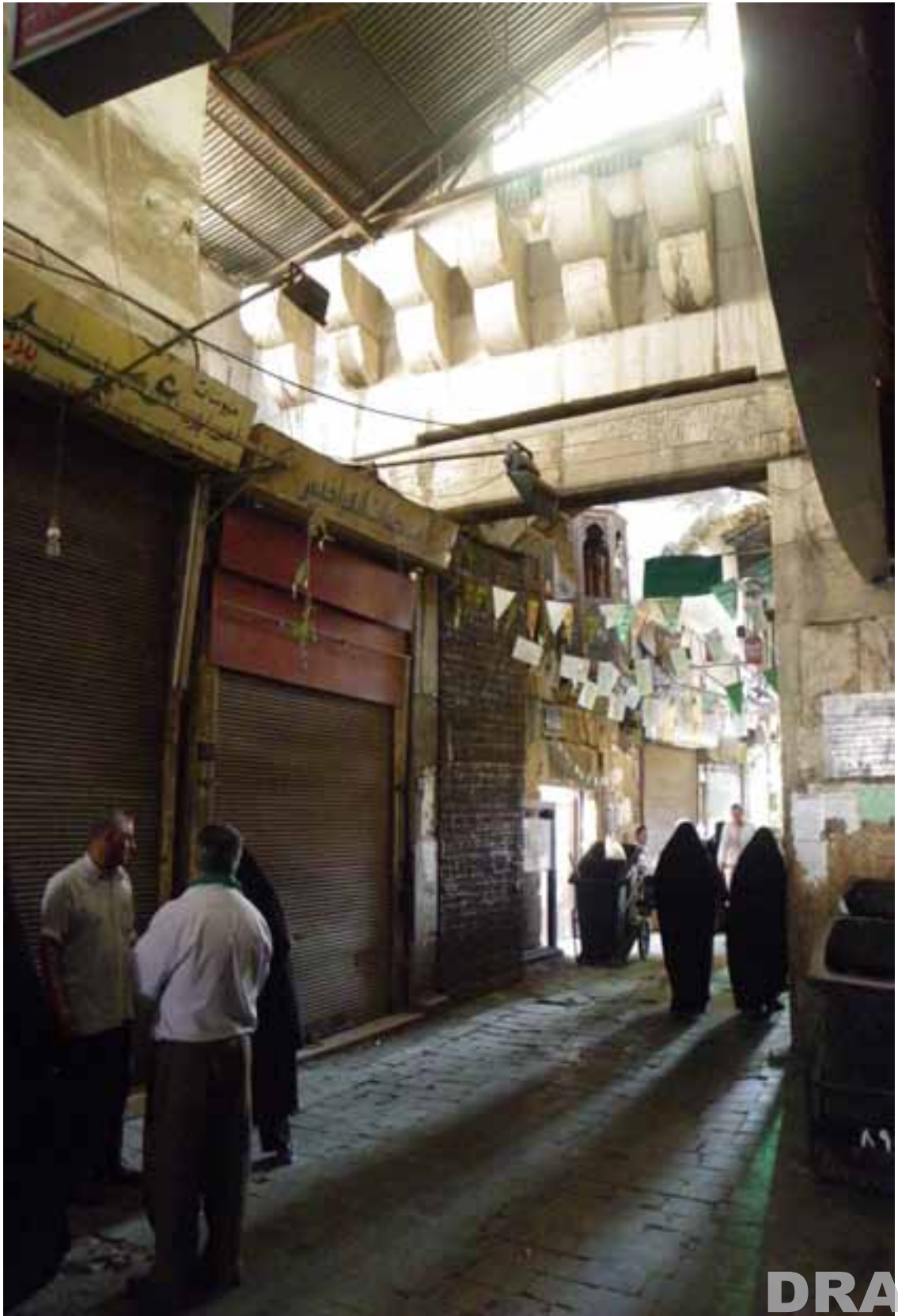
roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*ideologicalgical superposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
 reformed

*ideologicalgical superposition*  
 renamed

built



# Bab Al-Saghir

-small gate-

Variant Names	Gate of mars, al-Shaghour	[ 3 ] link to page
Aprox.age	2000 years	
Usage	Gate, mausoleum, minarett,	

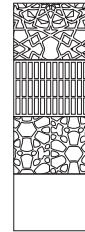


The gate is situated in the west of the city along the same line of the eastern gate, and they both have a similar design. It has this name because residents of the Jabiya vilage used to pass through this gate.

Bab al-Jabiyeh is the name the entire neighborhood of Damascus still carries. It is located west of the Great Wall and at the end of the Straight Street, facing Bab Sharqi, was erected in honor of planet Jupiter.

It was named Bab al-Jabiyeh because it led to the military camp that housed tax-collectors (Jabi in Arabic).

The gate was renovated first by Zinki in 1164, then by King Nasser Daoud. It is now enclosed by surrounding souks.



^  
perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
added

*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
reformed & added

*programmatic juxtaposition*  
*ideological superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
renamed & added

built





[ 51 ]

# Bab Al-Kissan

-gate of Kisan-

Variant Names      gate of Saturn  
Aprox. age          90 years  
Building Usage      gate and church

[ 70 ]  
link to page



The gate was built during the Roman era and was dedicated to Saturn. It was shut by Nur al-Din Zinki, then re-opened under the Mamluk Dynasty in 1363 and renamed after a slave from Byzantine times liberated by the Umayyad Caliph Muawiyya at this gate in 635.

Bab Kisan was renovated by the French in 1939 with the annex of a church. They renamed the gate after St. Peter, who arrived to Damascus fleeing from the Roman persecution. After the independence in 1948 the gate was renamed again to its former name from the Mamluk period Kissan.



^  
perceptual

[ 52 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*ideological superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
rebuilt

*rupture*  
demolished

*no*  
reopened

*ideological superposition*  
*rupture*  
demolished

*ideological superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
reformed & renamed

built > reformed





[ 53 ]

Perhaps one of the most notorious incidents of these centuries was the massacre of Christians in 1860, when fighting between Druze and Maronites in Mount Lebanon spilled over into the city. The whole of the eastern end of the city above Straight Street, 3000 or more houses, was comprehensively burnt out. The quarter was replanned retaining the few features that had survived such as the underground Chapel of Saint Ananias. Several thousand Christians were killed, with many more being saved through the intervention of the Algerian exile Abd al-Qadir and his soldiers, who brought them to safety in Abd al-Qadir's residence at the citadel. The Christian inhabitants of the notoriously refractory Midan district outside the walls (mostly Orthodox) were, however, protected by their Muslim neighbours.





# The gates of Damascus

Security has always preoccupied the Damascenes. Their narrow streets and alleys have been throughout history surrounded by high walls and gates, to protect them from invaders.

Men defended the city with arms, while women, children, and the elderly retreated behind the security of the high walls of Damascus.

The gates of Damascus are one of the treasures of Arabic and Islamic architecture.

Some were made out of wood, wrapped with zinc belts decorated with nails.

Others were simple; a high entrance with a smaller gate carved out of it.

The great wall of Damascus the first in human history was erected after a flood, and within it were all the gates of the Old City.

Invaders came through this great wall, and so did merchants, poets, philosophers, and leaders.

Each gate stands witness to centuries of history the creation of empires, and the collapse of others. Historians are in disagreement as to how many gates existed in Damascus.

Some put the number at eight equal to those of Heaven. Others say that they are seven, as many as the branches of the Barada River.

Qutayba al-Shihabi and Ahmad Ibish, two historians of the Syrian capital, authored a book called The Historical Monuments of Damascus outlining in detail, the history and location of the gates of Damascus, and put the number higher than either of the first estimates.

If one compares their list to the one printed on the maps of Damascus (currently on display at Ministry of Tourism billboards all over the city), and to the one remembered in oral history, he or she would find striking differences.

According to Shihabi and Ibish, the gates of Damascus once included: Bab al-Bared, the west gate of the Temple of Jupiter, located between the Hamidiyyah Market and the Miskiyya Square, which was brought down by the Ayyubi Dynasty; Bab Touma, at the eastern end of Damascus; Bab al-Jabiyeh; Bab al-Salam; Bab Sharqi, in east Damascus; Bab al-Saghir, in southwestern Damascus; Bab al-Faradis (now Bab al-Amara) between Bab al-Faraj and Bab al-Salam; Bab al-Faraj, in north Damascus; Bab Kisan; Bab al-Jaynak, between Bab Touma and Bab al-Salam; Bab Jeroun, east of the Umayyad Mosque; Bab al-Hadeed, the north gate of the Citadel of Damascus; Bab al-Sir, the secret gate of the Citadel; and Bab Srijeh, west of Bab al-Jabiyeh. While many of these gates have faded away into history, those that remain are:

**Bab Sharqi** This gate symbolizes the sun, and lies on the eastern front of the Great Wall. It ends at Straight Street (Midhat Pasha), which links it to Bab al-Jabiyeh.

It was constructed during the Roman Era and renovated during the reign of Nur al-Din al-Zinki in 1163 and again under Sultan Murad during the Ottoman Empire, sometime before 1582.

Like other monumental gates, it has a large central arch for horse-drawn vehicles and two smaller arches on either side for pedestrians.

There is a minaret above the northern arch, which was built at the time of Zinki.

The Muslim leader Khaled Ibn al-Waleed entered Damascus through Bab Sharqi, during the Muslim invasion of the city, and Abdullah Bin Ali also marched through it when the Abbasid Dynasty came to Damascus.

**Bab Touma** located on the northeastern front of the Great Wall, Bab Touma symbolizes planet Venus and was given its current name during Roman Era. The gate was built in 1228, during the Ayyubid period, by king Nasser Daoud.

Bab Touma has a market, with small shops that can be used for shelter and sealed off during invasions or any of the sieges of Damascus.

Originally a church stood there, which was transformed into a mosque during the Muslim era, then taken down under the French Mandate in the 20th century.

Amr Ibn al-Aas, one of the brilliant military commanders of the Muslim Empire, came through Bab Touma when entering Damascus.

**Bab al-Jaynak** This gate stands for the Moon, and very little information is known about it, apart from its one-time location between Bab al-Salam and Bab Touma. It also had a church that was transformed into a mosque, when the Muslims came to Damascus.

**Bab al-Salam** Standing east of Bab al-Faradis, this gate symbolizes Saturn, and was named Bab al-Salam (The Gate of Peace) because, according to the Muslim scholar Ibn Asakir, "it made (people) optimistic, since combat from this end of the city was not feasible, because of the numerous trees and rivers surrounding it." Under the Umayyad Dynasty, visitors of Damascus walked through Bab al-Salam to greet the Umayyad Caliphs.

There is disagreement on the origins of Bab al-Salam. Some credit the Romans with building it while others attribute it to Nur al-Din Zinki in 1164.

What is certain is that it was the second gate to be created for Damascus, after Bab Touma.

It is also one of the best preserved gates of Damascus.

**Bab al-Faradis** Some call it Bab al-Amara, because it is located in the posh Amara district of Old Damascus, home of the Muslim scholars of the Syrian capital.

It was originally called Bab al-Faradis (Paradise) because of all the orchards and gardens surrounding it.

Bab al-Faradis was created by King Imadulldine Ismail in 1241 manifesting planet Mercury.

**Bab al-Faraj** Located in east Damascus, next to the Citadel, leading to the Dahdah Cemetery, Bab al-Faraj was also created by Nur al-Din Zinki.

It was called Bab al-Faraj (Salvation) because it shortened the walking distance for entering or leaving Damascus.

The gate has two entrances and was renovated under Seifuddin Bin Abi Bakr Bin Ayyub.

**Bab al-Nasr** This is another one of the gates that no longer exists in Damascus, and was once located on the western front of the Great Wall, south of the Citadel.

It was created by Nur al-Din Zinki but demolished by Bab Touma the Ottoman Wali (governor) Mohammad Rushdi Pasha in 1863.

**Bab al-Jabiyeh** This gate is no longer there, but an entire neighborhood of Damascus still carries its name. It was located west of the Great Wall at the end of Straight Street, facing Bab Sharqi, erected in honor of planet Jupiter.

It was named Bab al-Jabiyeh because it led to the military camp that housed tax-collectors (Jabi in Arabic).

Another story says that it was called so because it led to the Jabiyeh village in the Golan.

The gate was renovated first by Zinki in 1164, then by King Nasser Daoud.

The Muslim leader Abu Ubayda Ibn al-Jarrah entered Damascus during the Muslim conquest, through Bab al-Jabiyeh.

**Bab al-Saghir** This gate represents planet Mars, and was called "saghir" (small) because it is the smallest of the entrances to Damascus.

It was made small on purpose, because the western front of the city unlike Bab al-Salam is small and not protected by trees and rivers.

Sometimes people refer to it as Bab al-Shaghour, and it was also renovated by Nur al-Din Zinki.

Yazid Bin Abi Sufiyan entered Damascus through Bab al-Saghir and so did the Mongol leader Tamurlane (who seized Damascus and set it ablaze) in 803.

**Bab Kisan** One of the doors that was shut by Nur al-Din Zinki, then re-opened under the Mameluke Dynasty in 1363, Bab Kisan was renovated by the French in the first half of the 20th century.

This is where they constructed a church named after St. Peter in 1939, on the same location in which he arrived, fleeing Roman persecution.

The name refers to a slave liberated by the Umayyad Caliph Muawiyya at this gate in 635.

These are the main gates of Damascus.

Over the many years, as empires changed in Damascus, so did the gates of the Old City.

Some survived and others disappeared.

New ones were created small gates at the entrance of specific neighborhoods like Bab Musalla, Bab Zoukak al-Borgol, and Bawabat al-Salliyyah.

This is Damascus, a city that can have any where from seven to fourteen gates, depending on who you ask, and 5,000 years of history held on the shoulders of the Damascenes.

Muhannad Shehadeh is a journalist based in Damascus.

fw-magazine July 2008 Art & Culture

## Own inscriptions

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Section of the ceiling in the guest Hall of Bait al Quwali, the badly damaged ceiling canvas from around 1840 are visible. Above there are elements from another ceiling that had survived since the mid-1700.

houses [ 57 ]



House I  
House II

Bayt al-aqqad  
Bayt al-Nizam

Hanania Orthodox Church

[ 60 ]	Bayt al- aqqad
[ 64 ]	Damascene house I
[ 66 ]	Damascene house II
[ 68 ]	Bait al Nizam
[ 70 ]	Hanania Orthodox Church

# Bayt al-‘Aqqad

Origin of name      Family name of former owner  
 Aprox. age        2000 years  
 Usage                Housing, intitution

[ 102 ]  
 link to page



The history of the building goes back more than 2000 years: Remains of the theatre of Herod the Great were found in the outer wall. Today the house forms a rectangle around the inner court with fountain and plants. The northern and southern buildings were built in the late 15th century and bear the impress of late Mamluk style and decoration, especially the large iwan and the beautiful summer qa'a (reception room) opposite. The house was also reformed during the Ottoman period and in the 1930's adapted to the new family structure connecting it with a neighbour courtyard.



^  
 perceptual

[ 60 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

architectural manifestation

usage

today

indep. 1946

house is reconstructed

mandate 1918

*morphological superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
 reformation

ottoman 1516

*morphological juxtaposition*  
 addition

mamluk 1216

*morphological juxtaposition*  
 house is built

seljuk 1076

*disjunction*  
 theatre is used as a quarry

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

Herod's theatre is built

hellen 333 BC





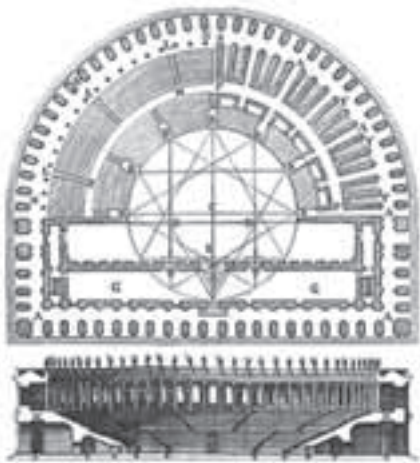
[ 61 ]



corresponding to the eastern side wall of the background over Roman Theatre stage, the southern part of the wall contains a small arch. The stones show incisions, clamp holes for beams indicating the existence of later annexes to the wall.



