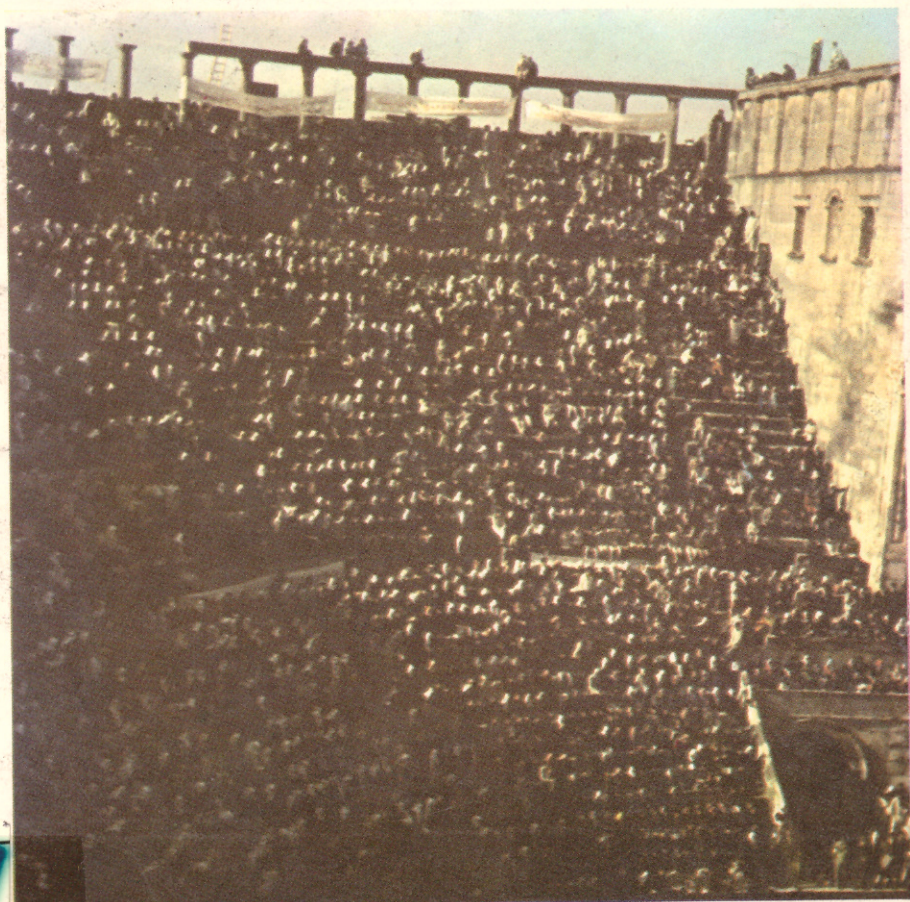


BOSRA



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BOSRA

Historical and Archaeological Guide

by

SULAIMAN A. MOUGDAD

Chief unif of archeological works

curator of Museum of Bosra

1578

Preface :

The Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic takes pleasure in publishing the second edition of Bosra : Historical and Archaeological Guide to aid the visitor in understanding this important city, its history and its magnificent monuments which reflect many different eras. A grand project is in preparation to bring to light the past history of Bosra. We have begun the excavation of the decumanus and the cryptoportico. These projects will be undertaken in the coming years until the entire city has been excavated, thanks to the encouragement of the government which has graciously dedicated a considerable budget to this important cultural project .

We thank all the people who have contributed to deepening our knowledge of Bosra, each stone of which seems to relate, in the silent language of art, the history of human creation. We also wish to thank the Curator of Museum of Bosra, Monsieur Sulaiman Mougdad, for all the effort he has put forth in this edition of his Guide. We hope that the next edition will be even more detailed and precise, a reflection of the great job of excavation, which he directs, in his native village. (1)

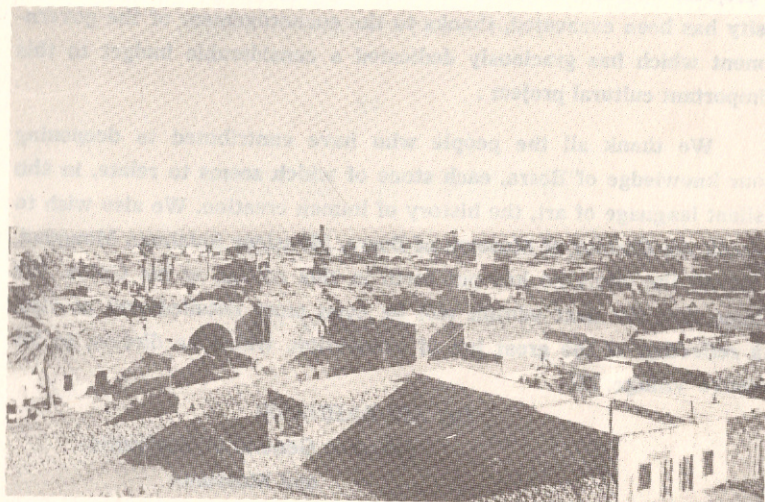
Dr. Afif BAHNASSI

Director General of Antiquities
and Museums

1 Since 1971, a unit of archaeological works has been formed. This unit, directed by Sulaiman Mougdad, includes the excavation of the Cryptoportico, Cathedral, and Roman Baths at Bosra.

BOSRA

The city of Bosra is situated in the fertile plain of the Nukra, at the southern border of the Ledja, in the vicinity of two wadis — the Zaydi and the Butm — both tributaries of the Yarmouk. The city is 141 km. from Damascus, 41 km. from Der'a, 36 km. from Soueida and 20 km. from Ezra. It stands at 750 m. altitude. Its name is attested in the sense of « citadel ».



A BRIEF HISTORY OF BOSRA

Historical information regarding Bosra before the Hellenistic era is rare. The invaluable Tell el-Amarna tablets from Egypt, dating to the 14th century B. C., which represent royal correspondence exchanged between Pharaoh and the kings of Phoenicia, the Amorrites, etc., mention the names of many villages in the Hauran, such as Astarte (Tell Astara) and Adra' (Der'a). It is known that Arab-Semites inhabited the Hauran from a remote period of history. From the peninsula of Arabia, the Semitic Arabs-Akkadians, Amorrites, Canaanites, Aramaeans, Nabataeans, Mundhirites, Ghassanids and Muslims — migrated to the regions of Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia.

The Nabataean state was highly developed politically, militarily and economically. Bosra had become the northern capital of the Nabataean Kingdom, while Petra remained the southern capital.

In 105-106 A. D. Bosra was annexed to the Roman Empire by Cornelius Palma. The 22nd of March, 106 became the new «era of

Bosra». The Nabataean kingdom was converted to the Province of Arabia and administered by a praetorian legate, who had at his command the Legio III Cyrenaica, the principal garrison for which was Bosra.

Bosra was given the designation Nova Trajana. The area under the jurisdiction of the Legio III Cyrenaica embraced the greater part of the Hauran, the villages of which adopted the era of Bosra. This is evidence of Bosra's importance. Alexander Severus conferred on

Bosra the title Colonia Bostra. The city was certainly enlarged, as is revealed by a study of its ancient plan at the time of its integration into the Roman Empire. The Roman era was a time of great prosperity for the Hauran. Its cities and its villages began to construct important monuments, of which we can see many vestiges. The abundance of inscriptions discovered up to now provide us with invaluable evidence. Bosra was the termination as well as the departure point for many important routes. The city was — thanks to the commercial roads which connected her with Philadelphia, the Arabian Gulf, and (by crossing) the Mediterranean — an important commercial city, linked to the north by two roads to Damascus. Bosra minted coins, notably during the reign of Phillip the Arab.

In the Byzantine era the Arab kingdom of the Ghassanids appears, of which the first known prince is al-Harith ibn-Jabala. The reign of this man was marked by a struggle between the Sassanids and the Mundhirites. It was moreover, often on bad terms with the Byzantine authorities for supporting the Monophysite cause. Bosra apparently played an important role in this religious quarrel. Its bishops took part in the councils of Antioch, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon. Titus, the bishop in 360, adopted a doctrinal position and his activity soon made him the best-known ecclesiastical writer of his age, in terms of wisdom, philosophical interpretation and secular activity. It is worth noting that before his time, Beryllus (222-223) had, under the influence of Origen, a nothable career, marked by a return to orthodoxy.

Byzantine Bosra was the central market for the desert frontier, where Arab caravans came to exchange goods. In 634 the Christian Arabs assisted their Muslim Arab brothers in liberating Syria from

Byzantine authority. Later, the Caliph Omar came to Syria to organize the country; it was the Hauran, rich with the memory of the Arab Ghassanids, which became his headquarters. Because of its position on the pilgrimage route, Bosra retained great advantages. Worthy of historical note is the encounter between the Christian monk Bahira and the future prophet Muhammed, as well as the legend of the «kneeling» of the camel which carried the first copy of the Qur'an to Syria.

At the time of the Crusader expeditions, the Hauran was the theater of numerous conflicts. The fortress built around the theater rendered Bosra nearly impregnable. In 1147 Baudoin III attempted in vain to breach the city, and a second attempt in 1151 met with equal resistance. But the Mongol invasion of 1261 left the fortress of Bosra badly damaged. Baybars dispatched a mission from Egypt which restored, enlarged and reinforced this important historical monument.

In the 15th century Bosra again became of great importance. She supplied the Mamluke administration of Syria with some of its outstanding personalities, many of whom were known by the ethnic name «al-Busrawi». Bosra remained a major gateway for pilgrims on the old route from Damascus to Mecca, via Philadelphia. Travelers were always struck by the spectacle of these ancient ruins, and they often paused with great interest before the defensive walls and the Citadel of the city.



THE CITY GATE

Actually called by the inhabitants « Bab al-Haoua » (Gate of the Wind), this gate is the first historical monument which the visitor sees when arriving by vehicle from Damascus via Der'a. Its construction dates from the second century of the Christian era. It is clear that it had been constructed later than the rampart to which it is attached. Its architecture differs greatly from that of the wall, since it was built during la belle époque of the city. The opening had been spanned by two super-imposed arches, resting on pilasters provided with niches and flanking the interior towers.



On entering the gate and approaching the center of the city by the main street, large columns on either side come into view. These were found here in situ while excavation was in progress.

THE CENTRAL ARCH

Known today as the « Bab al-Qandil » (Gate of the Lantern), its construction dates to the beginning of the third century of the Christian era. Especially well-preserved, its ornamentation resembles the sculptural style used by some cities of the Decapolis. On the pillar to the right, an inscription informs us that this arch had been erected in memory of the Legio III Cyrenaica, which was garrisoned in the city,



and in memory of Cornelius Palma. Its form is that usual for triumphal arches. It is composed of three arches, of which the central arch, twice the size of those on either side, attains a height of 13 m.

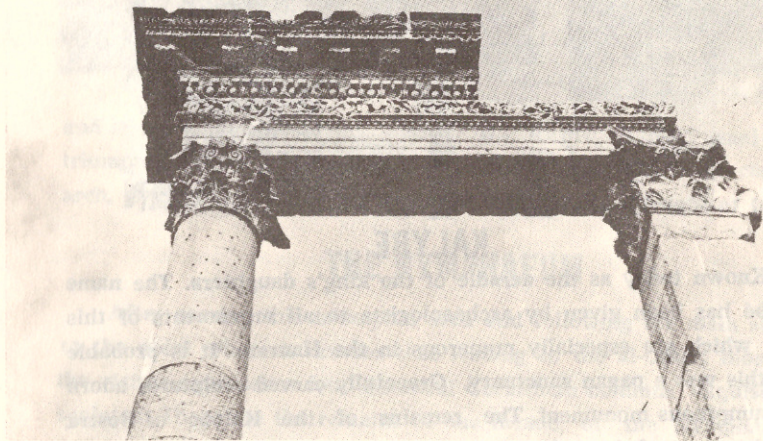
THE NYMPHAEUM

After passing this triumphal arch and following the main street to the point where it crosses that leading to the al-Omarj mosque, the visitor approaches four beautiful Corinthian columns, exquisitely sculpted. These are the remains of one facade of the Nymphaeum which supplied water to the gardens and the people of Bosra. The walls have fallen and little remains save the columns standing on octagonal bases, skilfully shaped. The circumference of each measures 1.20 m. and the height of the columns, including the foundations (now missing) is 14 m. The capitals which crown this exceptional



KALYBE

Known today as the «cradle of the king's daughter». The name Kalybé has been given by archaeologists to all monuments of this type, which are especially numerous in the Hauran. It is probable that this was a pagan sanctuary. Gracefully carved sculptures adorn this sumptuous monument. The remains of the Kalybé of Bosra include a part of the wall and the sculptures which ornament it. The inhabitants of Bosra believe that one of the kings of the city had built this «chateau» in order to protect his daughter from death. He had food brought to her in a basket. One day she was brought a cluster of grapes; a scorpion hidden in the grapes stung the beauti-



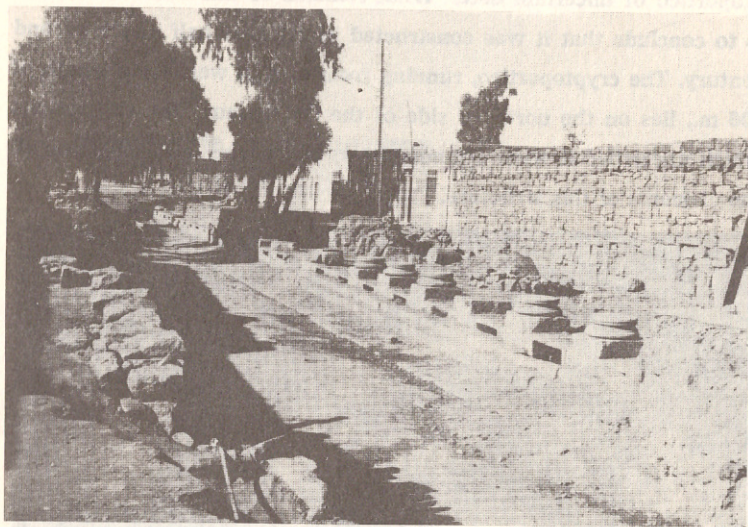
ful young girl, who died of its poison. The visitor cannot but be astonished at the beauty and delicacy of all the the sculptures which remain in this building.

THE CRYPTOPORTIC

In 1968 the archaeological excavations undertaken by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums brought to light a cryptoportico of uncertain date. What remains of this structure allows us to conclude that it was constructed in the first half of the second century. The cryptoportico, running from east to west for a length of 106 m., lies on the northern side of the decumanus. The excavations which unearthed it were not completely successful in disengaging all the elements of this structure.



From the information available at present we can confirm that the cryptoportico at Bosra had been used as a great merchandise market which imported from various regions the local products destined for export. The south wall is pierced by 34 «skylights», which provided illumination for the interior. The entire length of this wall is broken by rectangular niches. The north wall has three doors still blocked by debris; these doors provided access to the Forum. Like its counterpart, this wall has niches, between the doors, along its entire length.



The height of the cryptoportico from ground-level to ceiling is 4.10 m. The original floor has not yet been excavated. The interior width of the building is 4.65 m. The style of the niches in either wall gives the impression that they were constructed at a later period.

1578

THE MARKET

This market is known to Bostrans as the «Khan ad-Dibs» (Molasses Market). Some archaeologists have argued that this is the site of the Roman baths, but realized later that it is indeed an ancient market. It is a rectangular court 70 m. long and 20 m. wide, with elevated walls inset with ovoid-shaped niches. Goods of all kinds were exchanged here; goods which had not been sold were guarded during the night, after someone had closed the gates. This idea is common throughout the numerous markets or «oriental khans». One part of this structure which served as a merchandise display had been covered to protect the goods as well as the merchants from the cold and rain of winter and the dust and scorching sun of summer. In this covered part we have put on display some small objects which are difficult to restore, since modern construction has impeded progress.



The Grumushtekin Mosque and the al-Jahir Spring:

Actually called Jami al-Khidr, this very ancient mosque is thus named by the inhabitants because of its location next to a «maqam» called al-Khidr. This mosque had been destroyed before the sixth century A. H. (twelfth century A. D.). It was then rebuilt in the year 528/1133 on the orders of the atabek Amin ad-Doula Abou Mansour



Grumushtekin, the then governor of Bosra. It is squareshaped and measures 7.40 m. on each side; its basalt roof rests on two columned arches. Above the Mihrab we may find many Arabic inscriptions engraved in the plaster. The minaret, largely in ruins, is separated from the mosque by a narrow passage.

To the west of the mosque we can see some remains of a small Roman structure, composed of two courtyards and a few rooms. People visit this place on Fridays, since they believe that the Khidr is buried there.

Leaving the Gumushtekin mosque the visitor passes near the spring al-Jahir, known for its flavorful water. One may take note of the Roman walls and, some distance to the north of these, the ruins of an ancient bath, where the remains of only one elevated vault stands in the vicinity of some vineyards.



THE MOSQUE OF OMAR

This is one of the most beautiful and well-preserved Muslim monuments. It takes its name from the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab. Bosrans call it « Jami-al-Arous » or « the mosque of the new bride ». It had been a pagan temple. It is the only mosque built in the early days of Islam in which the facades retain their primitive style. All the columns were found in situ, in spite of much restoration work since the time of the original building. On two of the columns Greek inscriptions were discovered, and on a third, a Latin inscription. A number of Nabataean and Arabic inscriptions, all from different centuries, were found inside the mosque. But the great square-based minaret



ret dates back no earlier than the twelfth Christian century, the high point of this mosque's history. The excavations of the Department of Antiquities in 1938-39 brought to light some sculptures and inscriptions engraved in plaster on the wall enclosing the prayer-room. Certain inscriptions are passages from the Qur'an.

This is one of three mosques still existing which preserves the style of mosque architecture at the birth of Islam; the others include the one at Medina and that of the Amir ibn al-As in Cairo. The work which the Department of Antiquities has undertaken is truly of major importance, not only in terms of restoration in the original early style, but in bringing to light new inscriptions as well. We are now able to see the prayer-room as it was in antiquity, and view the three exterior porticos in which stood the columns supporting the arches. These arches supported the original flat-stone roof; the roof has been replaced by cement during restorations. A graceful cupola had once dominated the area of the watercourt. Eight doors gave access to private homes and to the nearby souk, demonstrating the importance of the city and its commercial activity at the time the mosque was built. Outside the mosque, a large section of the portico near the east wall uncovered and restored. formerly, upon arriving at the main door of the mosque, one climbed some steps, although today, in fact, one must descend.

According to a mutilated inscription (the purpose and importance of which can be easily deduced), this building was erected in 102 A. H. (A. D. 720-721), by the Caliph Yazid II. A second inscription, engraved upon a pillar which supports one of the prayerroom columns, reveals that this pillar had been erected in 128 A. H. (745-746). Since the leaning column must date before that time, and

the foundation of the mosque must antedate by 25 years the construction of the pillar, it is therefore certain that the column was put in place in the course of the works undertaken by Yazid II. It therefore follows that this entire system of which the columns and arches are a part is one complete unit, and we may thus attribute this entire building complex, including the minaret, to the Omayyad era, as is indicated by the inscription of A. D. 720.



It was only at a later date some pillars of different shape were introduced. Today the mosque is covered by basalt roof tiles, of which certain sections can be dated by inscriptions of 460 A. H. (1067-1068). Omayyad buildings were customarily roofed with timber-work, and the frailty of the supporting members indicates that this type of roofing had been adopted here. It is clear that if the columns are buckled, it was due to the added weight of the new stone roof,

necessitating the addition of supporting pillars which are here and there in evidence. It therefore remains to eliminate these parasite additions, and to restore the missing columns, the ancient existence of which is assured, and to recover, as completely as possible, the original plan of the Omayyad mosque.

This plan lacks only the detail of the arrangement of the axial nave, completely obliterated by a refectory, but the existence of this nave is certain, the raised sides showing that the colonnade was not

able to expand from one side to the other prayer-room retaining throughout the same space between the columns. We can conclude that the roof of this nave, its weight distributed by longitudinal arches, rested on the pillars which later replaced the actual columns.