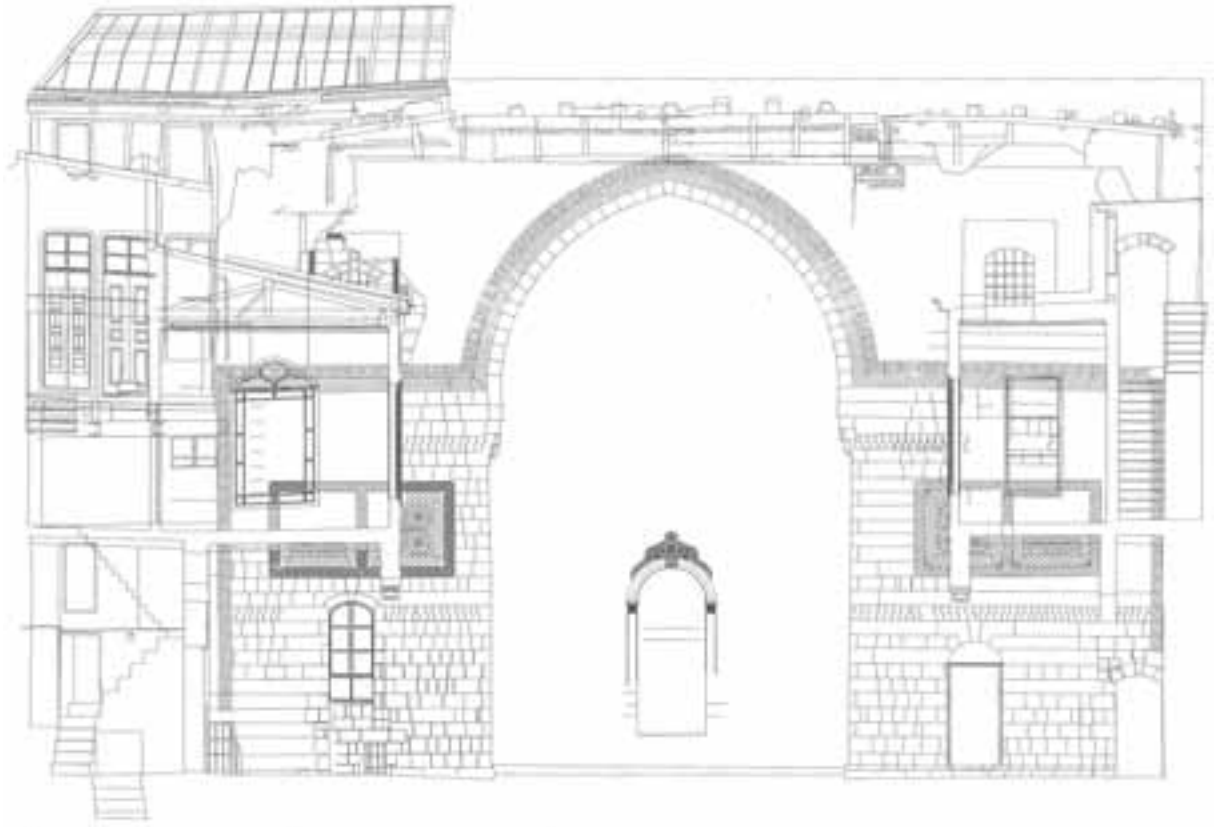
Through several centuries probably elapsed between the deconstruction and disjunction of Herod's theatre and the gradual creation of a complex on the 'Aqqad site. The actual 'Aqqad House would never have had the configuration we know today if the area had not previously been occupied by the theatre.



Vitruvius's drawing of a Roman theatre





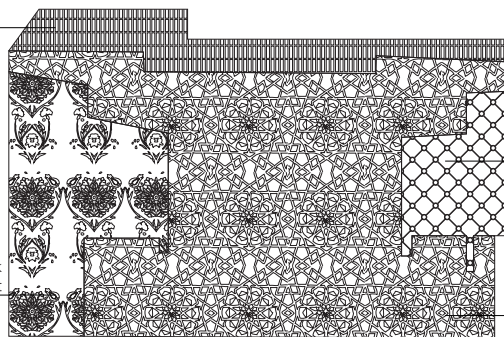


[ 63 ]

The elevation of the Mamluk iwan superposed by Ottoman features shows us how, since the beginnings, successive owners have added layer upon layer to the complex for more than two thousand years. As some things were added, however, others were lost.

roof reformed in the 1970's

Ottoman annex covering Mamluk  
ornamentic details of the backfront



annex from the 1920's

Mamluk backfront including iwan

# Damascene House I

-intra muros-

Location Intra muros  
Aprox. age 800 years  
Building Usage House, hotel

[142]  
link to page



The history of this courtyard house is not very well documented, nevertheless we know that it is built upon traces from the original wall of the Jupiter Temple. It is believed that the house is also part of a hammam, as no proper typology can be read.

Since the beginnings successive owners have added layer upon layer for more than 800 years as some things were added however others were lost.

The house was originally larger and has been divided by some point.

In recent years it has been restored and transformed into a hostel. During the restoration the question was what are the layers that should be seen and exposed.

As the owner says they tried to expose the poetry of either light, material and structure and treated every layer with its own allegation.



^  
perceptual

[ 64 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programmatic juxtaposition*  
restoration & conservation

used & reformed

used & reformed

*programmatic superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
house is built

*disjunction*

jupiter temple is built



Detail of a room with Ottoman features



[ 65 ]

# Damascene House II

-intra muros-

Location Intra muros  
Aprox. age 800 years  
Building Usage House, Institute

[132]  
link to page



The old Damascene house use to be the people's rest places, their aesthetical pleasures and their representative in the social life.

This example of a damascene courtyardhouse has been built under the Mamluk era and underwent a mayor transformation during the Ottomans. During this times it became a hammam.

Today it is going to be renovated with traditional technics and transformed into an institute with offices and lodgement for foreign archaeologists.



^  
perceptual

[ 66 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programmatic juxtaposition*  
restoration & conservation

used & reformed

*morphological juxtaposition*  
reformed  
*programmatic superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
built

*disjunction*

jupiter temple is built



traditional technic for bricks

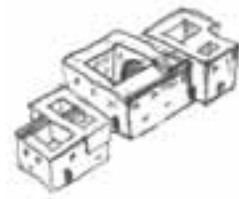


Technic from the Ottoman era

# Bait al Nizam

Location Intramuros  
Aprox. age 250 years  
Building usage Hotel\*

[ 82 ]  
link to page



One of the most gorgeous Damascene houses during the 18th and 19th centuries enclosing two interconnecting courtyards. Its earliest vestiges were found on a hall wall dating back to 1757. The house has three quarters of 35 rooms and halls, in addition to three enormous luxury lwans. 1800sqm in total.

Beit Nizam is currently an informal museum and occasional set for Syrian soaps and films, most of which tell dramatic tales of the past, often set during the tumultuous years of the French Mandate. With Bait Sibai and Quatly it is going to be part of a grand hotel complex.



^  
perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programmatic superposition*  
restoration & conservation

built







[ 69 ]

The ornamentic above the arch does not belong to only one period of history. A juxtaposition of elements from the Ottoman Rococo joining Mamluk geometric decoration is visible.



# Hanania Orthodox Church

-house of refugees-



The Apostle Hanania Church is the oldest church in Damascus. It was built in 1840 A.D. It is situated in Al- Qarshi Alley in the district of Al-Midan. During the Christians massacre of 1860 the members of this church were protected by their muslim neighbors. The wonderful icons combining Syrian and Byzantine arts are being protected by three refugee families that are living in the courtyard building.



[71]



## In Syria, delicate preservation work is pushing against profit-driven speed.

**D**amascus is rediscovering its architectural gems, but hasty restoration puts history at risk.

...But it is the city's more recent history that is reshaping contemporary Damascus. As Syria slowly opens its socialist economy to tourism and development, scores of traditional Arab houses from the 17th to 19th centuries have been restored and reopened as boutique hotels and restaurants in the capital's UNESCO-protected Old City.

Three late-Ottoman era houses south of Straight Street – Beit Nizam, Beit Sibai, and Beit Kuwali as well as an adjacent school – that were once the residences of Damascene notables and later, European consuls, are at the center of an increasingly frenetic pace of development often motivated more by profit than good preservation practice.

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), which promotes historic preservation and development projects throughout the Muslim world, has invested \$20 million to restore and reopen the three houses as a boutique hotel.

The scheme is far better funded and staffed than other restorations in the Old City, which – along with Aleppo – has the highest concentration of preserved, traditional Arab residential architecture in the Middle East. The AKDN aims to set standards in preservation practice, expand the shrinking number of traditionally skilled craftsmen and carpenters, and produce what it calls „a model for cultural and tourist development.“

„We think of the revitalization of cultural assets in order to use them as a catalyst for development,“ says Ali Esmail, CEO of Aga Khan Cultural Services in Syria.

„And we want others to copy what we are doing.“

Whether or not private investors will follow AKDN's model is another question. Investments have boomed in the Old City and throughout Damascus in the last decade. Yet many developers use cheap, damaging materials like concrete and cement plaster instead of traditional wood and mud brick in order to speed up conversion work and maximize returns.

Concrete and cement cannot breathe the way wood and mud brick do in the hot Syrian summer. Nor do they trap heat as effectively during damp winters.

Today, such commercial and inattentive restorations threaten the area's unique architectural heritage.

„We should keep considering Old Damascus as a living city,“ says Naim Zabida, „not as a place only for visitors.“ Mr. Zabida is a Syrian architect with the government's Municipal Administration Modernisation, a group funded by the European Union that oversees urban planning and preservation in the Old City.

Wealthy Damascenes first began abandoning their old courtyard houses in the mid-20th century in favor of Western style, open-plan apartments outside the walls of the Old City.

„Until very recently, little attention was paid [to] the usage of these houses,“ Mr. Esmail says. „Back in the 1980s and 1990s, a good number of these houses were used as warehouses after being deserted by their inhabitants because of the problematic issues of maintenance and the lengthy government approvals required for restorations.“

While Cairo's historic center has crumbled under the weight of population and pollution, Damascus faces a different set of preservation problems. Thousands of houses are still standing in an Old City relatively removed from the traffic and con-

gestion of modern Damascus. The issue is how to control ever-growing investments that see in the city's architecture and heritage only an opportunity for tourism and commerce.

„What is missing in these restorations are new ideas and innovation,“ says Daniela Gurlt, an architect and adviser at German Development Services, which cooperates with German Technical Advising and the Syrian government on rehabilitating the Old City. „As a business model, as long as tourists are paying to get into the Old City, fine.... But for the architecture I don't know how sustainable it is.“

Reuters recently quoted Syria's tourism minister saying that he expects the number of hotel beds to double to nearly 90,000 in the next three years. The number of hotels could grow from around 15 today to more than 50 in the half-square-mile Old City, according to an Associated Press report on the number of government-issued licenses. Restaurants could grow from a few dozen now to 120. We always wanted to keep Damascus a city of inhabitants, not a Disneyland city for visitors,“ says architect Zabida.

While the properties will reopen as a luxury hotel, many of the ornate first-floor rooms will remain open to the public as cafes, galleries, and „show-rooms,“ according to Aga Khan's Esmail. Beit Kuwali will not have guest rooms. A structural review determined it could not support them without major layout changes. This is a shift from other commercial and tourism conversions that quickly resize rooms and fit bathrooms into every available space, despite the burden on centuries-old wooden floors and foundations.

csmonitor August 2009 Arts & Culture

[ 73 ]

## Own inscriptions

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[ 74 ]



edifice [75]







[ 78 ]	Takiyya Sulaymaniyya
[ 82 ]	Al Qabbani School
[ 84 ]	Madrasa al-Zahiriyya
[ 86 ]	Hammam Nur al-Din
[ 88 ]	National Museum
[ 90 ]	Bimaristan of Nur al-Din
[ 92 ]	Azem Palace
[ 94 ]	Madrasa al-Adiliyya

# Takiyya Sulaymaniyya

Variant names Süleymaniye Külliyesi  
 Aprox. age 464 years  
 Building usage Suq, pathway

[ 70 ]  
 link to page

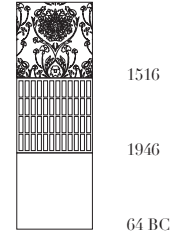


This major Takiyya complex located on the banks of the Barada River was built on the ruins of Qasr al-Ablaq by the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I in 1544.

The complex is composed of a large mosque on the southwest side of a courtyard and a soup kitchen across the courtyard, flanked by hospice buildings.

A separate madrasa was added 20 years later to the southeast of the Takiyya complex and is linked to the takiyya complex with a souk. The entire complex is aligned northeast-southwest, pointing towards qibla. The entire complex was restored in the 1960s and converted into a military museum.

Nowadays the museum doesn't exist anymore and there is a pathway that cuts through the complex.



perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

architectural manifestation

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

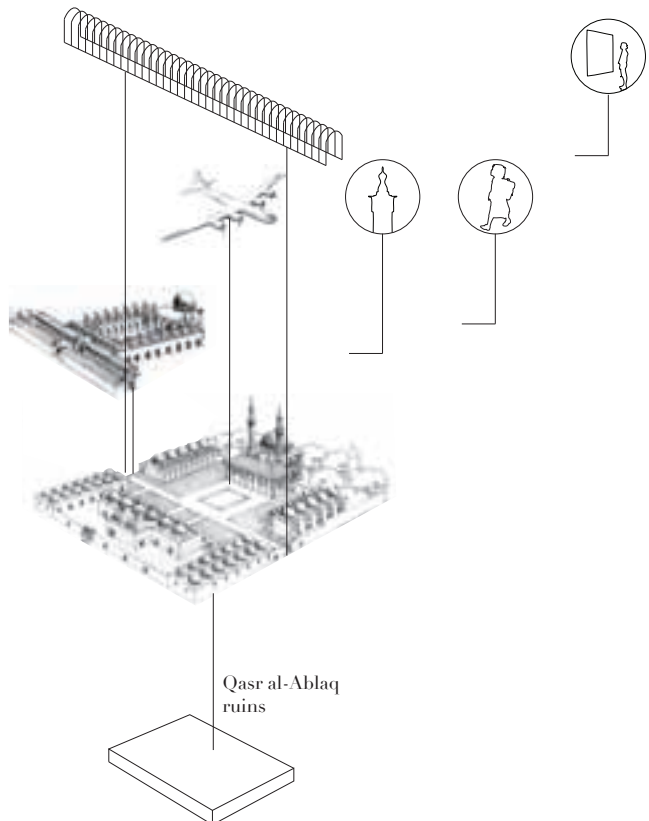
hellen 333 BC

museum is closed  
*programatical superposition*  
*ideological superposition*  
 renovated

*programatical juxtaposition*  
 added  
*morphological superposition*  
 built

built

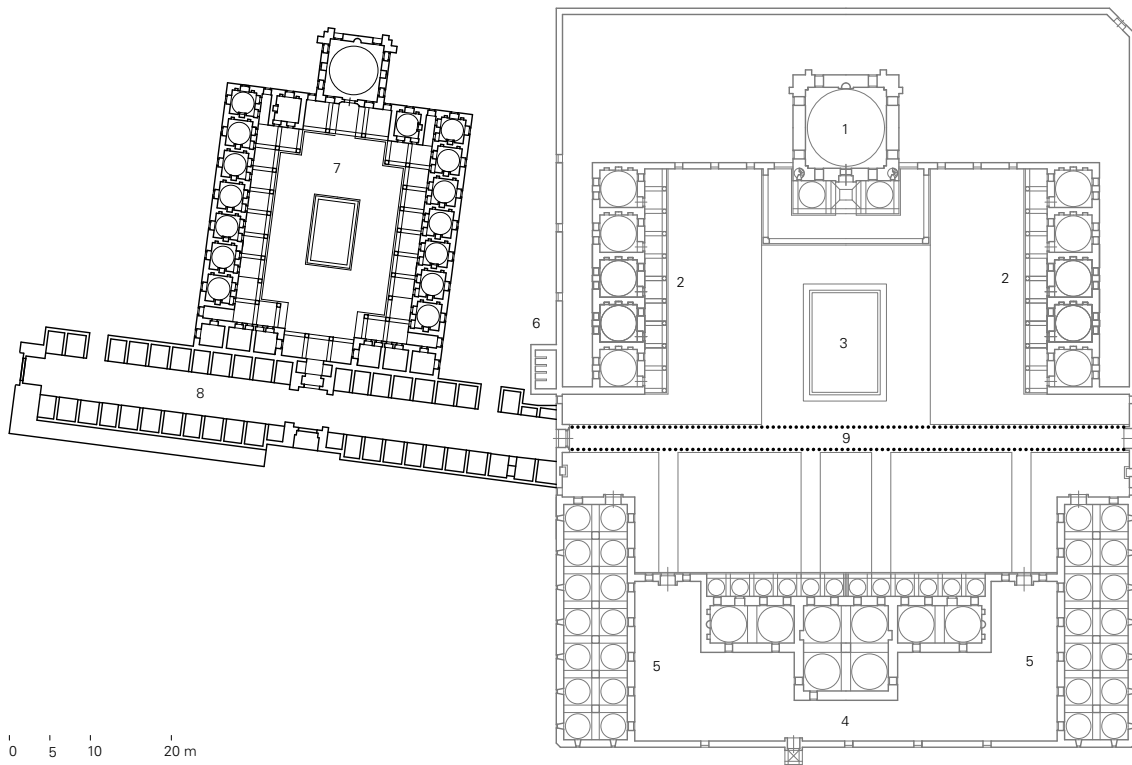
Qasr al-Ablaq  
 ruins





[ 79 ]

*La Takiyya, Jérusalem, vue depuis la Rampe d'entrée*



1 Mosque\*, 2 Guestroom\*, 3 Pool\*, 4 Hospice\*, 5 Caravanserai\*, 6 Latrines\*, 7 Madrasa\*, 8 Suq, 9 Pathway

From the history of the Sulaymaniyya emerges that the actual complex has been undergoing a dynamic process, where programmatic juxtapositions consistently occurred. Always keeping a stable religious ideology. Rather than just causing a programmatic change, the conversion into a military museum gave birth to a new ideology, which superpositioned the old one. The Sulaymaniyya was the appropriate site to expose the military force, as it is a place where collective memories for the damascenes are deeply localized. Although it is considered a programmatic superposition, since a new utilization excluded the old one, the complex constantly remained a public venue.