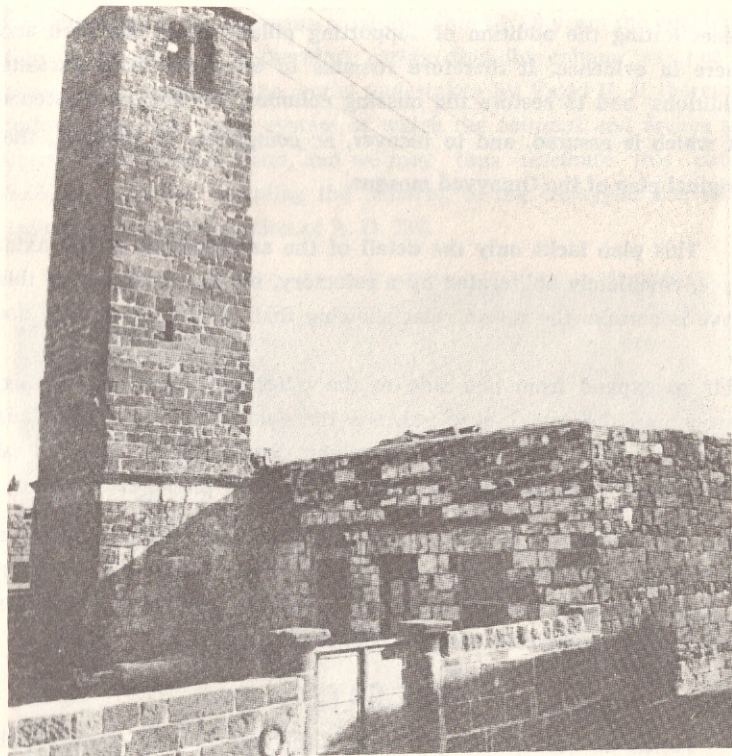
The mosque of Yazid II had therefore been square, with a prayer-room and axial nave being the only two transversal elements; a square minaret, and a portico at a slightly lower level than the prayer-room, dominated three sides of the courtyard.

THE BATH

To the east of the mosque we find the Ayyubid bath from which conduits carry water to the basin of the mosque. This bath is inhabited at the present time. From the height of the mosque one has a magnificent view of the city and surrounding villages.

THE MOSQUE OF FATIMA

This mosque is situated between the cathedral and the convent of the monk Bahira. Constructed on the same plan as the Gumushtekin mosque, but of greater dimensions, it dates to the Fatimid



era. Restorations have somewhat modified its original plan, but a few arches and the minaret are remnants of the Fatimid structure.

The name of the builder of this mosque, as well as the date of its construction, cannot be read in the Arabic inscription which was found to the right of the main doorway. On the minaret one can see a Qur'anic verse. From this inscription we may conclude that the minaret was built at a much later time than the mosque.

THE CONVENT OF THE MONK BAHIRA

This is considered to be the oldest of the churches in Bosra. The style is Melkite, which allows us to guess that it was built in the fourth century of the Christian era. Its style of architecture is different from that of any other church in the city. The most striking feature of this building is the semi-circular apse. The walls, built with





style, are pierced in their lateral sides with lofty windows. It was necessary to restore the entire main facade, since nothing remained of the original work but the angles of the walls and the Ayyubid half-columns of each side. Legend has it that this was the place where the monk Bahira encountered Muhammed.

JAMI MABRAK AN-NAQA

Numerous historical mementos are associated with this mosque. It was here that the first copy of the Qur'an, brought by camel to



Syria, was guarded—since it was here that the camel halted. According to another story, this same building stands on the place where the Prophet had camped before entering Bosra. It remained for a long time a center of learning where many well-known Hanafite professors lived and taught, among them sheikh Safi ad-Din Abou-il-Qasim at-Tamimi, his son sheikh Fakhr ad-Din ben Othman and his grandson el-Emir Alam ad-Din Sulaiman al-Busrawi. This family of scholars was associated with the school for more than a century. Here also was buried one of the sons of al-Khodaywi Abbas Pasha, who had lived among the Anezeh tribe of Beduins in order to learn their way of life.



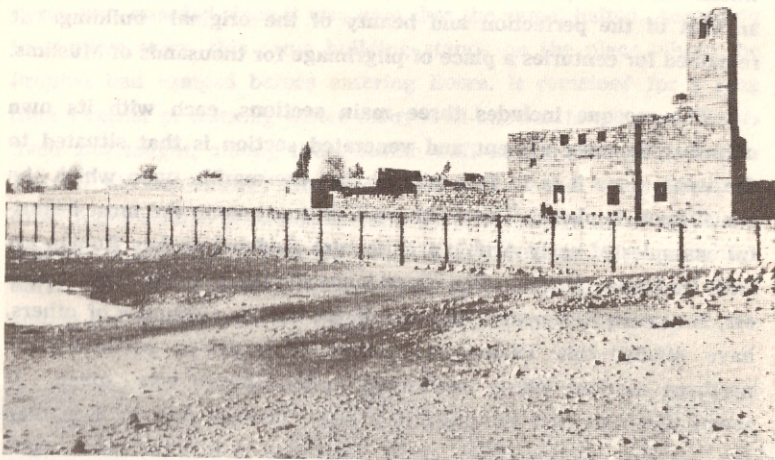
In spite of the numerous transformations which it underwent, which ruined a great number of its architectural details (among

which were lovely marbles and inscriptions), this mosque still gives an idea of the perfection and beauty of the original building. It remained for centuries a place of pilgrimage for thousands of Muslims.

The mosque includes three main sections, each with its own mihrab. The most ancient and venerated section is that situated to the west, since it is in this mihrab that the marble upon which the camel knelt is placed. The north wall figures among the most beautiful examples of early Arabic architecture modeled on late Roman art with its flat sculptures. The three learned archaeologists and travelers, Brunnow, Butler and Burckhardt, as well as a number of others, have studied this Islamic monument in detail—in particular the northern section, where instruction in the Qur'an was given. It seems apparent that this part is many centuries later in date than the western section. The entire structure is in cruciform style topped by a central cupola. Parallels to this style are rare in Syria. According to Prof. J. Sauvaget, this may be the only madrasa in Syria built on this plan. The date of construction of the eastern part is given by an inscription found on a marble plaque above one of the windows in the north wall: this section was built in 530 A. H. (June, 1136).

THE CITERNS

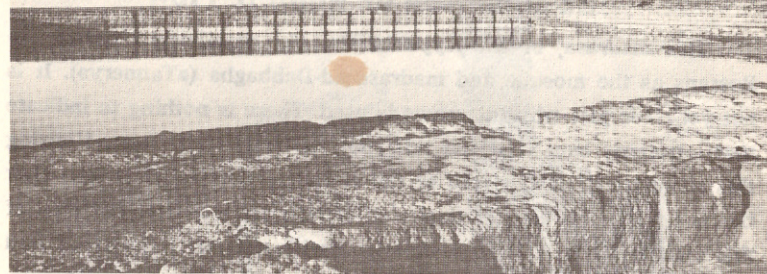
Among the many cisterns at Bosra, the most important are those which the local people refer to as the «Oriental basin» and the «Basin of the Hajj». The first is a short distance along the route, to the east of the city, which leads to Suweida. The eastern walls, which one may see when near the Mabrak an-naqa, were partly destroyed at the beginning of this century. The sides of this reservoir, nearly square, measure 114 by 112 m. Even though its dimensions are



less than those of the al-Hajj, the Oriental cistern is used more often by farmers who bring their flocks there to be watered. It is 6 m. in depth, but partly silted up. It is constructed in the same style as the birket al-Hajj, which is located facing the Citadel and was probably within its walls.

The walls of the al-Hajj cistern are better preserved, but less water-tight; it is therefore often dry by the end of autumn. Its rectangular sides measure 155 m. in length and 122 m. in width. Although it is now filled when holding only four meters of water, its original depth was eight.

There is no agreement on the date of construction of these reservoirs, which are fed by the Wadi al-Zaydi. The archaeologists Porter and Butler believed the cisterns were Roman, whereas Burckhardt, among others, attributed them to the Arabs and saw them as



contemporary with the Ayyubid parts of the Citadel. More recently, scholars have accepted Butler's position and argue that the cisterns were built at the same time as the city walls. It would be safe to conclude that they are Nabataean. They were constructed on a raised embankment above the level of the city so that water would flow easily to supply the public baths and fountains. This water, which also supplied the men and horses of the Roman garrison, was much later enjoyed by the great caravans of pilgrims in the Middle Ages.

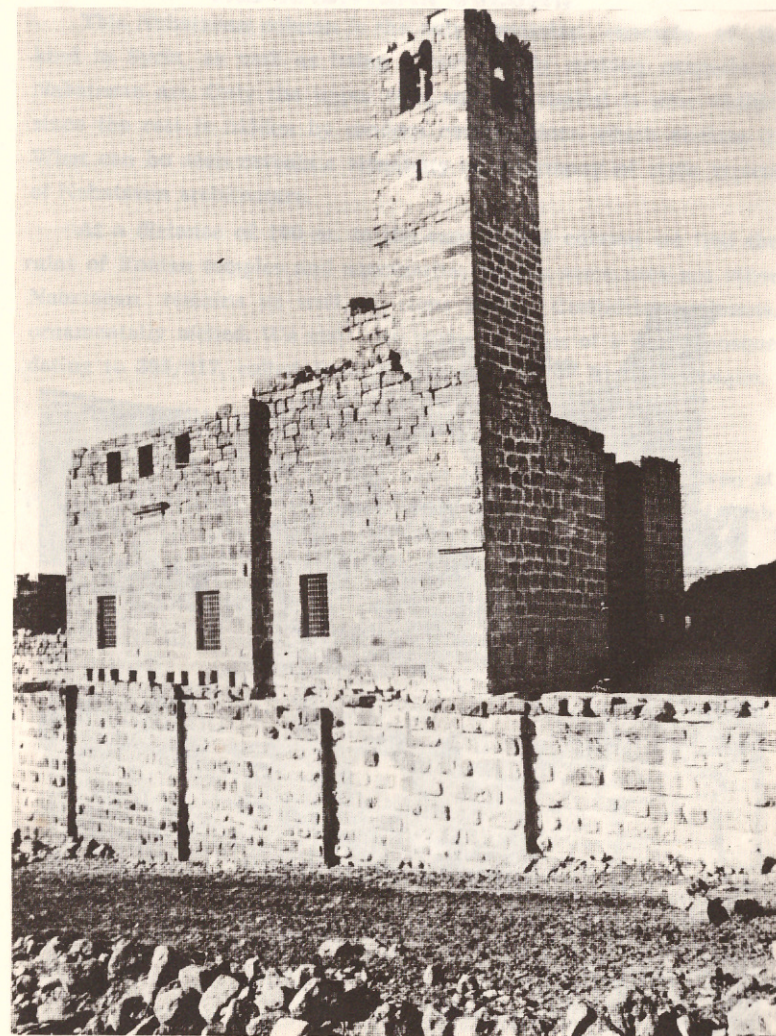
At certain points in the city, both brick and lead piping has been uncovered, through which the water flowed from the cisterns to public outlets and private houses. The cistern walls are made of

dressed basalt blocks, of an average thickness of three meters. The exterior of the walls is reinforced by buttresses; the interior, at regular intervals, with other supports which provide extra strength. The Birket al-Hajj is among the largest reservoirs known to exist in the East. It is particularly beautiful to view, by moonlight, during spring and summer nights.

THE MADRASA OF ABOU-IL-FIDA

This madrasa, of the Ayyubid era, is familiarly known to Bosrans as the mosque and madrasa ad-Dabbagha («Tannery»). It is not yet clear just why this name is used. There is nothing to indicate that a tannery ever stood on this spot, or in a nearby area. Viewing this structure from the wall of the al-Hajj cistern, one realizes that this is among the finest examples of Islamic art in Bosra. The plan of this madrasa is unique in comparison with the other madrasas and mosques in the city, for two reasons. First, the building was originally one large rectangular room; its elevated ceiling rested on six arches supported by slender columns. Second, its minaret had neither ceiling nor staircase, which are normally a part of all buildings of this type. The date of its construction is noted on the south facade, under a window, in an inscription which gives the year 622 A. H. (1225).

At the side of this mosque stands a mausoleum in which Sharif ad-Din Aiyub (d.654 A. H.) is buried; he was the son of the Emir Yaqut, commandant of the Bosra Citadel. At the entrance of this mausoleum we can see an arch of the most exquisite Muslim art. Next to it a tiny mosque was added, built by the same Emir Yaqut in the year 655 A. H. Nearby we find an ancient Muslim cemetery which dates to the Fatimid and Ayyubid eras.





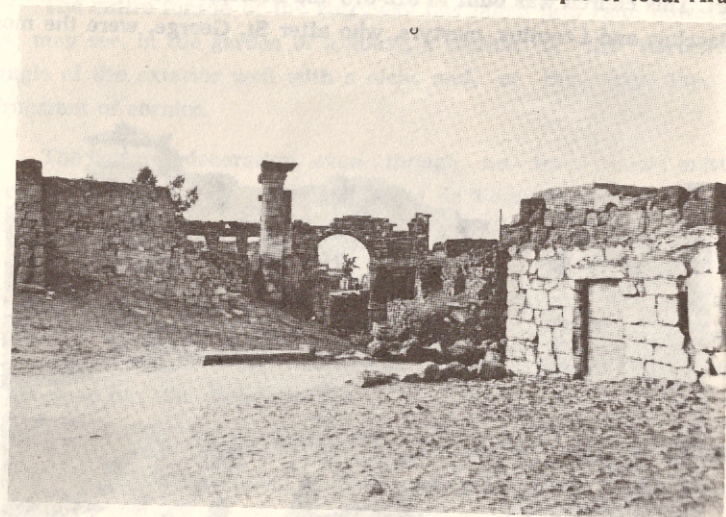
THE NABATEAN COLUMN

This Nabataean column is the only remaining example of its kind in Syria, as well as being a particularly striking example of Nabataean art. Only the upper part and the capital is now visible, since the rest is hidden by modern constructions which enclose it. What can be seen reveals a simplicity and harmony of style typical of Nabataean architecture.

At a distance of 100 m. to the east of this column we find the ruins of Roman temples and sanctuaries. In this same area are other Nabataean remains as well as some lovely Corinthian columns, ornamentally niched. We may also view the ruins of a small mosque dating to 305/917, called Jami' al-Mubarak or the Blessed Mosque.

THE NABATEAN GATE

This gate is also the only example of its type in Syria even at Petra there is nothing quite like it. It is a fine example of local Arab



architecture uninfluenced by Roman style. It is unfortunate that the debris of houses abutting this gate is still an obstacle to a detailed study. According to some scholars, this would be the main entrance to the palace in which the Nabataean king Rabbel II resided. The gate displays an arcaded style of solid construction, above which is a single, high, wide entrance. Above each of its pillars a tiny chamber

has been inset. The visible sculptural style resembles that at Petra with, in addition, a certain Greco-Roman influence.

THE CATHEDRAL

Following this road to the north some 60 m., we come to the Cathedral. This building is of particular interest from the architectural point of view, since its location in northern Arabia played a large role in the formation of Arab artistic styles and the beginnings of Muslim art. This church was built in 512-513 and dedicated to Saints Sergius, Bacchus and Leontius, martyrs, who after St. George, were the most



celebrated of Syria. It was with the church at Ezra, the oldest example of a cupola-style church built on a square plan. It is rectangular, measuring 51 m. in length and 37.5 m. in width. Its great cupola, 36.2 m. in diameter, rises on a circular drum supported by eight pillars, poorly engineered, which have collapsed a number of times since their initial construction. Today only the three apses and some sections of the walls remain. But the complete plan was painstakingly studied and recreated by French and American expeditions before the church fell in further ruin. Two of the three apses, at their angles, are enclosed by rectangles; the center of each is formed by the three sides and two half-sides of a decagon. Numerous doors, windows and niches designed for statues, cleverly arranged to emphasize certain aspects of the stonework, vitally enhance the highly original design of the facades. This might best be seen in the north wall, which is well-preserved.

The entire facade of the entryway has fallen into ruin; however, we may see, in the garden of a house, a section of the northwest angle of the exterior wall with a niche and, at the very top, a fragment of cornice.

The interior decoration, even though no trace now exists, consisted of sculpted work. The Comte de Vogué, in his book *La Syrie Centrale*, was the first to mention the importance of this building; in his day he noted on the altar the remains of a standing statue of the Virgin, her arms outstretched. It was Waddington who found the Greek inscription, inscribed on the main door, which gave the date of construction: 512-513 of the Christian era. This stone has since been lost.

When the Emperor Justinian, some years later, wished to build the church of Santa Sophia at Constantinople, as well as the one at

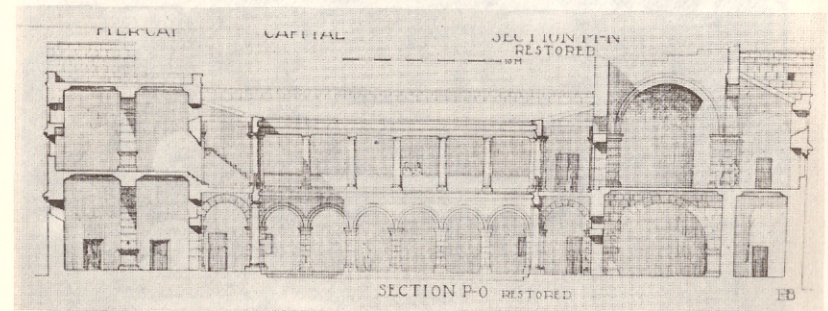
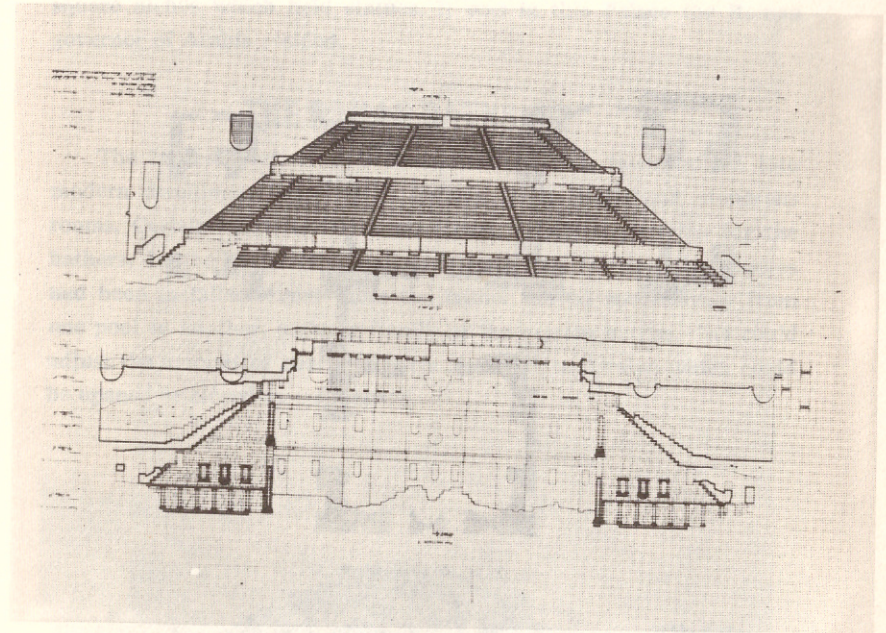
Ravenna, he had his architects use the plan of the Bosra Cathedral as her model. Happily these men avoided the structural error, unnoticed during the construction of the Cathedral, and Justinian's two churches still stand.