After the Museum had been closed, the complex turned into a pathway to access the existing Suq from the east.



# Al Qabbani School

-school typology from the 70ies-

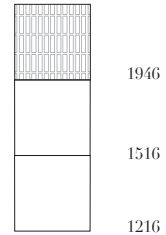
Aprox. age 30 years  
Building usage School, hotel

[ 68 ]  
link to page



This primary school has been built in the 1970ies according to a socialist school typology that you can find over the hole city. This building represents together with a second school in the former agora district a socialist enclave within the walled city.

The school is going to be demolished in order make space for a reconstruction of an Ottoman building that previously has been on this site. The new edifice will be part of a big hotel complex. The students of the school are going to be replaced to an other school in the sageer neighborhood in the outskirts of the muros.



^  
perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*morphological superposition*  
house rebuilt  
*rupture*  
school demolished  
*morphological superposition*  
school is built  
*rupture*  
demolished

house is built







# Madrasa al-Zahiriyya

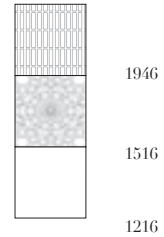
Variant names      Mausoleum of Baibars  
 Aprox. age        732 years  
 Building usage     Museum

[ 94 ]  
 link to page



Zahiriyya was originally a residential home that was transformed to a madrasa in 1277 after the death of Mamluk ruler Baybars sultan who is famous for the conquest of most of the Levant from the Crusaders. The king was buried in an elaborate mausoleum with a high dome in the southwest corner of the building.

The madrasa is richly decorated using various materials and techniques. The main entrance gate is semi-domed with stone muqarnas. In Ottoman times at the beginning of the 20th century it became and remained the only public library of Damascus. Actually Zahiriyya has been restored and is going to become a new museum complex together with the Madrasa al-Adiliyya.



^  
 perceptual

[ 84 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programatical superposition*  
 restoration & conservation

added

*programatical juxtaposition*

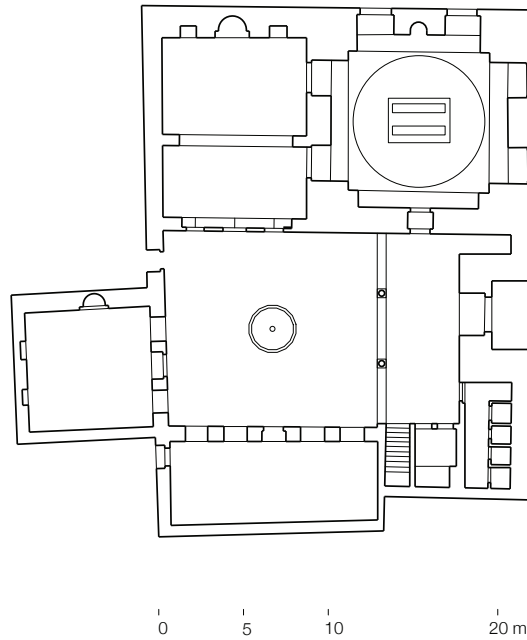
added

*programatical juxtaposition*

added

built



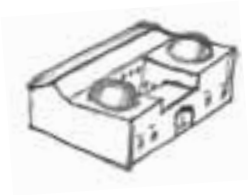


[ 85 ]

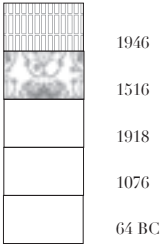
# Hammam Nur al-Din

Variant namesHammam Al-Buzuriya  
Aprox. age855 years  
Building usageHammam, restaurant

90  
link to page



The hammam of Nur al-Din was the first public bath and the oldest active example in Damascus. It is centered on a heated room- the tepidarium of the Roman thermals. It was founded between 1154 and 1172 AD by Nur al-Din in order to provide income for his madrasa. The domed chamber immediately at the entrance is unusually grand and dates back to the Ottoman period. For more than seven centuries, the structure was in use. Then at the beginning of this century, it fell into use as a warehouse and the interiors were extensively damaged. The domed and vaulted hammam, located in the souk el Buzuriyya within the old city of Damascus, was restored and renovated to accommodate a cafe and restaurant.



^  
perceptual

[ 86 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

v

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

programatical superposition  
restaured & reconstructed

programatical superposition  
damaged

morphological juxtaposition  
adapted

used

mosphological superposition  
built

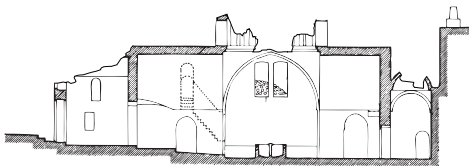
disjuncted

built

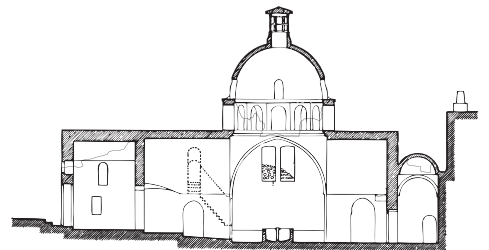




[ 87 ]



< before | after >



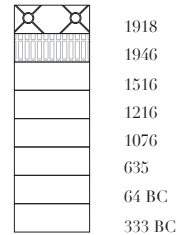
# National Museum

Aprox age 74 years  
Building usage Museum

[ 94 ]  
link to page



Founded in 1919, initially installed at the Madrasa al Adiliyya. The museum moved in 1935 to the current place where the great hypodrome from Medieval times used to be and became the central Museum of Syria. The hypogeum of Yarhay from Palmyra -108 A.D-, the Synagogue of Dura Europos -mid 3rd century A.D-, the façade of Qasr al-Hair al Gharbi -dated to 727 A.D-, one of the entries of Yalbugha Mosque and the Damascus reception hall of 1737 A.D had been reconstructed within the museum's complex.



^  
perceptual

[ 88 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*ideological superposition*  
museum is built

*disjuncted*

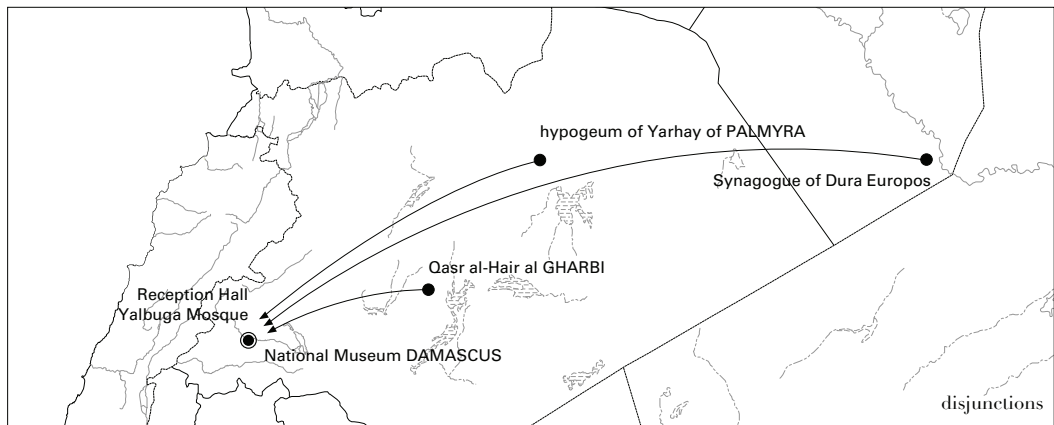
Reception Hall of Damascus is built

Yalbuga Mosque is built

Qasr al-Hair al Gharbi is built

*disjuncted*  
synagogue of Dura Europos is built

hypogeum of Yarhay is built in Palmyra



Façade from the desert palace „Qasr al -Hair al GHARBI“

# Bimaristan of Nur al-Din

Aprox. age 855 years  
Building usage museum

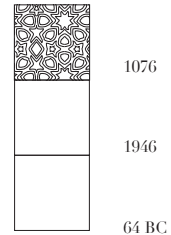
[ 86 ]  
link to page



The structure of Bimaristan al-Nuri, reveals Seljuk architectural designs in terms of its plan, form and ornamental elements. Following from the ancient tomb of Safwa al-Mulk, the hospital heralds the introduction in Damascus of the Iranian architectural tradition: in the center of each side of the courtyard stands a great iwan, with pointed vault towers above the side rooms that form the corner of the building. In fact stones from the outer enclosure of the Antique temple were reused in it, perhaps the rationale for the insertion of Antique spolia.

The bimaristan had two primary functions: first as a hospital providing treatment to patients and second as a medical school. The hospital was used until the beginning of the 20th century when it was replaced by the modern University Hospital.

In 1978 the bimaristan has been transformed into a museum for science and medicine.



^  
perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

∨

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programatical superposition*  
reformed

used

used

used

built  
*disjunction*  
temple is dissected

temple is built







The bimaristan of Nur al-Din was built in two phases: in 1154 the sultan Nur al-Din bin al-Zangi erected the main building; an extension was added in 1242 by doctor Badr al-Din. The extension allowed the hospital to serve a larger number of patients without compromising the building's original form. In 1978 the bimaristan has been transformed into a museum for science and medicine.

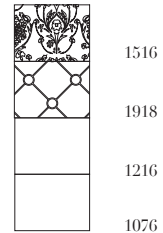
# Azem Palace

Aprox. age 260 years  
Building usage Museum, private residence

[124]  
link to page



The palace was extensively damaged in 1925 when French troops shelled the old quarter of the city during a Syrian uprising. At the time of the award the restoration of the complex (which in 1954 became a folk museum) had been ongoing for 34 years. The conservators relied on plans made by the French in the 1920s and on descriptions by members of the Azem family. The French Institute comissioned their resident architect to design new quarters within the palace to accomodate the Institute's staff. In 1936 only one new building was realized. The French government continued its proprietorship of the Azem Palace until 1946 when, with the independence of Syria the building was returned to the Syrian government. Upon restoration, the palace was converted into a museum of Folk Arts. The annex building now houses offices and workshops and a guesthouse.



^  
perceptual

[ 92 ]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*ideological superposition*  
*programatical superposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
*by implying disjunction*  
rebuilt

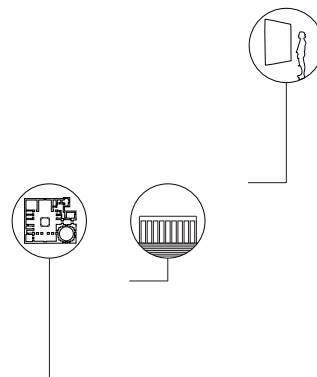
*ideological superposition*  
*programatical superposition*  
renovated and annex

*morphological superposition*  
built  
*disjunction*  
house is dissected

used

built  
*disjunction*  
temple is dissected

temple is built



Azem after the French troops attacked the Old city in 1925.



below:

Sketch of the juxtaposition with a pilot-style annex



[ 93 ]

*For the reconstruction the restaurators used materials from other buildings being demolished to make way for the modern roads being constructed. (MIDAN)*

# Madrasa al-Adiliyya

Aprox. age 794  
Building usage Museum

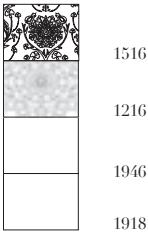
[ 88 ]

link to page



This madrasa is an important example of Ayyubid architecture in Syria. It was founded in 1215 by King Mohammed bin Ayub, who is buried in the tomb. The main parts of the building remained in good condition due to the continued attention the madrasa has received over the years. It was converted into the National Museum in 1919.

The general plan of the madrasa is organized around the central courtyard that distributes the various functions on its four sides. The southern courtyard façade precedes the prayer hall, while the northern side opens to a large iwan. The western side has been completely renewed in the last century but used host a series of residential cells. It includes the staircase that leads to the second storey of cells and smaller halls. The main entrance is located in the eastern façade and covered with a stone vault.



perceptual

historical

event & palimpsest

usage



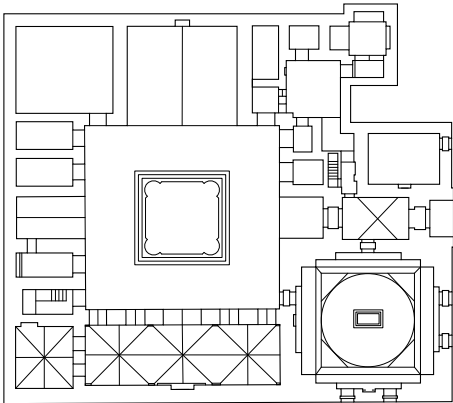
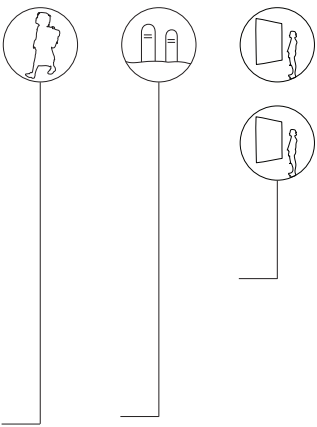
*programatical superposition*  
restoration & conservation

museum closed

*programatical superposition*  
reformed

*programatical juxtaposition*  
added

built





[ 95 ]





# A new master plan for Damascus?

**D**amascus is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, frequented by historians, geographers, travelers, architects, poets, diplomats, writers and tourists. They all returned home with favorable stories about Damascus.

The area of this long-lasting city was estimated to be 212 hectares in the early 16th century, with a population of 52,000. This rose to 313 hectares by the mid-19th century, and a population of 90,000. Damascus was divided into two parts: trade dominated neighbor-hoods, vibrant with business activity, and residential areas. In the first part, streets are wide, regular, and open to uninterrupted networks, all leading to the city's numerous entrances. These main streets lead to peripheral ones (quarters) then smaller ones (alleys). These alleys comprise the residential areas. Each has its own gate, and numerous shops to serve its residents.

The beginning of the city's massive expansion can be found in an early 20th century map, laid out by an Ottoman architect at the Damascus Police Department. The main administrative activity took place in the Marjeh Square, through which two electrical railways the Damascus Tram passed. Under the French Mandate, another map was drawn; a topographical lay-out covering the years 1921-1924. This period witnessed the improvement of road networks both within and around the city. In 1925, a new master plan was developed for Damascus by three Frenchmen; Viebert, Sauvaget, Ecohard, and a team of Syrian architects. It concentrated on modern urban planning. Later, Ecohard was asked to prepare a master plan for Dummer and Mezzeh, two relatively uninhabited districts in the vicinity of Damascus that today, have become part of the capital itself due to tremendous need for new residential areas. After World War II, Damascus witnessed an unprecedented urban and cultural renaissance. European style neighbor-hoods emerged. Bridges and public parks were constructed. These developments, however, were a double-edged sword. Although they brought modernity, they also stripped Damascus of its earlier identity. Experts at the time expected the city's population to reach 1.5 million by 2000. They were surprised by the massive migration to Damascus, which resulted in a current population of 18 million. This resulted in the mushrooming of random, wild, residential areas throughout the Syrian capital.