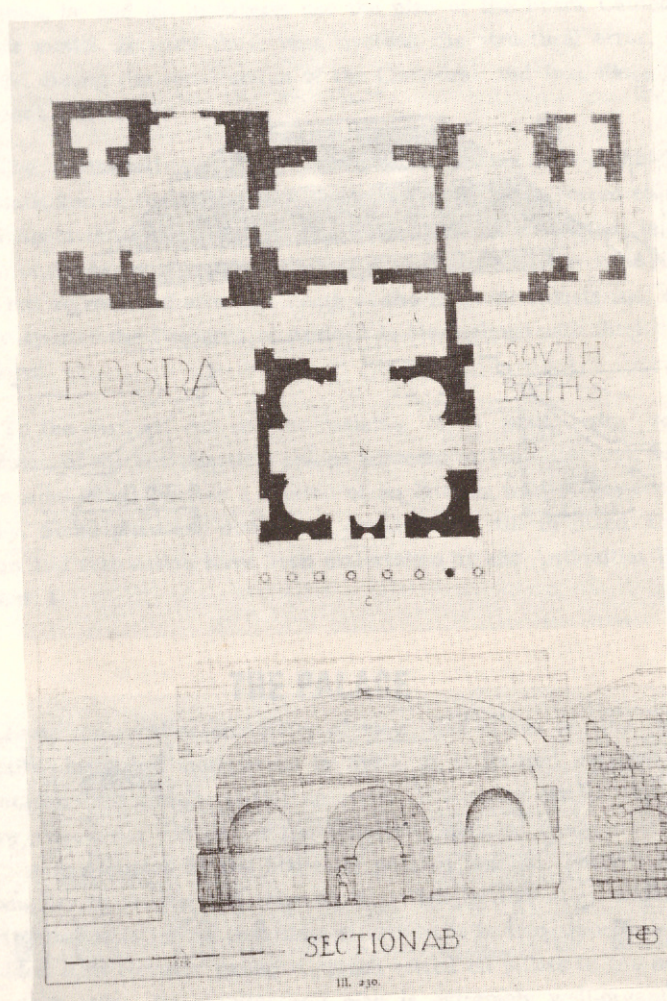
The Cathedral at Bosra was dedicated by the archbishop Julianus, known for his integrity and courage. He was forced to flee from Bosra the same year that the Cathedral was completed, in the wake of the letter of reprimand sent to him by the Patriarch of Antioch, but he returned after the death of the Emperor Anastasius, who had supported the Patriarch of Antioch in his dealings with the Bishop of Bosra.

To the east, we can see the remains of a wall, with some windows, of the ecclesiastical palace adjacent to the Cathedral. Some modern buildings enclose a section of an interior wall of the second storey. Some pilasters, doors and arcades are still in place. Excavation and restoration have been undertaken by the Antiquities Department. I

THE PALACE

From the architectural point of view, this is one of the most beautiful historical monuments in Syria. It is located between the Nabataean Gate and the al-Hajj reservoir. The visitor cannot view the entire palace, nor can he see the courtyard, because the greater part of these is occupied by the homes of peasant families. The Palace is rectangular in shape, with sides 50 m. in length and 33 m. wide. Its main entrance is in the east side. It was built in two storeys and provided with elevated galleries, which rested on pillars in the north and south sides. Its architectural plan is extremely well-organized.

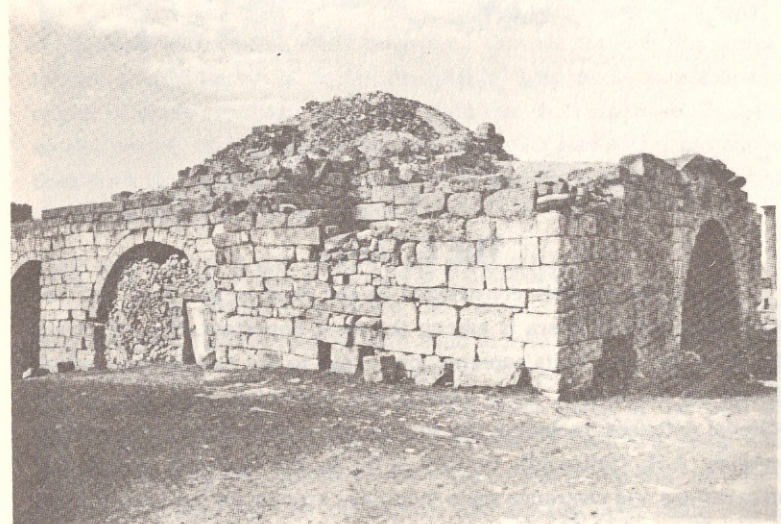




The exterior face of the wall is decorated with round apertures and square niches which held statues. It was in this Palace the Roman governor of Arabia resided.

THE ROMAN BATHS

The largest part of this structure has been incorporated into modern dwellings. These baths include many pools and numerous rooms. Certain of these latter were used as dressing-rooms for the bathers. In the walls of these dressing-rooms, fixtures for clothes had been installed. From there the bather moved successively from one pool to another, arriving finally at the «steam baths». One could adjust the amount of heat in this room thanks to a valve which could be opened or closed as one wished.

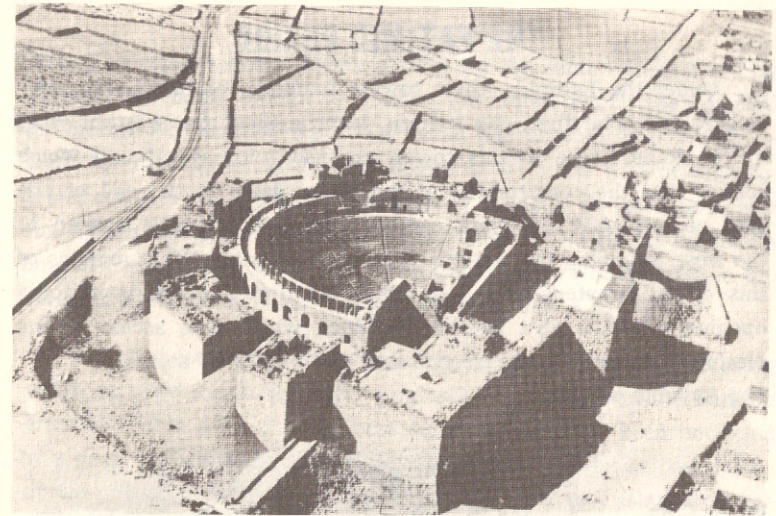


The Baths were of paramount importance to the city's social life; it even became habitual to bathe at least once a day, four hours or so before sunset. Entry, at first by admission fee, was, in time free to all. The building of the public baths by the wealthy proved to be a popular gesture.



THE CITADEL

Of all the citadels constructed in the East at the time of the Crusades, that at Bosra is among the most important. We may trace the different steps in its construction thanks to the various inscriptions found on the towers. Until 1948 it was commonly held that all the Citadel defences, including the towers, were built during the seventh century A.H. (thirteenth century A.D.) in the Ayyubid period. But excavations and clearance since then have brought to light inscriptions and walls proving that the construction was accomplished in a number



of stages. The defensive walls uncovered showed that military architecture greatly improved during the Middle Ages. Some stones in the angles of walls are more than 5 m. high; one such stone can be seen at the corner of the north-west tower. This Citadel resisted more than once the invaders who attempted to capture it. Below are noted the different stages in the construction of the Citadel:

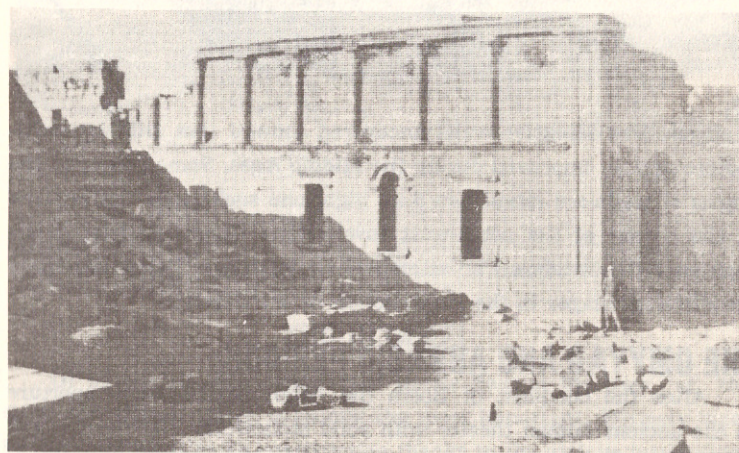
THE OMYYAD AND ABBASID PERIODS:

After the conquest of Bosra the Arabs sealed every aperture in the ancient Roman theater with solid stonework. The theater was thus transformed into an easily-defended fortress with gates giving only restricted access. We may still see these gates in the wall of the western wing of the theater. A propos of this, we recall the account given by Ibn Asaker on the topic of Ibn al-Haidam, in which the former points out that the theater had already been made into a citadel at this period.

THE FATIMID PERIOD

Under the Fatimids, three towers flanking the outer wall were constructed. The first, the eastern, leans against the western wing of the skene. Close to this tower, an inscription was found which relates that the construction of the tower dates to the end of the fifth century A.H. (eleventh century). Another tower is located to the west, adjoining the western wing of the theater. What remains of this tower threatens to fall in ruins. All three towers have doors opening onto the vast Roman corridors, which give access to the platforms separating the second and third tiers of seats.

The Ayyubid period:



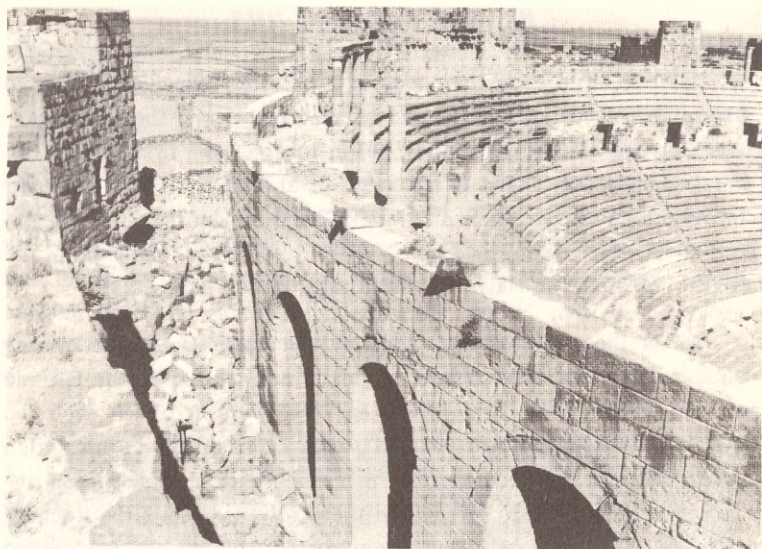
When the Hauran became a coveted territory for Crusaders, they invaded this region twice. The first attack was undertaken by Beaudouin III in 1140 A.D., and the second by Beaudouin IV in 1183. At this time the fortifications of the Citadel were not sufficiently

strong to repulse every enemy attack. By the same token, the Citadel was not large enough to quarter the troops which the Ayyubid governors had installed there and which had become their headquarters. For this latter reason they began to erect the first of nine towers; construction began in the reign of al-Malik al-Adil Abou Bakr ibn Ayyub and under his son al-Malik Sharif ad-Din Isa, at the beginning of the year 599 A.H. (1202). The last tower was completed in the reign of al-Malik an-Nasir Yussuf Khalil, in 649 A.H. (1251).

All of these towers were built on the outside of the enclosing walls, as were the three others originally constructed in the Fatimid era and still in good shape. These earlier towers had been encircled by a deep ditch in the year 608/1211 as is indicated by an inscription on the tower at the north-west corner; some buttresses (sloped on one side) had been added to strengthen these towers. Above the ditch a bridge of five fixed arches was constructed; this arched bridge had been preceded by a wooden drawbridge.

THE THEATER

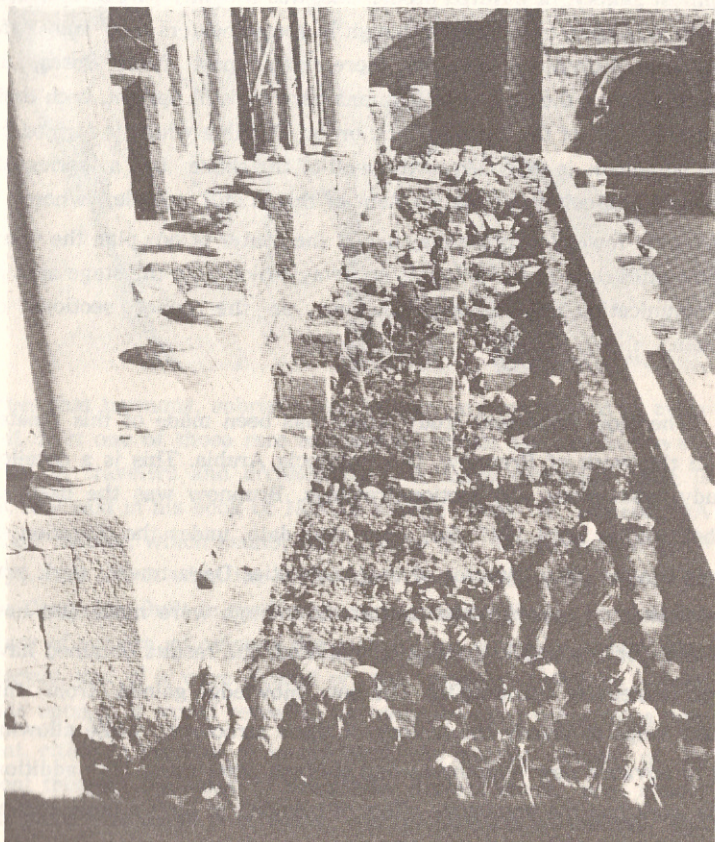
This monument combines grandeur and solidity of construction with the most delicate and refined styles of artwork; it also displays some original traits. We may see here the symbol of the greatness of Roman Syria, inasmuch as it immortalized the city of Bosra. Archaeologists are in accord in regarding the theater as an expression of advanced civilization, and the theater at Bosra is considered one of the best-preserved of these historical monuments, in spite of Tim's destructiveness. A sense of equilibrium underlies the construction of its separate parts, and is evident in the proportions, dimensions and decorations. From whatever side the visitor may view it,

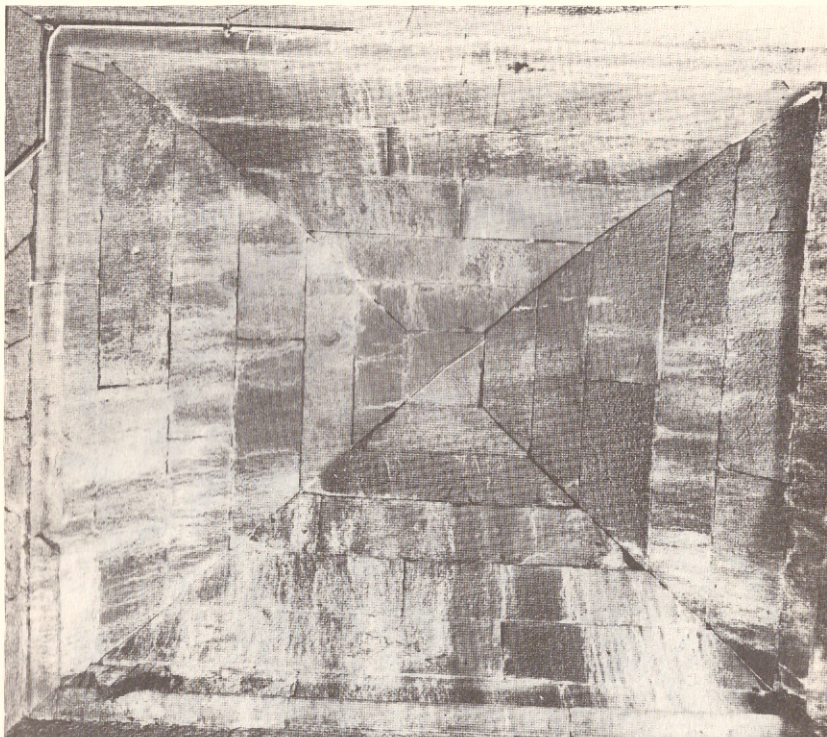


he sees that harmony, sobriety and delicacy are manifested in every detail. It is one of those rare monuments which has caught the attention of travelers and archaeologists in many centuries. Here is what Rey said in his book of 1854, *Le voyage dans le Hauran*: «A military theater, which cannot fail to excite our archaeological curiosity». And this is what the Comte de Vogué wrote in his work, *La Syrie Centrale*: «Built in the Roman age, undoubtedly in the second century of our era, of colossal dimensions, this structure is admirably preserved, and if it were cleared of the modern buildings which intrude upon it, it would reveal to us, more than any other ruins now extant, either in the East or in the West, the interior design of an ancient theater. The seats, of beautifully dressed stone, are almost all in place. The skene is complete, with proscenium, postscenia and attendant structures; it is decorated with niches and monumental

doors ornamented with moldings. A portico extends along the entire circumference, at the top of the seats, and forms a covered gallery which adorns the whole building; this feature is known to have been a part of all Roman theaters, but all others have disappeared. The topmost gallery, or covered promenade, was the only part of a theater which was open to women, although in some theaters this rule was less strict. I do not believe that there exists, apart from Bosra, an extant portico; the numerous columns here are still upright, with their architrave, all of the Roman Doric order. The line which is formed by this colonnade is extended to the wall of the skene by a series of engaged half-columns. One segment of this is still visible, where it meets the lower level. We may see at the center of our plan the entry to a vomitorium and the double stairway which puts the stage area in communication with either the outside, or the upper sections of seats».

The most important study which has been made of this theater is in the work of Brunnow, *Die Provincia Arabia*. This is a detailed study, with plans and section-drawings. Brunnow was the basis of other studies until 1947. But since that date, under the direction of Emir Dja'far, then Director of the Antiquities Department, work was undertaken to excavate the theater. Soundings were made and new methods of systematic excavation initiated, the results obtained have been immensely encouraging. The new knowledge gained from this study helps to clarify the history of these structures, while allowing us to advance new hypotheses and confirm older ones. In addition, this work had the immediate effect of bringing to light a large section of the theater hitherto inaccessible.





It can now be seen that the study and the drawings of Brunnow had been superficial and at times even erroneous in the overall view as well as the details. But it is understood that the reason for this was the rapidity with which he made the study. By a happy coincidence the sections of the theater now missing or badly preserved do not prevent us from reconstructing the entire building in all of its details.

Since these Syrian theaters had been copied (not without cer-

tain innovations) from Hellenistic and Roman models, it is logical to conclude that the former follow the same system of stage production as the latter. Troupes of actors had a leader, subsidized by the government, who decided what plays to perform. When he had chosen a particular play, he would demand a certain price from the governor. But if the audience reacted unfavorably to the play, the head of the troupe had to repay that sum to the governor, and the actors would receive no reward for their efforts. Admission to the theater was free; an official was responsible for the seating arrangements and the maintenance of order during a performance.

Other research leads us to believe that the Nabataeans, who were settled at Bosra before the Roman conquest, celebrated the return of the Olympic games every four years. Delegates from every city were invited here to take part in these celebrations, and to make offerings to the well-known Nabataean god, Dusares. These religious ceremonies were followed by performances given in the honor of those inhabitants of Bosra who had distinguished themselves by some act of bravery or some invention in the different branches of science or art. We may imagine them receiving a prize or a laurel crown in the midst of the thunderous applause from thousands of spectators.

It is not certain that the theater of Bosra was built on the site of an ancient Nabataean citadel, as Clermont-Ganneau thought. The foundations are raised nearly 20 m. above ground-level and are hemispherical in shape. The center of this hemisphere (the cavea) is oriented to the north with a slight inclination to the east. It is one of the rare theaters in the world in the sense that it is not built into a hillside or in the flank of a mountain. The theater at Bosra adjoins a wall pierced by windows and doors. The entrance and exit are seen to be truly enormous facilities, especially since it is estimated that the theater could seat more than 15,000 people. It is divided into three sections, separated by large galleries bounded to the right by the backs of seats, whereas to the left are the exit doors



(vomitoria). The building is surmounted by a covered portico; the columns of this arcade are of the Doric order, of which only two remain in the north wing. (The Antiquities Department has restored two others next to the ones in place, and has replaced four others in their original location).

The upper part of this theater is composed of four tiers, the part toward the center, ten tiers, while the lowest section, which is also the largest, has at the moment a dozen tiers. The excavation work is not yet complete, and it is estimated that the total number in this section will exceed eighteen.