This was the rapid spread of brick-buildings in residential areas, with total disregard to the visual and psychological effect that they have on residents. Instead of the beautiful stone buildings bequeathed from one generation to the next, we were left with dull stone buildings that have very little if any art in them, copied from Soviet style apartments that were common during the Cold War.

The emergence of such residential areas contributed to the eradication of green space in Damascus. This resulted in increased emission of poisonous gas, more pollution, and higher temperature. With technological development came new devices, like satellite dishes and air conditioners, both of which contributed to an increasingly 'different' image of the capital of the Umayyads.

All of these changes coincided with a slow campaign by the City's Municipality to expand its road system to accommodate the increasing number of auto-mobiles commuting all over Damascus. This sluggish expansion did not meet the rapid influx of cars, creating an auditory and air pollution problem for the residents of the Syrian capital. Commercial shops were also randomly distributed around the city, due to lack of alternative locations. This caused the price of real estate to skyrocket at a rate that few people could afford to pay. Owning a house became increasingly difficult and available space was now taken by shops and business establishments. Today, almost every building in-side the city has a clinic, an office, or a shop within it. This further distorted identity and privacy and led to an increased number of social problems.

The way forward Given all of the above, Damascus needs a lot of effort to solve these numerous problems, especially as it prepares to celebrate itself as the capital of Arab culture for 2008. One method has been the government's encouragement of investment, aimed at saving and re-storing the Old City. From an architectural perspective, one of the envisaged ideas is to establish a new modern commercial, touristic, and residential City Center, based on international standards. It would pay particular attention to the factors that have contributed to the city's prosperity over the ages, separating economic districts from residential ones. The proposed land is the southern entrance of the city of Damascus.

This area is approximately 800,000 SQM. The constructed area within it is currently 550,000 SQM, whereas the territory occupied by shops amounts to 200,000 SQM. The residential area is 125,000 SQM. Green space is almost non-existent, and accounts for only 5% of the total area.

The proposed project foresees a 40% increase in green space for Damascus, more investment, and an expanded residential era build on healthy habitation standards. It envisions the construction of more schools, universities, 5-star hotels, shopping malls, cinemas, theatres, and office buildings to meet market demands. The plan aims at making use of existing places, like the Tishreen Sports Complex and hospitals, and benefiting from easy access to the Jordanian and Lebanese borders, along with Damascus International Airport. This area after all is adjacent to the southern periphery highway, known as Hafez al-Assad Boulevard.

The project also foresees a complete cancellation of bus routes in the area and the removal of the Baramkeh bus hub. This hub shall be relocated to the outskirts of the city thereby lessening noise and pollution. Moreover, the project fore-sees the construction of parking lots to solve the city's parking and congestion problems.

Commercial centers must be of inter-national standards. All other shops that are currently in the area which deal with car parts, care accessories, pumps, building materials, as well as car maintenance and repair garages, must be relocated into the industrial zones. They must be replaced with appropriate boutiques selling clothes, fashion, jewelry, watches and shoes, in addition to chain supermarkets.

Office buildings will reduce the burden on Damascus, since they will serve as clinics, law firms, engineering offices, trade companies, and banking centers. The project will also promote tourism since the area is close to Old City, the National Museum and the Takiya Sulaimanieh Bazaar. Finally, the proposed project shall invite creative minds and qualified people to contribute to its development, which will help reduce unemployment. It shall provide economic returns to the state, investors, and a segment of the population. It shall also be part of the services infrastructure necessary to make Syria one of the top tourist destinations in the world.

fw magazine August 2009 Arts & Culture

[ 97 ]



## Own inscriptions

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The world is nothing but an eternal seesaw. Everything in it seesaws incessantly. I am not describing an essence but a transition, an account of various and changeable chance occurrences, of undefined and even, as it happens, contradictory ideas. Not only does the wind of chance bluster me about, but I, in my turn, move and change direction. And anyone who pays close attention to his point of departure will note that he does not arrive at the same location twice.

Michel de Montaigne

block

[ 99 ]



Merjeh square

Yalbugha mosque

Citadel

Roman Theatre

- [102] Roman Theatre
- [106] Citadel
- [108] Yalbugha mosque
- [110] merjeh square

# Roman Theatre

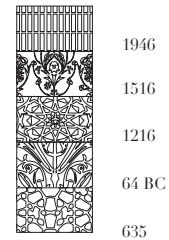
-Block-

Origin of name      Herod's Theatre  
 Aprox. age        2000 years  
 Usage                Housing, shops, institutions

[ 60 ]  
 link to page



The theatre located south of the via recta in the Tell Samak area and built under the reign of Herod the Great (Watzinger-Wulzinger 1921), raises questions about the significance of the city of Damascus during that time. The sanctuary of jupiter and the theatre were erected simultaneously, both buildings were closely linked with one another in their function.



^  
 perceptual

[102]

historical

event & palimpsest

architectural manifestation

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programatical juxtaposition*  
 addition...  
*morphological superposition*  
 demolished...  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
 addition...

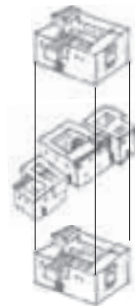
*programatical juxtaposition*  
 reformed...  
*morphological superposition*  
 addition...  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
 first houses are built

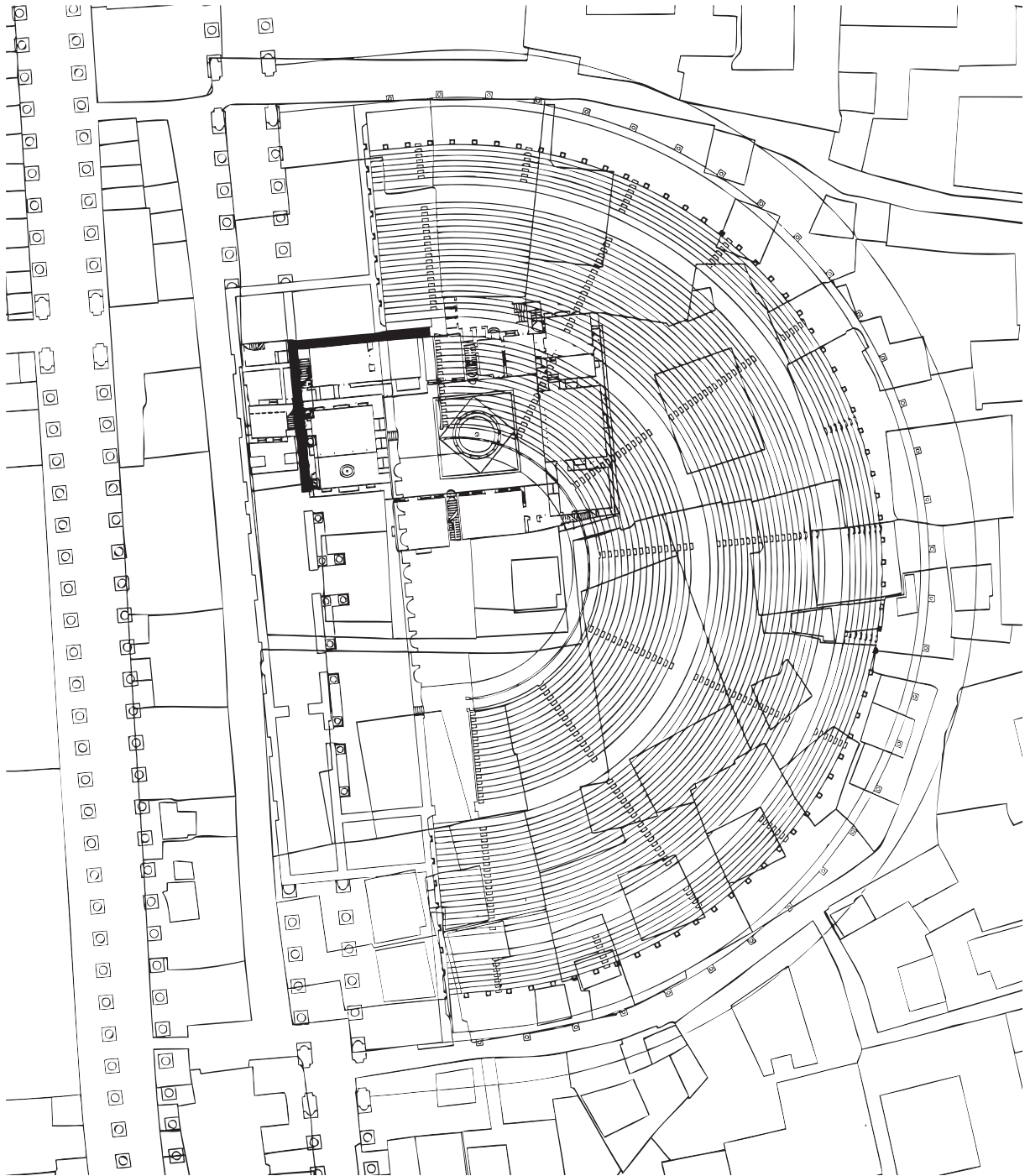
*disjunction*  
 used as a quarry

*programatical superposition*  
 storage

theatre is abandoned

Herod's theatre is built



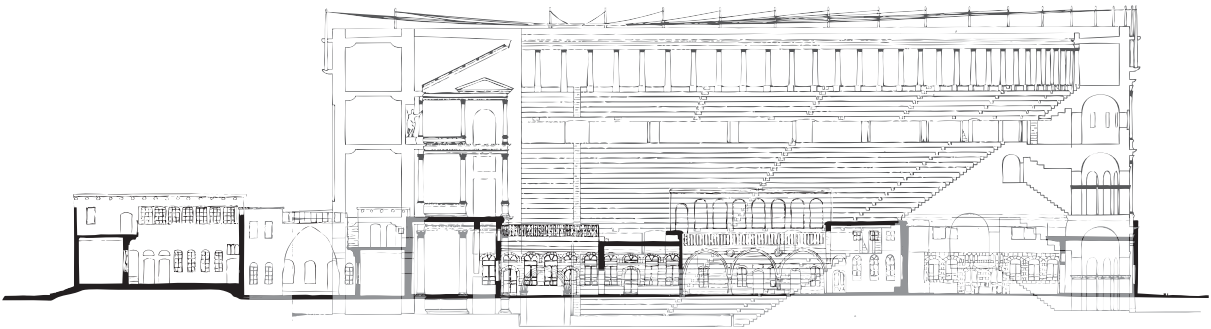


Herod's theatre complex and its immediate vicinity underwent gradual and continual change. The reason the theatre in Damascus disappeared was more pragmatic than ideological. The need for material and space in the dense walled city were probably the reason. The crucial factor in this development was securely the prohibition issued by the Byzantine emperor Justinian in 529 against the performances for which the theatres had previously been used. At that time, such performances had taken place for more than 500 years gradually stopped, leaving the building complexes abandoned and unused. The theatre in Damascus stopped been used maybe in the 6th century and was quickly employed as a sort of storage or warehouse, before it's process of disjunction started.





[104]







# Citadel

-city within city-

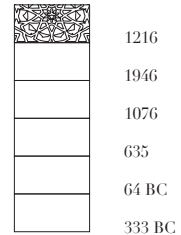
Aprox. age 2100 - actual one 807 years  
Building usage No use

[108]

link to page



The Citadel served as the city's defense against countless invasions for over a millennium. The present structure does date from the late Middle Ages. Some historians claim a castrum was in existence at the site during the Roman era, from about 64 B.C. Another early citadel, for which there is clear archeological evidence, dates from A.D. 749, constructed by Hussein Romaine. The next citadel was built by the Seljuks in 1078 A.D. with masonry taken from the city wall, and turned into a heavily-fortified citadel surrounded by walls, towers, a moat and trenches. Inside, they built houses, baths, mosques, and schools; Damascus citadel was a city within a city. At the height of Crusader raids and attacks, it was used as residence for the sultans of Egypt and Syria such as Nureddin, Saladin, and al-Malek al-Adel, whence they supervised military operations against the Crusaders.



^  
perceptual

[106]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*ideological superposition*  
*programatical superposition*  
museum

restored

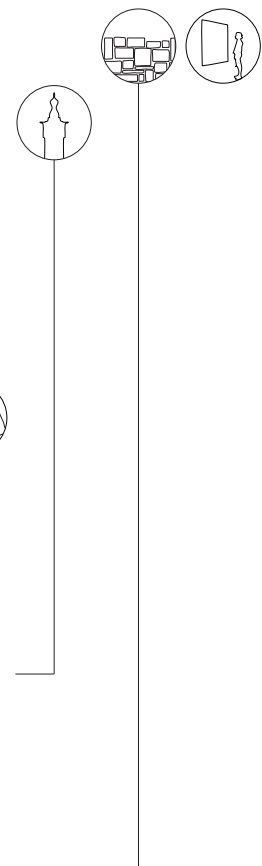
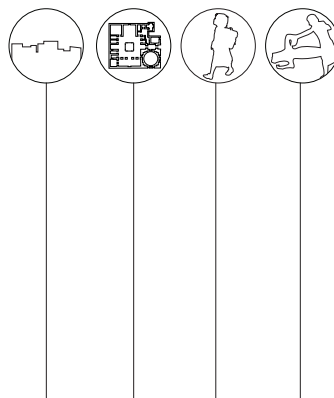
neglected  
*morphological superposition*  
*by implying disjunction*  
demolished & rebuilt

*morphological\**  
*by implying disjunction*  
reformed

*morphological\**  
reformed and annex

*ideological superposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
claustrum is built

fortification is built



But al-Malek al-Adel soon found that it was no longer adequate for defense against contemporary weapons, so he decided in 1218 to demolish and re-build it. The outcome was an impressive modern citadel, incorporating the latest inventions in the martial arts. It has imposing walls and a dozen colossal turrets surrounding it; there were three-hundred arrow slits and enormous parapets all round. In the mid-thirteenth century, however, it was the principal target for Tatar and Mongol attacks, and was later neglected by the Ottomans. The moats and trenches around it were filled up, and the souqs of Hamidiyeh, Asrounieh, and al-Khuja were built thereon. Recently, the latter was demolished, and the western walls of the fortress came into full view. Extensive repair and restoration work is underway at the moment; when completed Damascus citadel will become the new war museum...



[107]

# Yalbugha mosque

-Marjeh square-

Variant names Marquez Basel al-Asad  
Aprox. age 744 year  
Building usage No-use

[ 88 ]  
link to page



The Yalbogha Mosque was built in 1264 by Mamluk princes on Al-Marjeh Square. It was restored in 1401 by Yalbogha the Governor of Damascus and named after him.

Under Ibrahim Basa in 1832 the the Mamluk mosque was converted into a bisquit factory.

However, it was taken down in 1975 and replaced by an unfinished urban redevelopment structure, slated to become a shopping center with a large mosque attached unfinished to this day due to uneven settlement of the structure. Remains of the Mamluk mosque are now exhibited in the National Museum.



^  
perceptual

[108]

historical

event & palimpsest

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

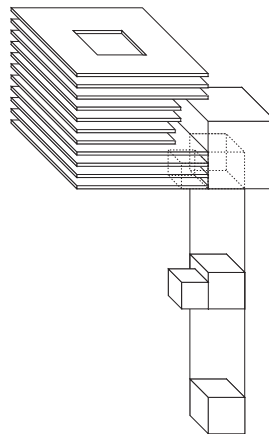
roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*morphological superposition*  
*programatical superposition*  
destroyed, built new

*ideological juxtaposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
bisquit factory is added

restored  
mosque is built





# Merjeh square

-Yalbogha Mosque-

By the end of the 19th century the Ottomans transformed the square into an administrative center as the hub of Damascus. It was a cultural magnet with a small park; where the city's best hotels were, and a terminal for trams. Damascus was the first city in the Ottoman empire to possess electric trams, with six lines covering, and the power supplied by a waterfall on the Varada River.

With the beginning of the new century the trams are gone. Al- Merjeh is now a traffic island with a tin patch of grass at the center. The whole area is dominated by the huge concrete construction. The square is now officially known as the Martyr's Square. The martyrs referred to the victims of the French bombardments in 1925.

As the focus of the city has shifted north and west, Al- Merjeh has been left behind, and the area has slid downmarket. Although the surrounding streets remain busy, the trade is in cheap eateries, pastry shops and low-budget hotels.



Merjeh square around 1910



- 1965 Syrian Ministry of Endowments solicits designs for *luxury hotel with mosque*, to be built at Martyr's Square in Damascus.
- 1966 Design selected from among numerous submissions. Winning plan calls for two hotels, offices, shops. Groundbreaking delayed due to trouble with financing.
- 1967 Proposal for project changes to include new mosque. Permission granted to *demolish Mamluk mosque presently on site*. Second competition held for new designs. Original winner wins again.
- 1970 Disputes over revised design. Ministry of Endowments in court with Committee to Preserve the Old City. Construction delayed.
- 1971 Minister of Endowments is replaced. New minister disapproves of proximity of mosque to hotel, cancels project. *Winning architects removed* from project. Plans are changed. Lebanese firm brought in to oversee the construction. Construction does not begin.
- 1974 *Mamluk mosque demolished.*
- 1975 Construction delayed. Redesign process continues. Hospital? Parking garage?
- 1980 Suggestion floated that the French underwrite construction. Ministry rejects, suspicious of French intentions. Plans changed to office building, possibly for government offices. No one sure just what plan is.
- 1982 Construction officially begins. More delays.
- 1987 Construction seems to resume. Is the building getting bigger? What is going on? When will it be done?
- 1989 *Building sits.*
- 1995 Official *declaration to name building after Basel al-Asad*. Plans for site to include equestrian ring along with hotel, shops, and mosque? None made publicly available. Someone remarks:
- "We don't like it as it is, but we don't know what we want it to be."*
- 1997 No activity at site. Boarded up at street level. But sand keeps getting moved, concrete mixed, stories added. One day there are 14 floors when the day before there had only been 13. Fourteen. A fact that simply wins acceptance: This is how it has always been – when were there ever only 13 floors? You don't know what you are talking about. You are seeing things.
- 2000
- 2001 Rumor that *building has started to sink into ground*. Argument: Sink? Never! You are out of your mind. Yes, an underground river is swallowing the whole thing up. No, hadn't this river been pumped away, diverted, taken care of? Yes, but it has come back, it has found its way back, and it is sucking the building down into the earth. Nonsense, this ton of bricks is not going anywhere. Oh yes it is, the earth is swallowing it. Send for reinforcements! Wrong! It will keep rising up, to the sky. It is not sinking, it is floating! No, my friend, you have an ass where your mouth should be. Inch by inch, it will disappear. Some day the whole thing will just be gone.
- 1984
- 1989
- 1997
- 1997
- 2003
- 2005 Quiet debate about what could replace the Marquez if it sinks, falls, implodes, or is destroyed: New headquarters for the UN. Housing for Iraqi refugees. The Israeli Consulate. The Lebanese Consulate. A 9/11 Memorial. Starbucks. Nothing. Theories climb into the thousands. Counting is exhausting, exhausting on top of believing every one of them. Most believable?: Only the mosque will remain, as if the site were returning to its past glory, when it was a beautiful Mamluk mosque, out in the open, unencumbered with commerce, not a hotel in sight, no prostitutes. . . and there will only be pilgrims, thousands upon thousands of the faithful passing in and out of the square. . . and it is the weight of their bodies on the earth that will keep this building from ever rising back up, will keep it from even being remembered. . .
- 2003
- 2005
- 2006 Debate subsides; Asad government places banner atop structure, facing Martyr's Square: "Syria is breathing patriotism." The whole thing seems solid enough.
- 2009 *Building still sits...*



## Own inscriptions

---

[112]

## neighborship

[113]



Several thousand Christians were killed in 1860 during the Christian Massacre, with many more being saved through the intervention of the Algerian exile Abd al-Qadir and his soldiers, who brought them to safety in Abd al-Qadir's residence at the citadel. The Christian inhabitants of the notoriously refractory Midan district outside the walls (mostly Orthodox) were protected by their Muslim neighbours.



Shifting agriculture

Straight street

Al-Midan

- [116] Al-Midan
- [120] Shifting agriculture
- [122] Straight street
- [124] Ecochard plan

# Al-Midan

-Al corashi lane-

Variant names      mīdān=maidān=place  
 Aprox. age          1500 years  
 Usage                Housing, commerce

[ 70 ]  
 link to page



A close relationship can be seen between Midan's historical development and the origin of the city.

Ever since Roman times, one of the most significant connection roads left the city passing by the Midan. In Ottoman times, a particular religious meaning was given to that connection with the south. In fact, sources show that from the 18th century onwards the Governor from Damascus was the leader of the annual pilgrim caravans that used this road to travel from Damascus to Mecca. Additionally, the high number of tombs demonstrates that Damascus has been considered a holy city and an important station for the pilgrimages already before the Ottoman conquest.



1946

1918

1516

^  
 perceptual

[116]

historical

event & palimpsest

architectural manifestation

usage

today

indep. 1946

mandate 1918

ottoman 1516

mamluk 1216

seljuk 1076

ummayyad 635

roman 64 BC

hellen 333 BC

*programatical superposition*  
*ideological superposition*  
*morphological superposition*  
 bridge is built

*programatical juxtaposition*  
*morphological juxtaposition*  
 settled

*ideological juxtaposition*  
 pilgrimage route

bread road is built

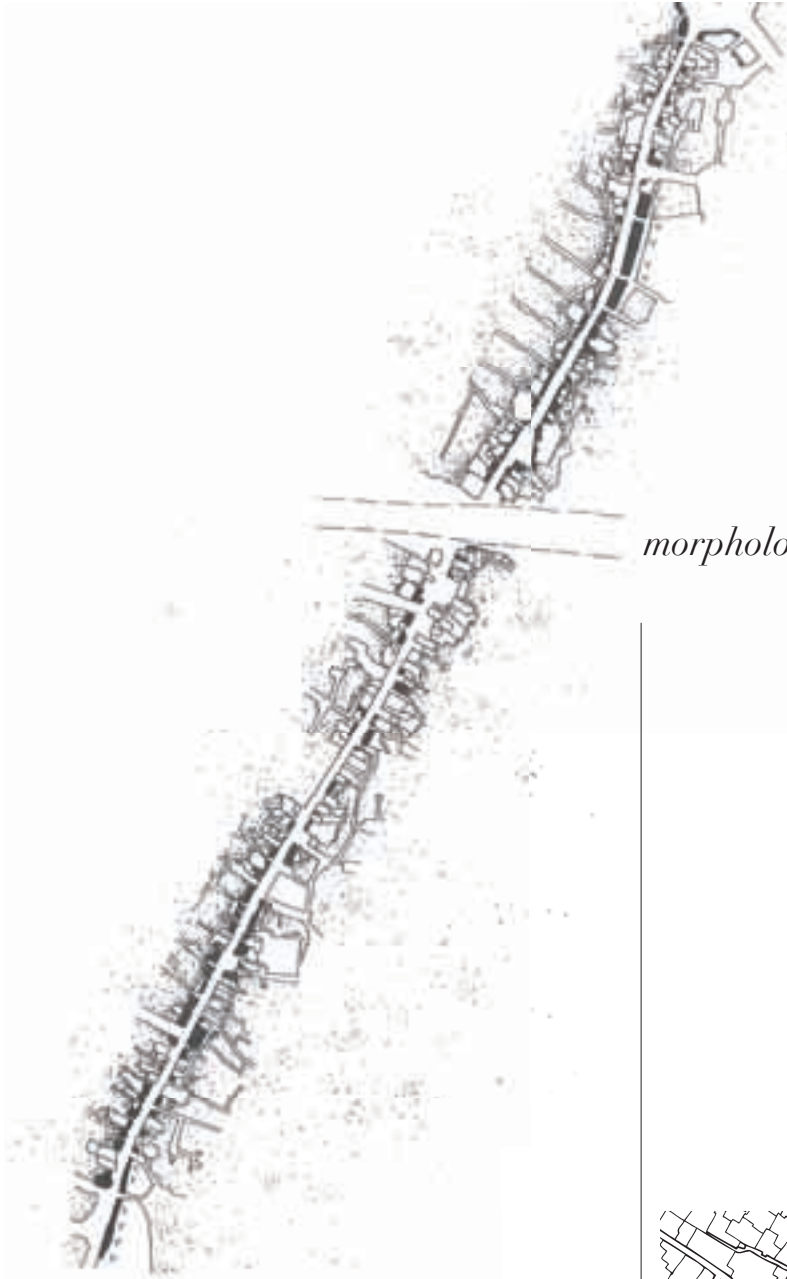


*ideological superposition*



[ ]



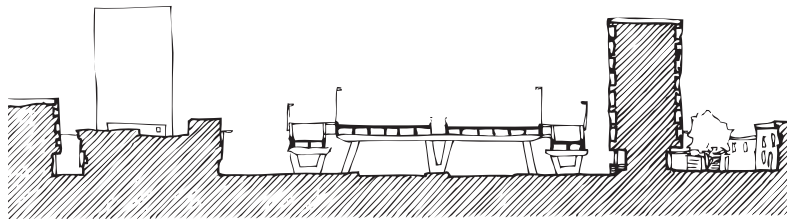


*morphological superposition*









[118]

The structure of Midan urban district has some similarities with the structure of the historical center. Almost all buildings are two-storey high, and the houses have a courtyard-typology. In spite of its long tradition as a holy place, in the 1960's it experienced the greatest aggression of its history. In fact, the master plan for Damascus done by Danger and Ecochar aimed at producing a contemporary modern city, included a highway that went through Midan's urban fabric. Consequently, the mobility is a primordial theme of the new ideology in order to establish Damascus as a modern capital of the 20th. century. After the highway had been built a new living typology of high-rise development quickly replaced the original typology. As a result, the courtyard that was thought as a withdrawn open space suddenly became very visible. Not only is the immediate section affected by this type of intervention, but also the entire area around it. This is an architectural, urban and social problem. Inhabitants felt observed while at home, and rejecting this forced change of habit, they leave their houses. As a result poor people came to Midan and are even stronger affected by this situation. Since the new inhabitants don't have the possibility to restore their houses the traditional urban fabric is deteriorating.



[119]

bottom|<sup>^</sup>top  
v



**DRAFT**  
© ETH Studio Basel

# Shifting agriculture

-bab el srije-

Bab el Srije in a buffer zone just outside the Old city where spontaneous growth of an urban tissue is eating up the puzzle-esque agricultural fields with the beginning of the French Mandate.

Before that there was a palimpsestical phenomenon within the sedimentation of different layers of agricultural cultivation.

\*

Agrarian fields in terms of their productivity need to change their type of cultivation every other year, so that eggplants follow kohlrabi and again tomatoes grow after chickpeas.

[120]



Bab el Srije today



[121]

Spontaneous urban growth in Bab el Srije around 1910

# Straight Street

-the dilemma-

[122]

Under the Greeks, the Old city of Damascus was conceived after the grid pattern designed by Hippodamus.

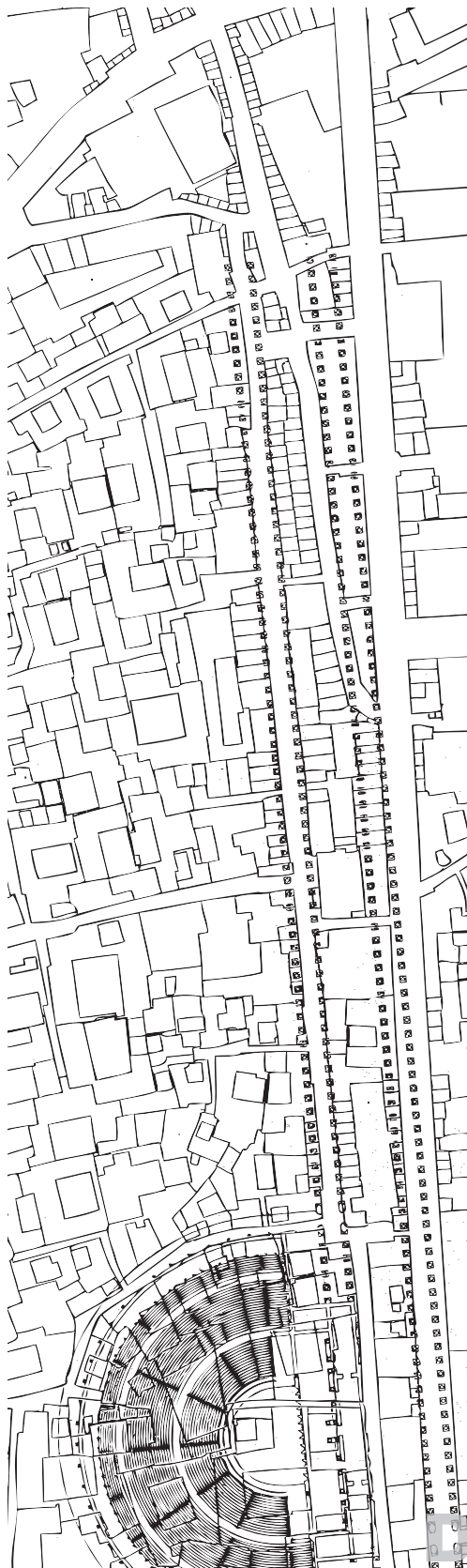
The Roman street, extending 1500 meters, used to be lined with columns and had gates on both ends as well as houses and shops on either sides.

It was once assumed that the open grid plan of the Greek Roman city began to disappear with the Arab conquest.

The latticework city with clear reference points designed for ease of communication and conveying a sense of dramatic impact in its major axes, allegedly succumbed to an oriental tendency towards clutter and confusion and parallel bazaars.



*straight street, via recta, decomanus maximus*





# Ecochard plan

-the masterplan-

The first master plan for Damascus, totally ignoring the local tradition and neglecting the old city, faced a lot of resistance from a city which had grown organically for a thousand years.

Danger and Ecochard presented a radio-centric road system, creating a ring road around the old town, to ease congestion but also to expose the cultural heritage of the old city. They also proposed a new sewage system for the city including the old town, but French Mandate and Independence planning mainly focused on building new modern housing outside the old city.

They also proposed a functional zoning map. The plan was adopted in 1960 and completed in 1994.

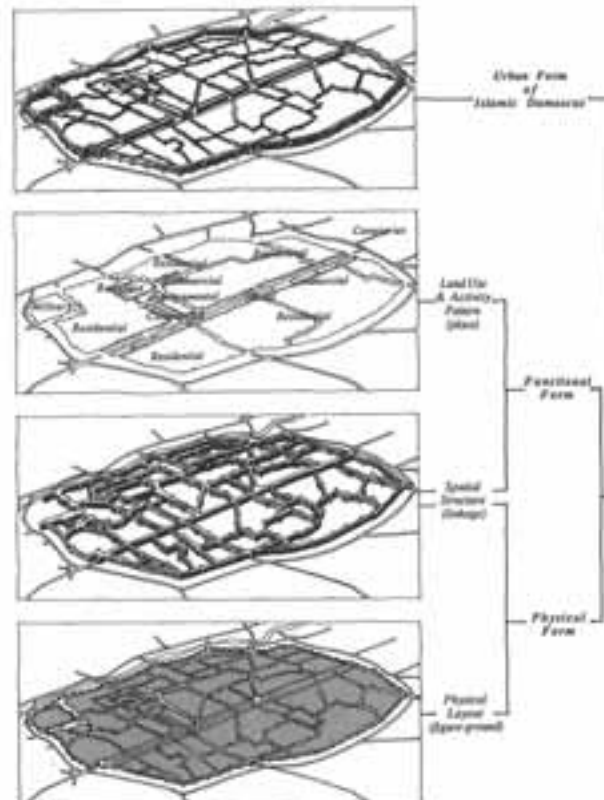
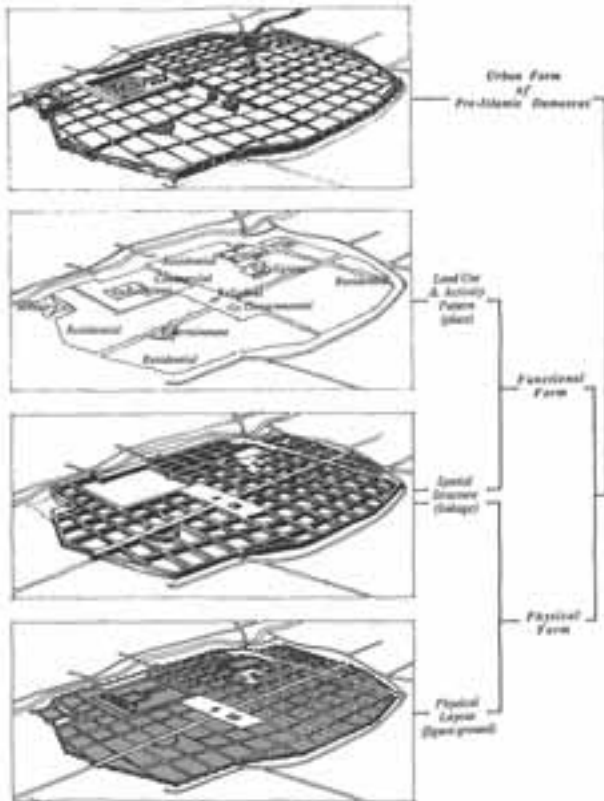
\*

The modernist ideology of Le Corbusier and his peers defines that everything that is old is bad and everything that is new is good with the exception of the Doric. But even the badness of the old can be quantified.