From the skene we can see three large doors: one reserved for foreigners, another for the people of Bosra, and the third for the upper class of citizens. This skene measures at the interior 45.5 m. and at the exterior, 54.35 m. The circumference of the hemisphere is 102 m. Behind the skene doors a long gallery, corresponding to a backstage area, was equipped for actors awaiting their turn to enter the stage. Lower than the skene (which was raised 1.5 m. to be level with the lower tier of seats), a semi-circular area (the orchestra) was reserved for musicians or actors. This part of the theater is still blocked by Ayyubid construction.

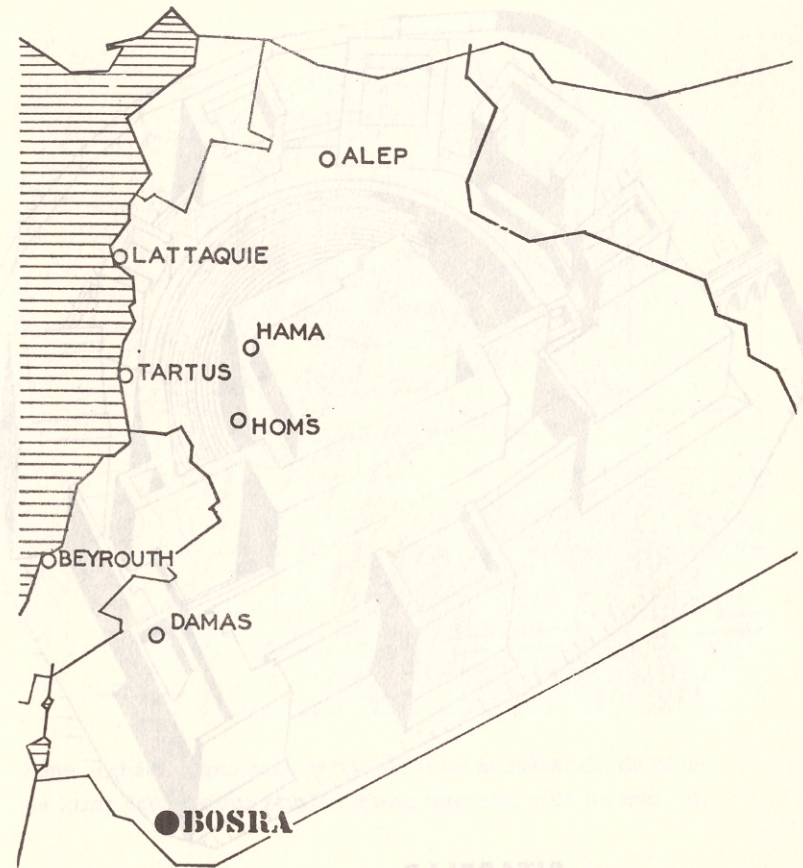
Since no one in antiquity possessed instruments for amplifying the voice, engineers devised ingenious accoustical systems, giving a theater the necessary shape, and the orchestra a particular depth, to ensure that the audience, in whatever section of seats, could hear easily. For this same reason they provided the curved vault of the

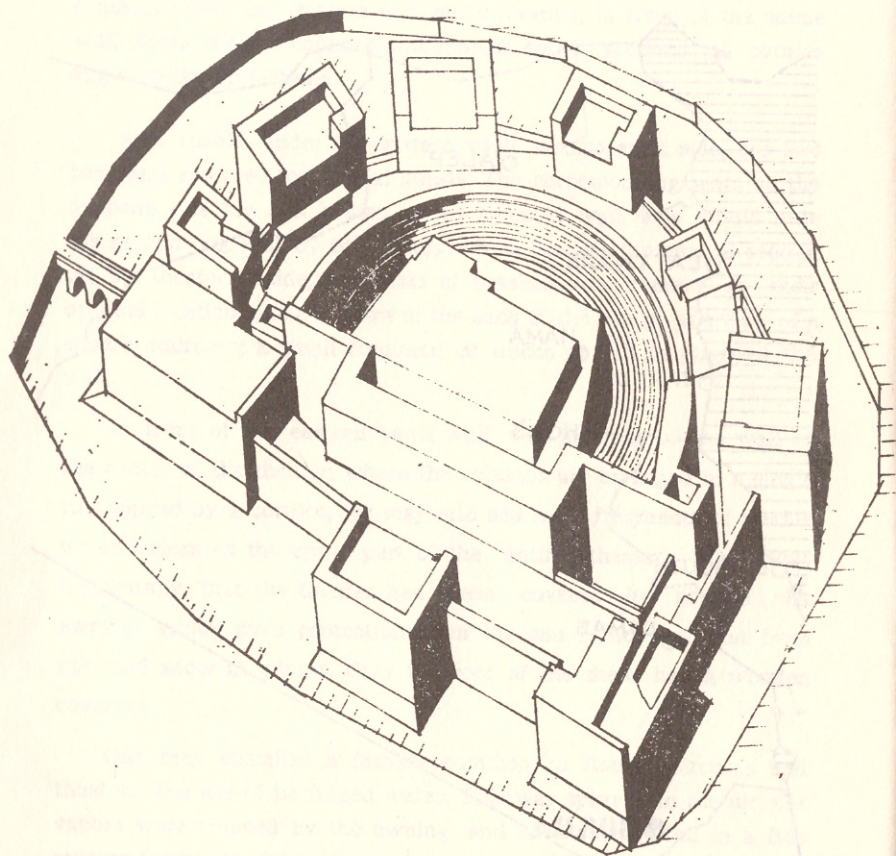
skene with two rows of columns and Corinthian cornices, which helped reinforce the actors' voices. We may still see some of these columns under the western and eastern vaults, in front of the skene wall. Some of these columns still support entire sections of cornice and roof-like projections.

Also visible, under the eastern vault, on the right side, are five box seats reserved for special guests. The corresponding seats on the opposite side are still hidden by an Ayyubid wall. One should note the second box seat by the gallery which borders the central section of the theater. Inside, two seats of basaltic stone remain in their original location, and a window at the back of the box gives a view of a square staircase; a small fragment of stucco is still in place on the wall.

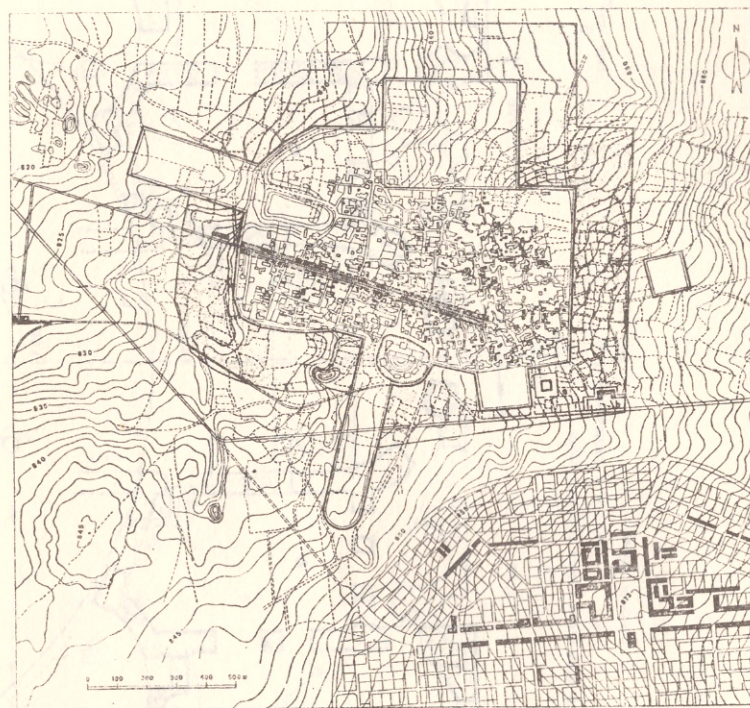
In front of the eastern vault wall, and in front of the wall at the center of the theater, where the columns are arranged in a single row topped by a cornice, we may still see some fragments of marble which decorated the upper part of the entire theater. We know, incidentally, that the theater had been covered by printed silk awnings which gave protection from the sun in summer and from rain and snow in winter. Only the roof of the skene had a wooden covering.

One may visualize a fashion common to Roman circuses and theaters: the use of perfumed water. This was sprayed in the air, the vapors were trapped by the awning, and subsequently fell in a fine mist on the heads of the spectators.