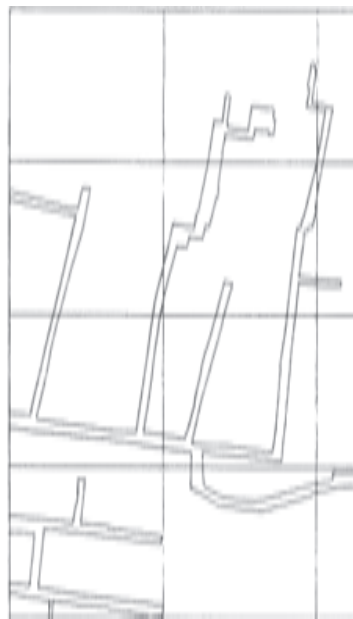
Starting with the other Greek styles, Roman, Byzantine, European Middle Age, Muslim and at the bottom the Ottoman style.



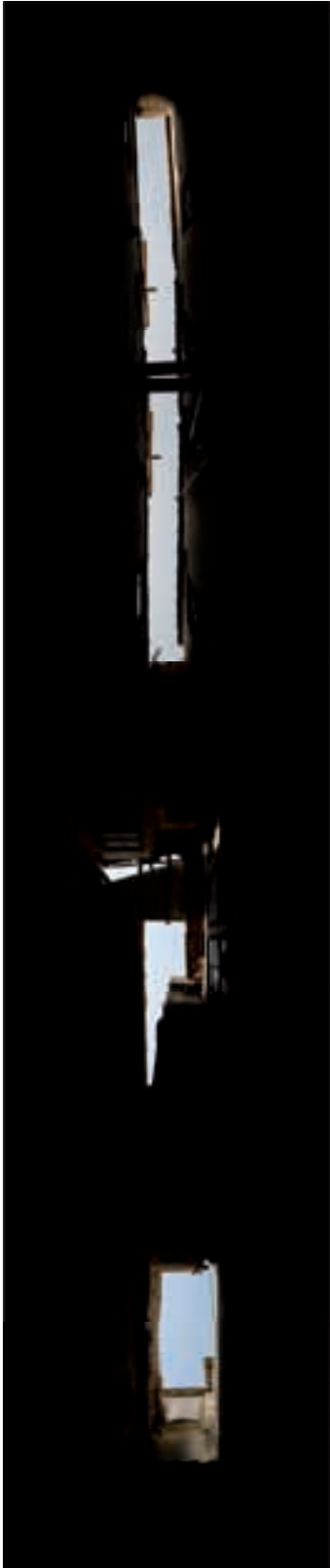




intra muros [127]



# Light



[129]

- [130] Light
- [132] Alleys
- [134] Urban layers



,Where can I see the sky?`

By comparing and analysing sky pictures of various quarters within the old town different urban structures become visible.

Sparse light thus refers to a prior cultivation and therefore to a distinct morphological sedimentation.



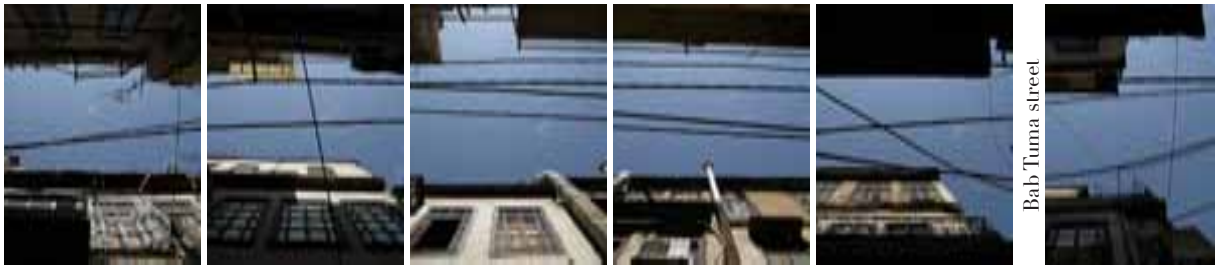
jewish quarter ^



agora area



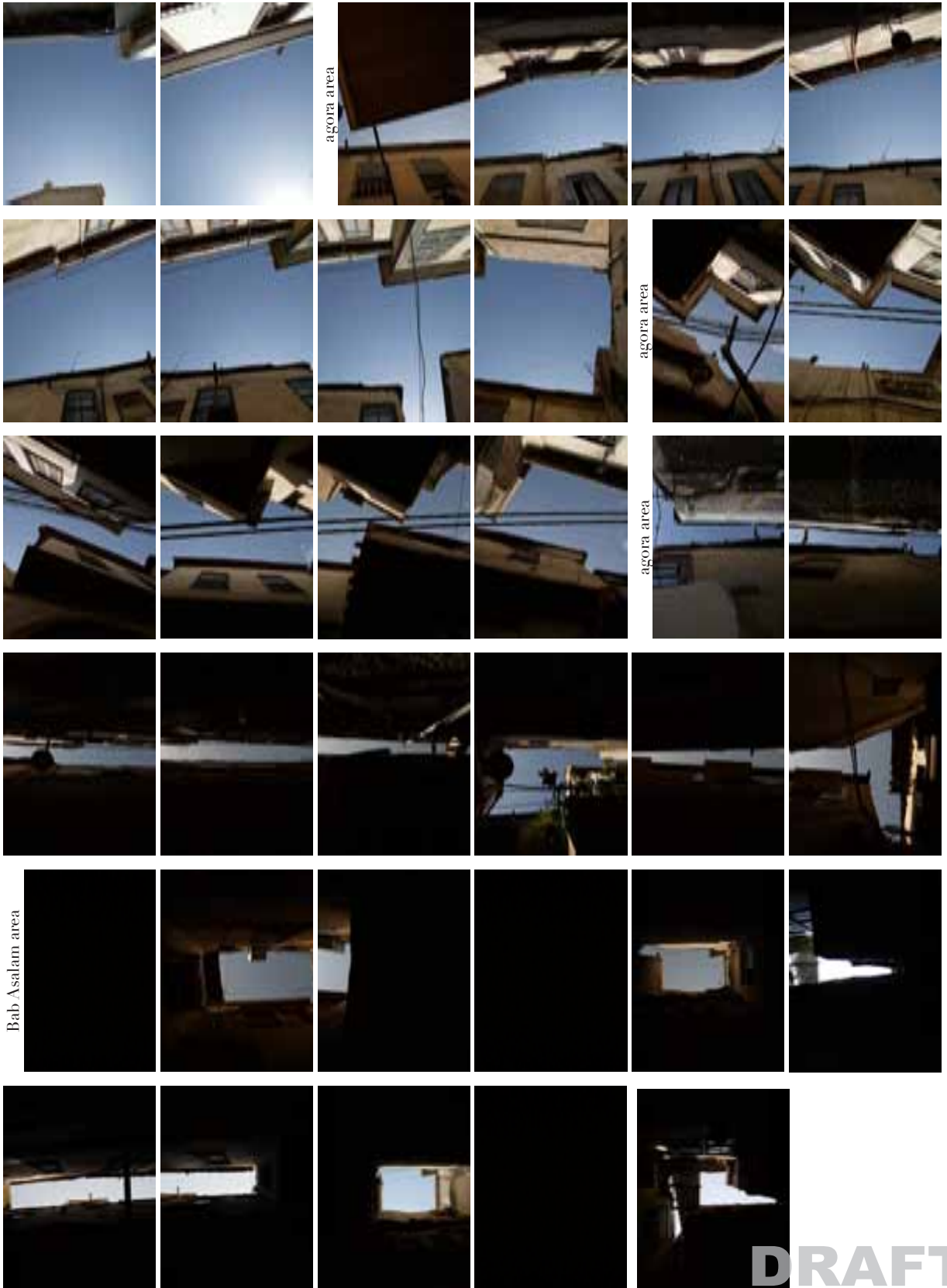
ortodox bishop



Bab Tuna street







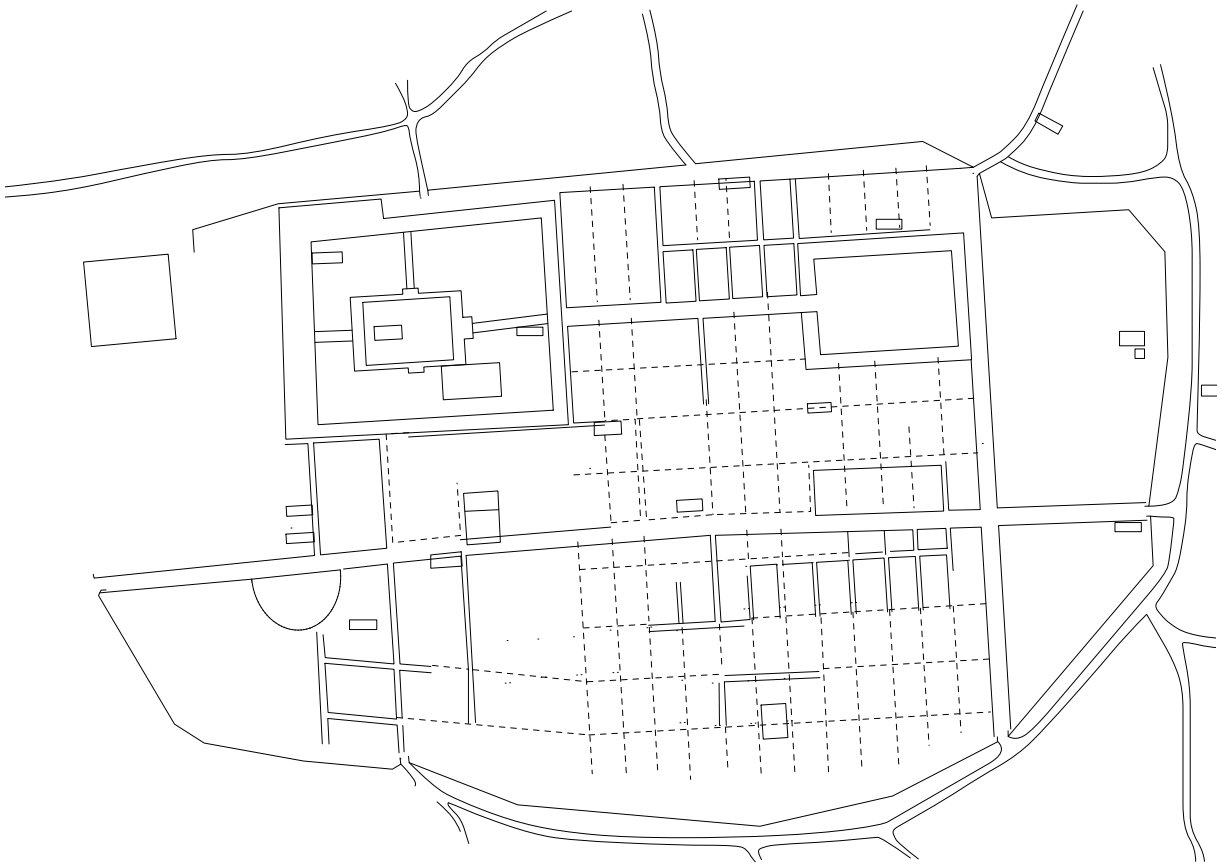
## Alleys



[133]

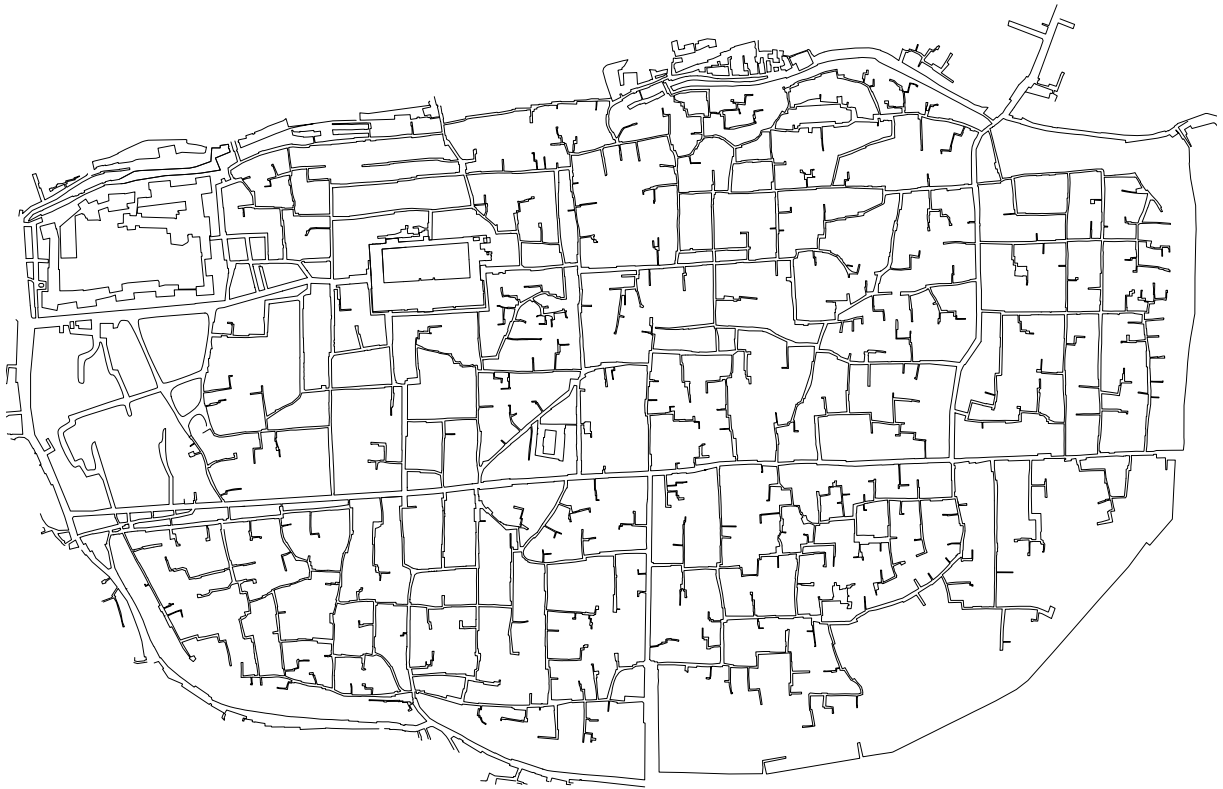






### Streamlined city during Romans & Byzantines

The Romans incorporated the Aramaean and Greek sectors of the city to form a city plan and built a broad wall to encircle the whole area. Seven gates were built at intervals and Damascus was divided by the via recta. The Inner city has approximately the same size as the old walled city today.



### Islamic city after Byzantines

The open grid plan of the Greek Roman city began to disappear during the Byzantines and with the Arab conquest. The lattice-work city with clear reference points allegedly succumbed to an oriental tendency towards clutter and confusion. The Umayyad mosque was built on the same site as the Cathedral of St. John.

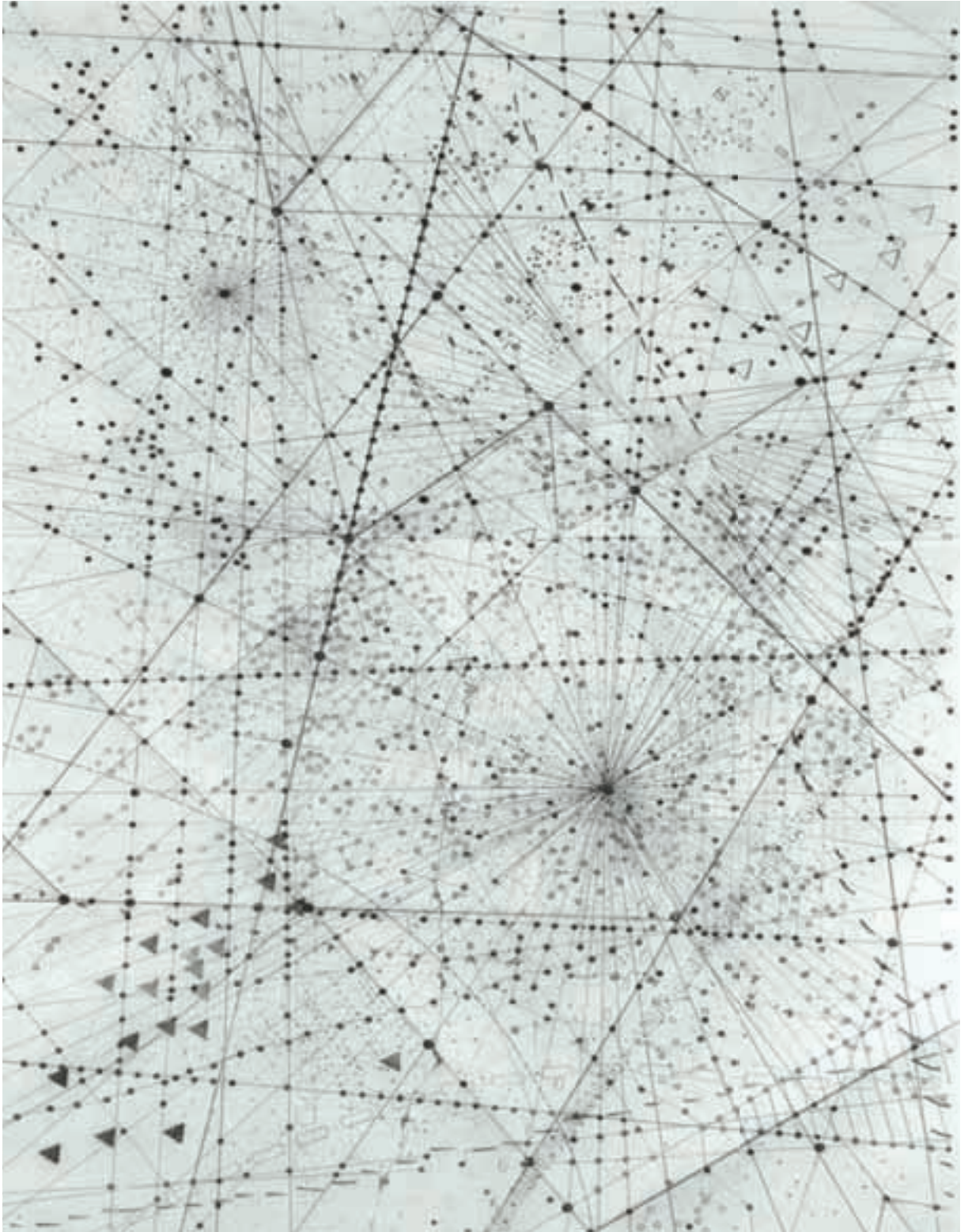


### Danger-Ecochard Masterplan

In 1935 the French presented a masterplan: creating a ring road around the old town to ease congestion but also to expose the cultural heritage of the old city. It has never been implemented.







constellation

# Umayyad Mosque

-the monument-

The site of the Umayyad Mosque has housed sacred buildings for thousands of years, in each incarnation transformed to accommodate the faith of the time. An ancient Aramaic temple dedicated to the god Hadad is the oldest layer of architectural use to be uncovered on archeological expeditions.

During the Roman period, the Temple of Jupiter occupied the space. This edifice was transformed to a church in the fourth century. The church was expanded to form the Cathedral of St. John, situated on the western side of the older temple.

After the Islamic conquest of Damascus in 661, during the reign of the first Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya Ibn Abi Sufyan, the Muslims shared the church with the Christians. While the Muslims prayed in the eastern section of the ancient temple structure, the Christians secured the western side.

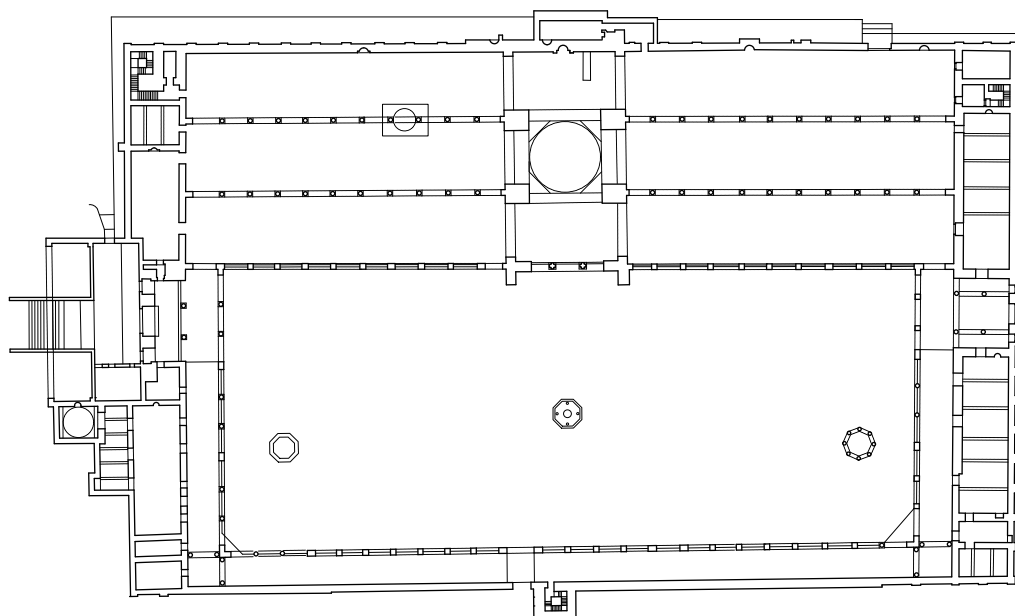
This collective use continued until al- Walid bin Abd al-Malik's reign, when the prayer space became inadequate both in terms of capacity and the need for an architectural monument to represent the new religion.

The caliph negotiated with Christian leaders to take over the space, and in return al-Walid promised that all the other churches around the city would be safe, with the addition of a new church dedicated to the Virgin granted to the Christians as compensation.

[142]



[143]



al-Walid bin Abd al-Malik:

, Inhabitants of Damascus, four things give you marked superiority over the rest of the world:  
your limate, your water, your fruits and your baths. To these I wanted to add afifth: this mosque.‘

[145]











# Overall View

-the soils-

## Historical section

All projects have been arranged into a historical section, showing the periods of the history which are relevant for the specific project.

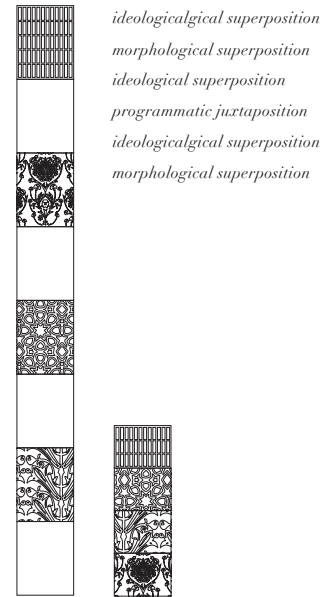
## Perceptual section

With the help of this tool we attempt to show the divergence in between the history and what is perceptible in the object. The most visible layer in the physical structure appears on the top of the soil, while the less visible at the bottom. In case that a historical layer which appears as relevant in the historical section but is not perceptible today, the soil is going to show a blank field. The chronology of time is irrelevant in this tool.

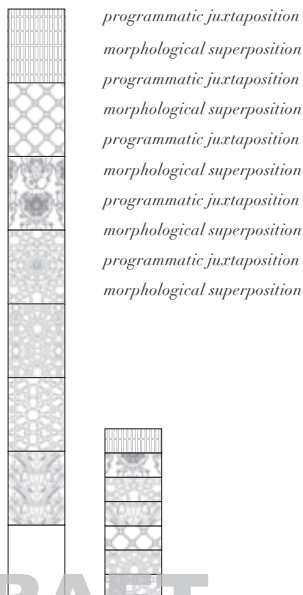
## Palimpsestical arrangement.

With certain terms/ like morphological disjunction, super. And juxtaposition, as well as ideological super and juxtaposition or programmatic super and juxtaposition to define the palimpsestical nature

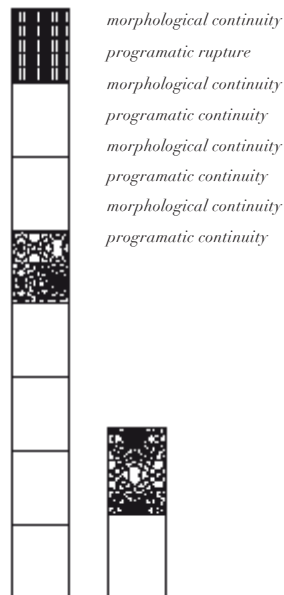
## Bab Al-Sharqui



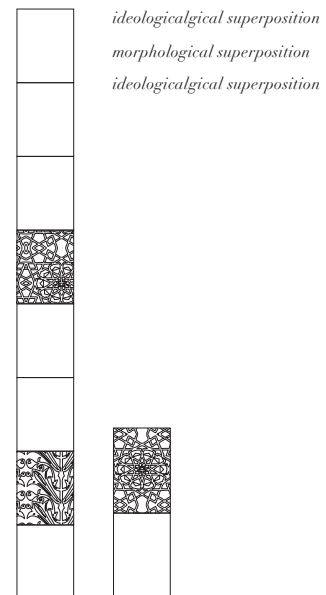
## Roman Wall



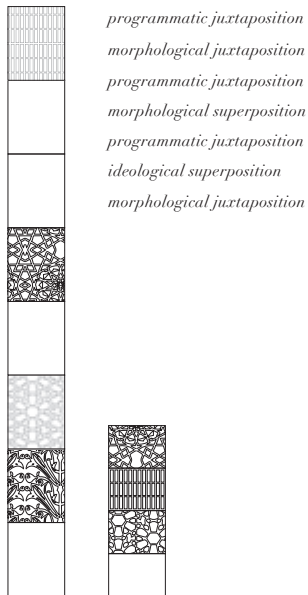
## Al-Jazari mill



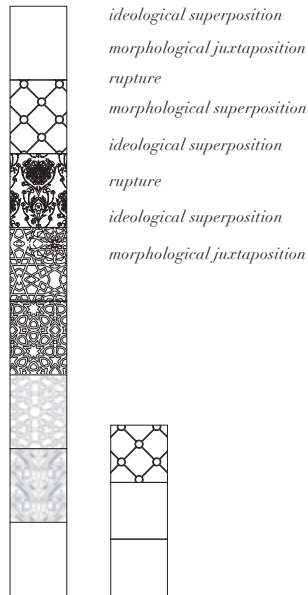
## Bab Al-Faradis



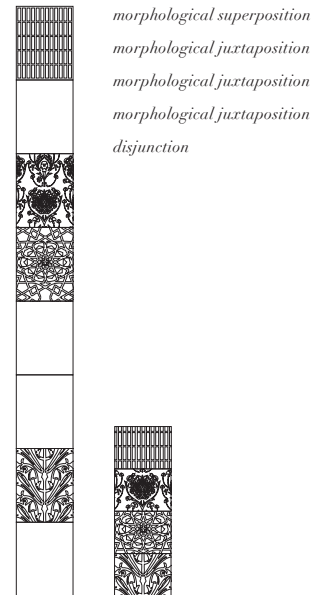
## Bab Al-Saghir



## Bab Al-Kisan

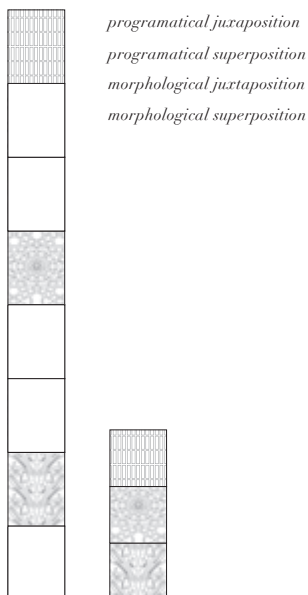


## Bayt al-‘Aqqad

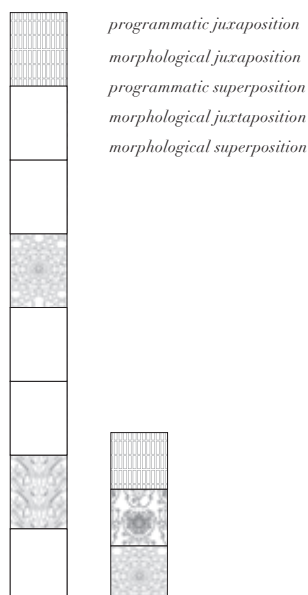


[149]