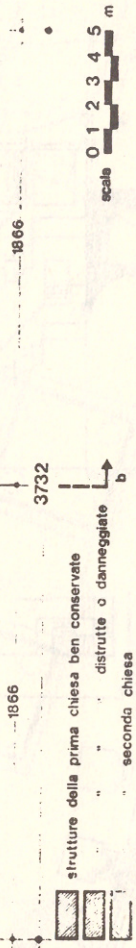
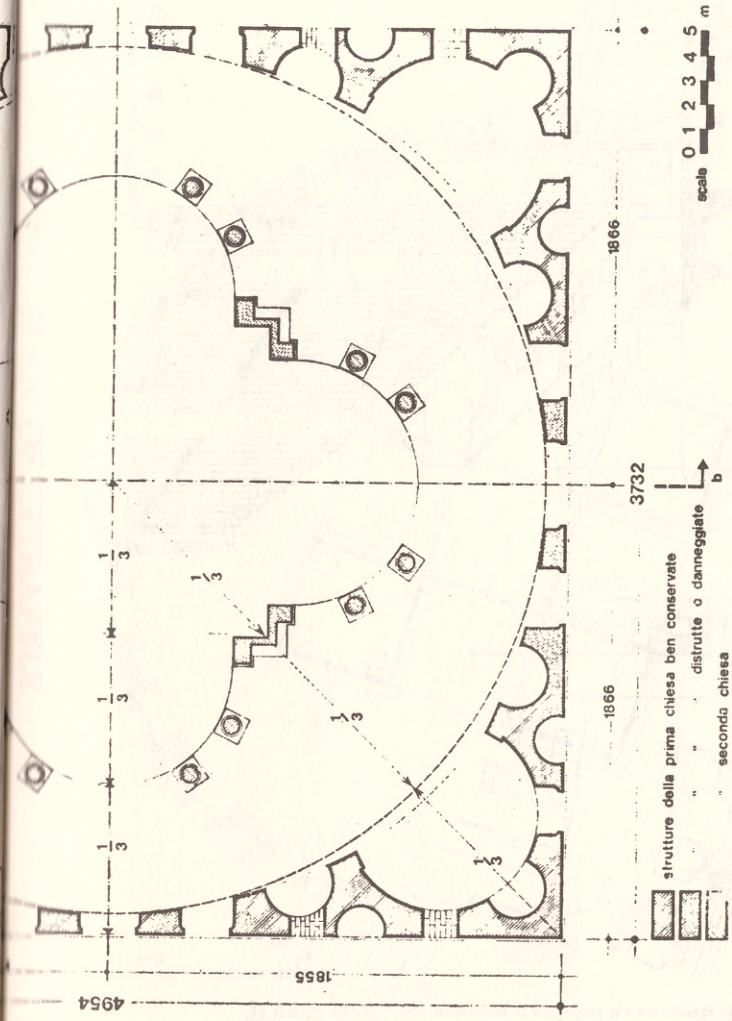
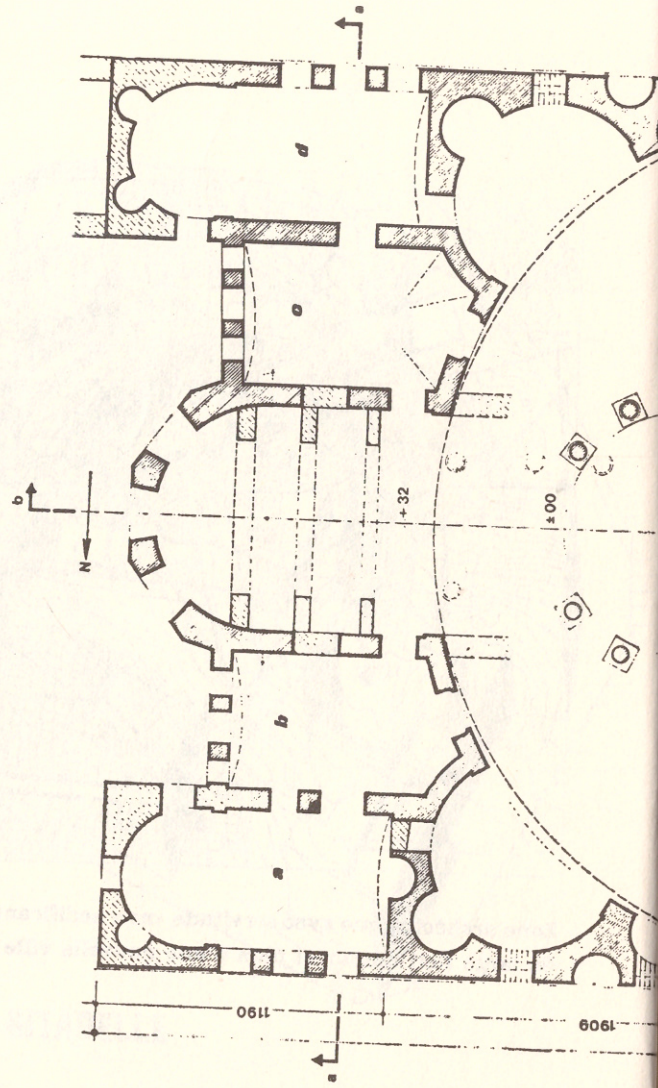


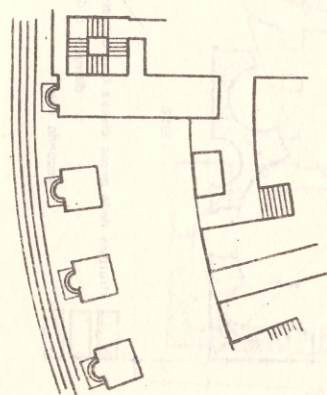
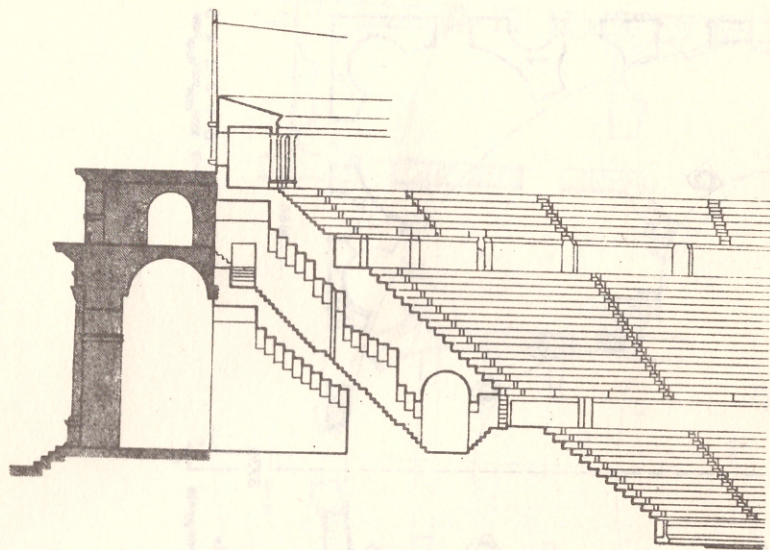


GITADELLE



Zone archéologique avec servitude «non aedificandi» de 200m de large tout autour et plan d'une nouvelle ville au sud-est.



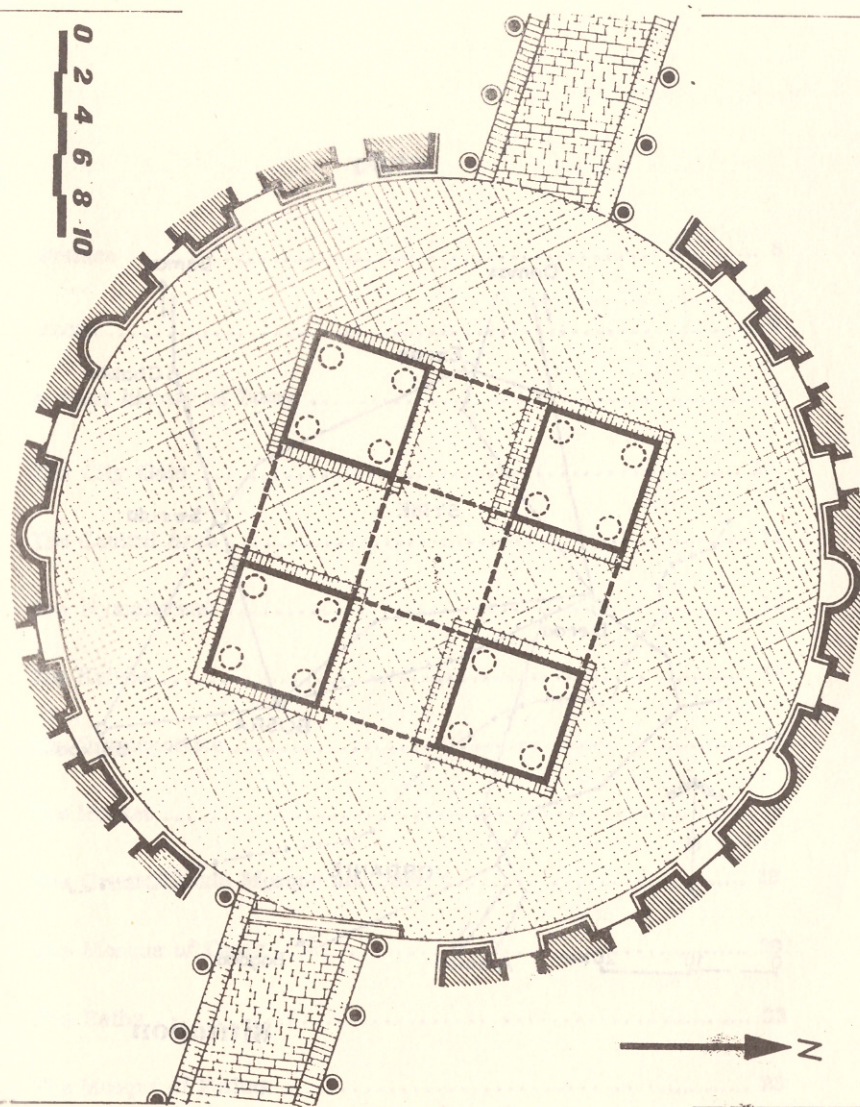


0 10 m.

Coupe sur la cavea du théâtre romain proposant la restitution d'une galerie extérieure.

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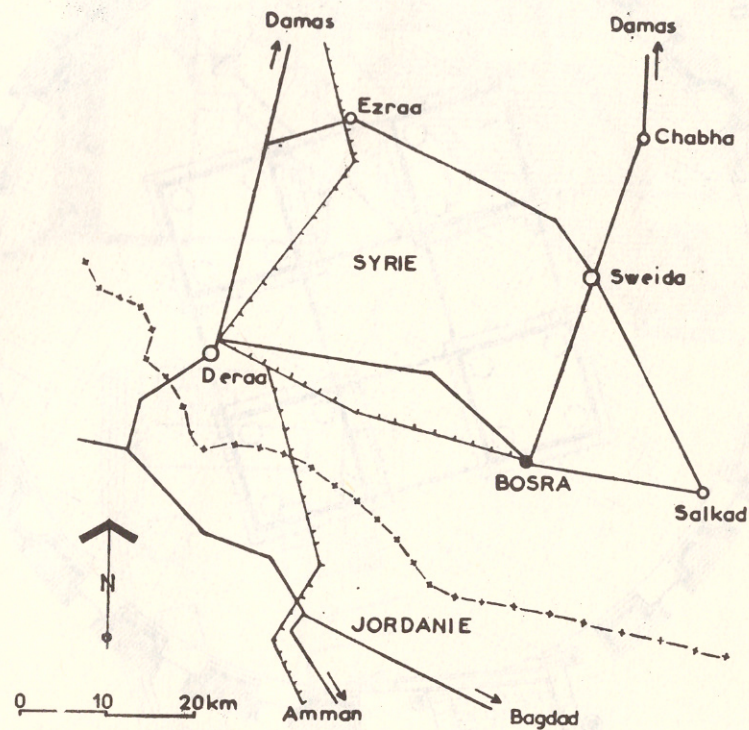
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Situation

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