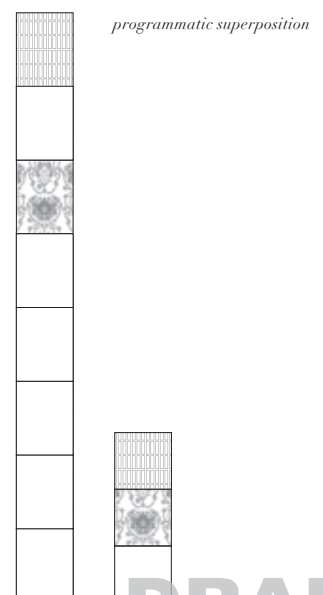
## Damascene House I



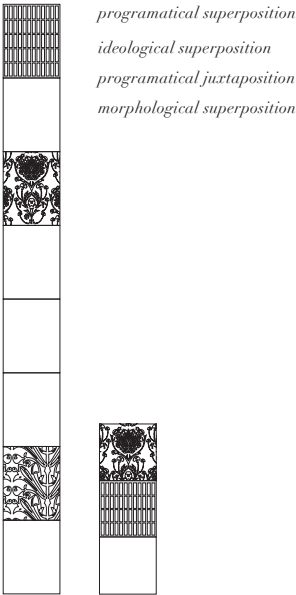
## Damascene House II



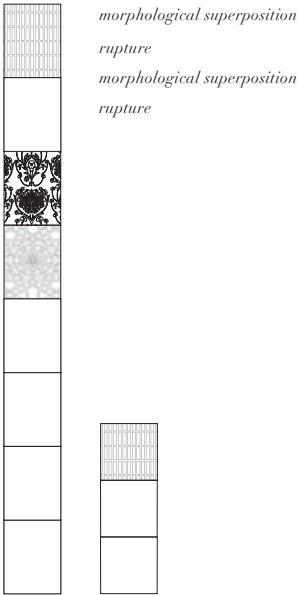
## Bait al Nizam



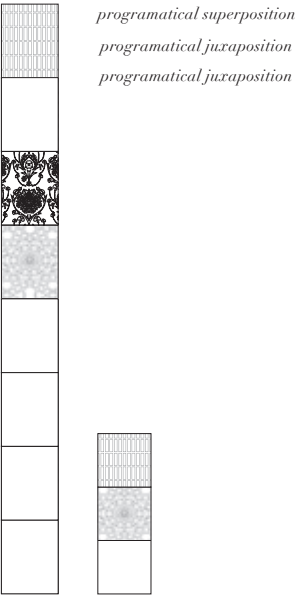
Takiyya Sulaymaniyya



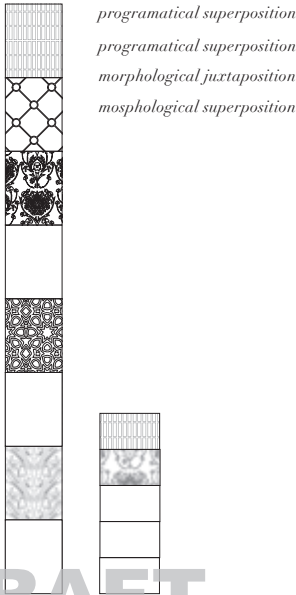
Al Qabbani School



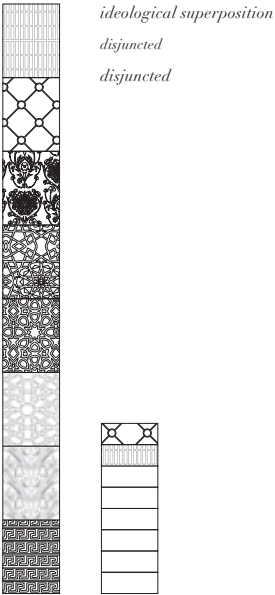
Madrasa al-Zahiriyya



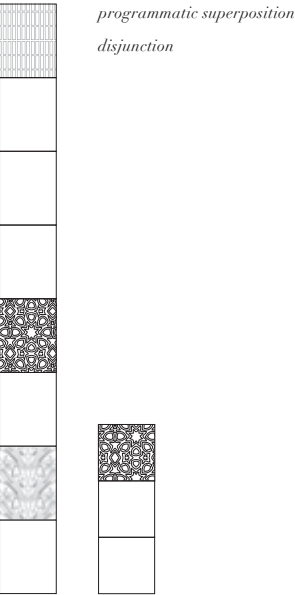
Hammam Nur al-Din



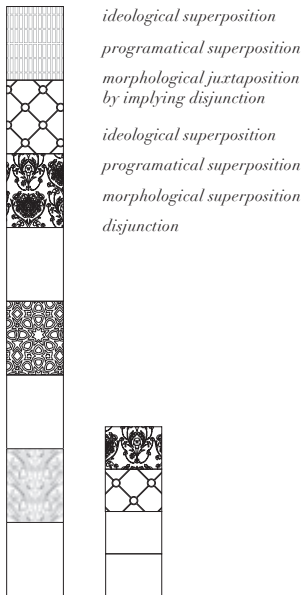
National Museum



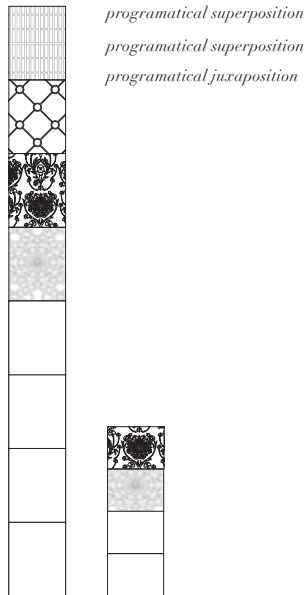
Bimaristan of Nur al-Din



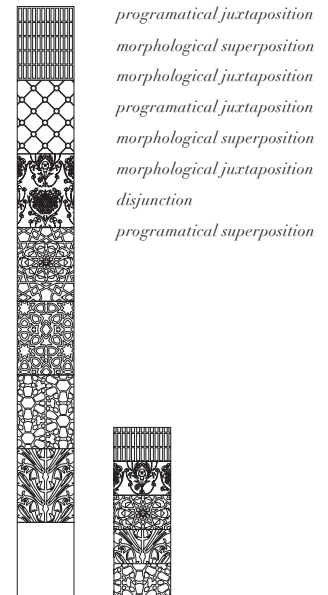
## Azem Palace



## Madrasa al-Adiliyya

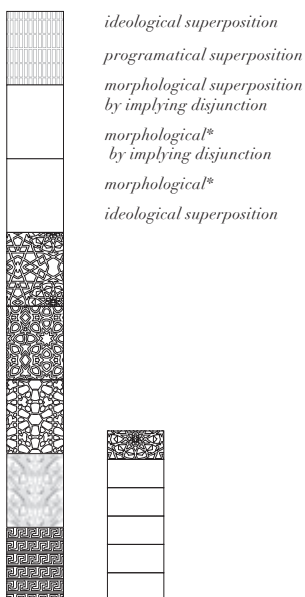


## Roman Theatre

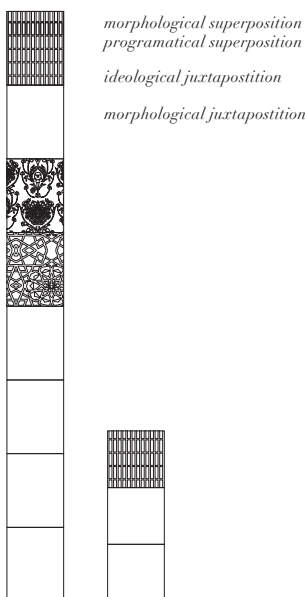


[151]

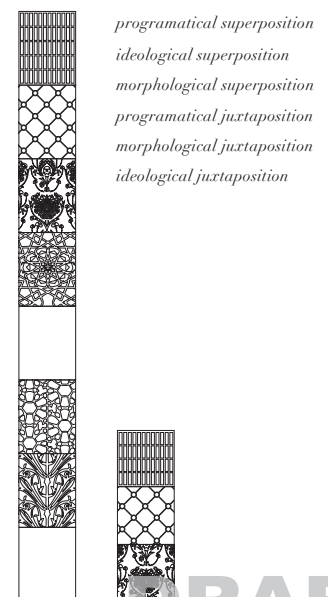
## Citadel



## Yalbugha mosque



## Midan



# Index



Bab al-saghir



Baklava



La grande Platane



Madrasa al-Kamiliyya



Bab Sharqi



Roman Wall



Bab al-Faradis



Sulayman Soup Kitchen



Bab Al-Saghir



Bab Al-Kisan



Al-Jazari mill



Bayt al-Aqqad



Damascene House I



Damascene House II



Bait al Nizam



Hanania Orthodox Church



Takiyya Sulaymaniyya



Al Qabbani School



Madrasa al-Zahiriyya



Hammam Nur al Din



Damascus Nat. Museum



Bismaristan of Nur al-Din



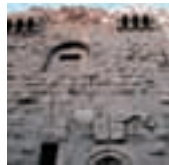
Azem Palace



Madrasa al-Adiliyya



Roman Theatre



Citadel



Yalbugha mosque



Merjeh square



Al-Midan



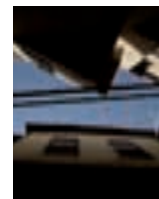
Agricultural area



straight street



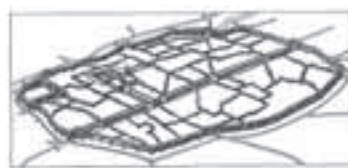
Ecochard plan



light



Alleys



Old city



Umayyad Mosque



# Inference

-the conclusion-

With our work we tried to reveal the perceptible extraordinary beauty of Damascus which we initially perceived and by understanding how it came about and how it will remain, we hope also to contribute not only to an understanding of Damascus in history, in place but a way of conceiving of cities in the world.

After such a brief period of stay we cannot say that we achieved to read Damascus in its completeness, yet we realized that the multiplicity of urban models, of architectural sensibilities and their interrelationship to ideological meanings and understandings is what makes this city as our friend and Damascene architect Khaled Malas has claimed a “place of seemingly infinite hope.”

Our contribution reveals certain specificities of permanence but at the same time also of rupture that are interesting and relevant to understand the state of cities in history and in the world .

The specific urban model in the walled city and in many extramuros parts of Damascus, such as al-Midan or al-Salihiye are not codified or unidirectional. The “natural growth” shows us a very pragmatic human way of making, unmaking, remaking its own environment. At the same time in the new parts of the city where the new architectural models has been adapted from the people in order to fit into changing and evolving specific lifestyles and social orders, show us the paradox of how physical structures are alternating and developing while ideologies remain for hundreds of years. In that sense we think that the whole existence of the city but not only the taxonomy of it could be seen as a long progression of palimpsestic reality, where the old cultures, the old traditions, sometimes are stripped away and sometimes continue to shine through the next layer of time. It is this dynamic process where typologies can develop, where traditions can be adapted.

Contemplating the city of the dead with the example of Bab al Saghir from the inscription of the book we would like to finish with a thought about a living city, and Mark Twain’s “(...) Damascus has seen all that has ever occurred on earth, and still she lives...” Damascus with its contemporary role as the administrative center of Syria, its historical role as a religious fulcrum in the Islamic world, its commercial location at the last stop on the desert has never disappeared and above all how it adapted itself throughout history.

Rather than only focusing on the fulfillment of functions in ,old‘ cities to ensure their ,survival‘ we believe the city will continue to live as it has in the last thousands of years. We think that our study has shown that ,old‘ itself is not singular. Damascus is old indeed. But as a set of palimpsests it is also, as we have expressed throughout our project; forming, disjoining, exposed, contested... And beautiful.

“all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned. “

Marx/Engels

[155]

# Glossary

-historical-

## Abbasid

The second major Islamic dynasty (750-1258), were the descendants of al-Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, hence the name. Their effective rule lasted only for a little more than a century. After that they became the figureheads of an elusive Islamic unity that did not exist in reality.

## Aghlabids

A dynasty that ruled Ifriqiya and Sicily between 800 and 909. Their capital was at Qayrawan, and they paid tribute to the Abbasids.

## Ayyubids

A family of Kurdish amirs who ruled Syria and Egypt (1176-1250). Their founder was Salah al-Din (Saladin), the exemplary knight and hero of the Counter-Crusade.

## Crusades

A series of campaigns launched in 1099 by Christian Europe against the Islamic East, ostensibly to liberate the Holy Land. In 1187, Salah al-Din (Saladin), the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, took Jerusalem back. In 1292, Acre, the last stronghold of the Crusaders in Palestine, fell to the Mamluks.

## Fatimids

An Ismaili dynasty whose founder claimed descent from Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet and wife of 'Ali, and established a counter-caliphate in Ifriqiya (909-71), which was later expanded to include Egypt and southern Syria (969-1171).

## Mamluks

A curious phenomenon that is not encountered outside the Islamic world, Mamluks were imported slaves, mostly of Turkish or Caucasian stock, who were destined for a military career. The Mamluks ruled Egypt and Syria from 1250 to 1517.

## Mecca

Birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and a major trading center in Arabia that linked Byzantine Syria in the north with Yemen in the south. The tribe of Qureish lived in Mecca and was divided into 40 clans of varying wealth and status.

## Mughals of India

A dynasty whose founder Babur (1526-30) descended from the most illustrious Mongol conquerors, Ghenkis Khan and Timur, hence the name.

They ruled most of India for three centuries before direct British rule was set in 1858. The period between Babur's reign and 1707, when five of his descendants, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb ruled is considered the age of the Great Mughals.

## Nizam al-Mulk

(1020-92). The able vizier of the Seljuq sultans who organized the structure of their state, promoted Sunni learning, and sponsored madrasas in Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, all called Nizamiyya.

## Ottomans

A Turkish dynasty named after Ghazi Osman, who established a small principality in the northwestern corner of Anatolia in the 13th century. The Ottomans fulfilled an Islamic dream in conquering Constantinople and formed the largest empire of its time which comprised the Balkans, Greece, Anatolia, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, the Holy Cities of Arabia, Algeria, and Tunisia. The empire lasted until 1924. The early Ottomans had a close relationship with sufis and dervishes, but the building of an Islamic empire brought the ulema class to the forefront. Early Ottoman religious architecture reflects the balancing of traditional Orthodox themes with the mystical sufi ones in its forms and functions.

## Post-Seljuq Period

After the disintegration of the Great Seljuq Empire, many spin-off dynasties carved out smaller provinces in Anatolia (which opened up to Turkish immigration after the Seljuks defeated the Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert in 1071), Syria, and Mesopotamia. The most important among them were the Seljuqs of Rum (Anatolia) and the Zengids.

## Safavids

(1501-1732): Of an obscure origin which is most probably Sunni and Kurdish, the Safavids forged for themselves an illustrious genealogy that goes back to 'Ali, and proceeded to forcibly change Iran into a Shiite state. In the process they shaped the modern image of the Iranian nation.

## Samanids

Dynasty which ruled part of former Sogdian territory from 819-1005; capital was

Bukhara; patrons of New Persian literature, science and architecture.

## Sasanians

Dynasty which ruled Iran from 226-651; capital was Ctesiphon.

## Seljuqs

(1038-1194). A Turkish, Sunni dynasty which ruled the whole Iranian world (including Khurasan and Transoxania), Iraq, Syria, and parts of Byzantine Anatolia.

## Shiites

From shia (supporters), those who recognized 'Ali as the only legitimate imam (political and religious leader) after the Prophet, and rejected most other caliphs, especially the Umayyads. They developed into several sects which differed in the number of imams they recognized. Most important are: The Twelvers Imamis, The Ismailis, The Fatimids.

## Sunnis

those who adhere to the standard practice (understood to be of the Prophet). Sunnis are the majority of Muslims and follow four schools of jurisprudence: the Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki, and Hanbali. They accept the legitimacy of both the Umayyads and Abbasids.

## Umayyads (of Spain)

After the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 750, a scion of the family, Abd al-Rahman I, fled to Spain and established a principality in Cordoba independent of the Abbasids. His great grandson, Abd al-Rahman III (912-961) declared a new Umayyad caliphate with its capital in Cordoba.

## Umayyads

First Islamic dynasty (661-750) established by a companion of the Prophet, Mu'awiya. Their capital was Damascus. They built the first monumental mosques.

## Ziyarids

Dynasty which ruled part of the Caspian provinces of Iran from 932 to c. 1075; nominally Islamic but holding to pre-Islamic Persian traditions and claiming descent from the Sasanians; responsible for several tomb towers, including Gunbad-i Qabus and Piri Alamdar.

# Glossary

-terminology-

## Ablaq

A decorative technique, popular during the Mamluk period, based on alternating courses of black and white masonry. The term is derived from the Turkish *iplik*, meaning rope or thread.

## Bab

Gate or door.

## Bayt

Arabic for house.

## Bimaristan

Derived from Persian, meaning 'place for the sick'. A general hospital. Maristan is alternative name for bimaristan.

## Caliph

Arabic for successor. The Qur'an describes Adam as the primordial norm and as Caliph, the representative of God on earth. Man in this sense is the vicegerent of God on earth. In a historical context however, the word Caliph referred first to the four rightly guided caliphs after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali) and subsequently to any Muslim ruler, in various dynasties.

## Dervisme

Persian for poor and means a Sufi.

## Dhimmi

People of the book; Christians, Jews, Sabaeans, Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists. The term was used to describe those who had to pay the *jizya* (poll tax) and who were not forced to convert because they were adherents of other religions, unlike idolators.

## Diwan

Originating from Persian, this term refers to a reception chamber, particularly in a palace or residence. It later came to mean ministry or government office. It can also mean anthology of poems placed in alphabetical order.

## Dar

A place where a lot of movement takes place. The word *dar* is used for a wide variety of buildings, however the most common usage of the term is to mean a house.

## Dar al-Islam

Refers to Muslim lands where sovereignty of Islamic law applies.

## Hajj

The Pilgrimage to Mecca. It can also be used as a title for someone who has gone on pilgrimage. In the latter context, Hajj refers to a man and Hajjah is used for women.

## Hamam/Hammam

Refers to bath houses, both private and public. Public hammams were an important feature of Islamic cities.

## Hijra

The migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Madina (Yathrib) in 622 A.D., which is the first year in the Hijri calendar.

## Imam

A religious leader; the preacher of the Friday ceremony or leader of the Muslim community.

## Imaret

Soup kitchen, it was one of the major charitable units in any religious Ottoman complex.

## Iwan

High vaulted hall completely open on one side to a courtyard

The combination of four iwans arranged axially around a courtyard became one of the most important plans of religious buildings in the Muslim world.

## Khan

Derived from Persian meaning a 'house with full amenities'. In Islamic architecture *khan* is used to describe the caravansaries found in Iran, Syria and Anatolia. An alternative name for *khan* is *wikala* or *ribat*. The basic plan consisted of an open court with a well and surrounded by rooms for storing and displaying merchants' goods. Annexed there is usually an area that would function like a stable for housing the animals of the merchants, mostly horses. The upper floors of a *khan* are the accommodation areas, with single rooms, duplexes or triplexes for the travellers. The details of the plan differed from one province to the other. *Khan* can also refer to Turkish nobility, a term commonly used during the reign of the Saljuk and Mongol rulers.

## Madrasa

The specialized institution of learning that was adopted by the Seljuqs to promote Sunni teaching.

A madrasa usually contains a mosque, classrooms, and lodgings for students and teachers. Madrasas appeared most probably in Khurasan in the 9-10th c. and spread all over the Islamic world in the 11-12th c.

## Marj

Gazing area on the edge of cultivated land.

## Minaret

A tall slender tower, circular or square in section, built next or in a mosque, from which the Muslims are called to prayer. Mosques may have up to six minarets.

## Pasha

During Ottoman Empire, thitle attributed to governors of provinces.

## Qa'a

Reception hall.

## Qibla

The direction of Mecca toward which Muslims are required to face when they perform their prayer. [157]

## Ribat

Originally designated a building type that was both military and religious in character. It was a fortified barrack for those volunteers whose piety led them to devote themselves to guarding the frontiers of the Islamic state.

## Suq

market, group of shops arranged by guild.

## Takiyya/Tekke

Sufi or dervish meeting place.

## Turkish Baroque Style

The name given to the Ottoman architectural and decorative production from the mid eighteenth century until the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The style was concomitant with the gradual Westernization of the Ottoman elite's lifestyle and tastes is characterized by a profusion of curved, undulating motifs, imported European patterns, and unres-trained, extroverted plans.

## Wali

Governor.

## Waqf

pious foundation.

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